

Marjorie Nishek Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Marjorie (Marj) Nishek served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia from 1962 to 1964 in a home extension program.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Marjorie Nishek

March 18, 2011
St. Augustine, Florida

By Sharleen Hirschi Simpson

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

SIMPSON: [00:00:07] This is March 18, 2011, and this is Sharleen Hirschi Simpson, and I'm interviewing Marj Nishek in St. Augustine. Ok, Marge, can you just tell us a little bit about what you're doing now?

NISHEK: [00:00:31] Well, now I'm an official retiree because it's been a long time since the Peace Corps days. So everything I'm doing now is sort of on a volunteer basis. But I still have that international bug in me, like so many of us seem to retain. And, uh, I I'm involved mostly in what's called global mission. It's through our Lutheran church. But we have a companion in Africa, in Tanzania, in the southern most rural part of Tanzania. And we are our whole region, which includes where I live in Idaho now. So our region includes all of Idaho and the eastern half of Washington state. And so together we are helping support this one school and hospital in southern Tanzania.

NISHEK: [00:01:31] And so I'm sort of the, um, well, I'm chair of that committee. So we support each other in many ways through visitations back and forth, but also in fundraising to get the school to meet the goals of the school, the goals that the school itself sets, the priorities they have. So it's a lot of fundraising, actually, and that means a lot of email back and forth and a lot of presentations.

SIMPSON: Sounds like you're still doing Peace Corps stuff.

NISHEK: That's what it is, basically. But it's fun.

SIMPSON [00:02:12] Great. Well, now let's think back. I want you to think back about, you know, when you were thinking about going into, the year before you, when you when you were thinking about going into the Peace Corps way back.

NISHEK: Way, way back.

SIMPSON: Way, way back in 1962 or '61. So how did you happen to get interested in the Peace Corps?

NISHEK: [00:02:33] Oh well uh yes. Uh Wayne, who is now my husband, who was then my sort-of boyfriend, he and I were attending a meeting at which Sargent Shriver was speaking. Whoa, that did it. We happened to be sitting next to each other, just happened to be because we were in a group of youth listening to Sargent Shriver. And we looked at each other and yeah, we both said, hey, we want to do that. But it didn't happen right away, but it happened very soon after that, that we did make our application.

SIMPSON: [00:03:11] When was that? When were you in that meeting?

NISHEK: [00:03:14] Oh, that was in March of '62, March of '62, and we joined the program in July of '62. Isn't that when our training started? Or June? The summer of '62 our training started. It happened that fast, but there was no question.

SIMPSON: [00:03:42] Did you, what were you doing? Were you in college then or what were you doing at the time?

NISHEK: [00:03:50] Yes. Both of us were in college at separate universities actually. And so when, when I did join the Peace Corps I had only finished my junior year but I didn't want to wait. So and at that time, they accepted even high school graduates. They didn't require a college degree at that time in 1962.

SIMPSON: [00:04:17] Yeah, but where were you studying?

NISHEK: [00:04:20] I was studying at North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota. Home economics education was my major.

SIMPSON: OK, and was, uh, that were you living in in the Dakotas as well?

NISHEK: Yeah. Yes.

SIMPSON: So then you accept, you join the Peace Corps. Then what happened? How did you get ready? What'd your family think?

NISHEK: [00:04:47] Well, I have quite liberal or I had quite liberal minded parents. My dad was very proud of me, actually. But then when I wrote letters home during our training, I think they all began to wonder why we were rappelling down cliffs and swimming around in the ocean with our hands tied behind our back. What did that have to do with Peace Corps? And to tell you the truth, I think some of us were wondering the same thing.

SIMPSON: Yeah, that Outward Bound training.

NISHEK: [00:05:24] But we survived it. And we were pretty proud of ourselves, weren't we?

SIMPSON: [00:05:29] What did you have to do yourself to get ready to go in the Peace Corps?

NISHEK: [00:05:35] Throw a few things in my suitcase and go. After all the applications and taking the tests that were required for acceptance.

SIMPSON: Where did you take your test?

NISHEK: In Fargo, North Dakota.

SIMPSON: [00:05:51] Yeah, that's great. I took mine in Salt Lake City. Ok, so when you go out to training, let's just talk about your impression, what you thought about the training.

NISHEK: [00:06:08] Well, we trained first of all in the Maricopa, what they called Indian community, didn't they use that phrase then? And I thought it was a great fit, you know, because we got to work with the women there. We got to visit different homes of the people living, the Maricopa people. And I think we had a great, um, we were trained with social workers. Wasn't that our official title?

SIMPSON: Community development I think is what they called it. Which is one of those ambiguous terms that fits a lot of things.

NISHEK: But our instructor, our female instructor, I thought was very, very knowledgeable.

SIMPSON: [00:06:57] Who was it that you worked with? Do you remember?

NISHEK: [00:06:59] Oh, I don't remember her name. I think she was a public health nurse though, wasn't she?

SIMPSON: Yeah, we had one who was a public health nurse.

NISHEK: We were doing the same thing.

SIMPSON: And I know then they had a midwife that I was working with some, but she then when she left that group and subsequently went to a different place. Yeah, so what all did you do in training?

NISHEK: [00:07:20] We worked with the Maricopa women. In food preparation, we made food for our whole training group. But that wasn't the real point. The real point was to get us socializing with them, etcetera. And then we did go to different hospitals in the area and visit the homes in the area. It was just sort of getting us used to learning how to, maybe not interview, but keeping our getting our eyes and ears open to the situation around us, which might be different from how we were raised, how we grew up. So it wasn't a formal training. I mean, we didn't take any examinations or anything like that. It was just sort of an eye-opening experience I thought.

SIMPSON: [00:08:15] What did you think of the language training and the various studies and all those?

NISHEK: [00:08:21] Right, the language training. Oh, my goodness. Uh, the philosophy then was to hear and repeat, which I didn't appreciate at all. I like to see things, you know, and we weren't really allowed to take notes, if I remember right, during language training. So I found that quite frustrating because it was hard for me to measure my progress and it was hard for me to go back and prepare for the next class. Because if you didn't remember something, well, that was the end of that. So, yeah, I thought language training. And then oftentimes our classes were like early in the morning when most of us weren't completely awake even

SIMPSON: Or late at night.

NISHEK: Or late at night. We had horrendous hours.

SIMPSON: [00:09:18] What did you think of those hours, getting up at 3:00 in the morning so we could go out and run our mile before breakfast?

NISHEK: [00:09:26] Well, I think they could identify the people who were very serious about being in the Peace Corps and could do that kind of schedule. I don't know how wise it was to exhaust ourselves like that, could be an interesting study. I don't know.

SIMPSON: I don't think they do that anymore quite the same way.

NISHEK: No, they don't. And that's a good thing.

SIMPSON: [00:09:55] So what did you think of the overall training experience and the like the other volunteers that you met there?

NISHEK: [00:10:03] Um, well, um, I thought it was good, although the one thing that bothered me a lot was we were asked to evaluate each other all the time. And I didn't feel that was my place to do that. I didn't like that part of it. But we certainly I think I learned I think I surprised myself by being able to do more physically than I thought I would ever be able to do. And I guess that's partly what it was all about too, you know, self-confidence. Once you know you can do something that you didn't think you can do, you tend to try a little harder and reach out a little further. I think maybe that was part of the whole process with the program.

SIMPSON: [00:10:57] That's the Outward Bound philosophy. And they were trying, I think, to incorporate that at least in Puerto Rico. So, OK, so we had, uh, what was your overall impression of the training period and the group? Did you feel, had you gotten to know a lot of the people or?

NISHEK: [00:11:21] Oh, yeah, our group was great. I enjoyed our group very much. And the whole experience. Except for the negatives that I've just stated. I think it was a great group. It was fun. I've been reading just recently reading the letters I'd written to my parents during that time and that sort of refreshed my memory and they were all positive.

SIMPSON: [00:11:49] Yeah. OK, so now the next thing that we were doing was we went to Puerto Rico. Do you remember that trip?

NISHEK: Oh yes.

SIMPSON: Can you talk a little bit about it, about the trip and then getting to Camp Crozier?

NISHEK: [00:12:10] Um, well, I don't remember so much. I remember being in.

SIMPSON: Had you flown before?

NISHEK: [00:12:15] Yes, I had flown before. So that part doesn't stick in my mind. I remember being in the bus and getting car sick because we were jammed. So many people in a small, well, it wasn't a bus, mini bus or even many of them. And then seeing the place where we were going to live at Camp Crozier. That was my first experience with geckos that I considered to be lizards who I thought sure would crawl into my bed when I wasn't looking but.

SIMPSON: You weren't one of the ones that found the tarantulas?

NISHEK: [00:12:54] No, I never did find the tarantulas.

SIMPSON: What did you think of tent city?

NISHEK: [00:13:02] Yes, well, it was a good thing because it was raining so much of the time. In my letters that I'd written to my parents that I just read, I was talking about the rain and how we would wash our clothes by hand, but they would never get dry on the clothesline because it was raining so much.

SIMPSON: Which was a big change from the Arizona desert.

NISHEK: Exactly.

SIMPSON: [00:13:28] So what did you think of our training in Puerto Rico?

NISHEK: [00:13:32] I thought that was a little over the top. I don't think we really needed to rappel down a cliff to prove ourselves, but it did.

SIMPSON: I never thought I'd ever rappel down a dam.

NISHEK: Me neither. And the jumping into the water with your hands tied behind your back. That's crazy, you know, but we did it. And we were proud of ourselves afterwards.

SIMPSON: [00:14:01] I think that's what they were kind of going for, you're right. So what do you remember most about Puerto Rico?

NISHEK: [00:14:13] Um, I remember most of the treks we were on, the small group treks where we had to follow a map and just live off the land, so to speak, and hopefully arrive at the right place at the right time.

SIMPSON: [00:14:32] Were you in a group when we did that 40-mile hike? Were you in a group with Wayne or were with you with my group?

NISHEK: I was with the girls.

SIMPSON: Yeah, because there was a bunch of women.

NISHEK: [00:14:44] Yeah, I remember two people. Rose. Someone got very bad blisters and they had to turn back.

SIMPSON: [00:14:53] Yeah, that was Rose. I was in that group.

NISHEK: [00:14:55] There were females from another training group in our small group too.

SIMPSON: We must have been in a different one then. The one I was in, well, we didn't do much living off the land.

NISHEK: [00:15:12] No we didn't. In fact, two nights, first one night a family invited us into their house or maybe we asked or begged to come into their house. I don't know. But after one of us, I was carrying a machete, which we were supposed to carry. And I remember the man said, well, if you leave your machetes, if we can lock up your machete, your group can stay in our house. And that's what happened. He took my machete and locked it in the room and then gave us all a room. I don't know how many of us there were at that time. There was one hammock and the rest of us sort of found places on the floor. But at least we were out of the rain. That was quite an experience.

SIMPSON: [00:16:04] We must have been in different groups because I don't remember anybody ever having us stay. They invited us for coffee. And, you know, there was one guy that tried to marry all of us off.

NISHEK: No, I don't remember that. We must have been in a separate group.

SIMPSON: [00:16:20] Yeah, OK. So whenever we got finished with the training and Camp Crozier, then we went to Mayaguez. Do you remember that?

NISHEK: Yes, I do.

SIMPSON: What did you think about that? They said we needed more language training.

NISHEK: Yes. I guess our group wasn't doing too well with language as a whole.

SIMPSON: Well, I often wondered if that was the real reason. Who knew all the different issues going on.

NISHEK: [00:16:49] I remember we stayed with families.

SIMPSON: Yeah, you and Wayne stayed together.

NISHEK: No, no, no, I stayed alone. I stayed alone with a family.

SIMPSON: OK, Rose and I were together with one family.

NISHEK: [00:17:03] And yeah, Wayne and I weren't married yet.

SIMPSON: Oh that's right.

NISHEK: And yeah. And so that was an experience. It was sort of a winding down time, I thought, and a good time to concentrate on Spanish because I for one needed that. And then we did some other social visiting social services that I don't remember much about.

SIMPSON: [00:17:34] I went, I decided I'd had enough of Spanish as I already had studied it. So I tried hanging around the hospital to learn some medical Spanish. But did you go to the beach? Remember we spent a lot of time down at the beach.

NISHEK: [00:17:52] Yes, that's true. That's true. I remember that now. Were we just playing around at that time? I guess.

SIMPSON: [00:18:01] Well we had our classes and whatever and then you know, there were free time.

NISHEK: Right.

SIMPSON: OK, so then we went home and got ready to go to Bolivia. What happened when you went back home?

NISHEK: I got married.

SIMPSON: Oh, did you get married at home?

NISHEK: [00:18:27] All the time, well, from the time, the last day we were at the Maricopa in Arizona. Remember, they were cutting. They were cutting people.

SIMPSON: Right.

NISHEK: And with that much previous notice. So until the last day of being in Arizona, we weren't sure who was going to continue on and who wasn't. So we didn't. I had my mother had planned our wedding, but didn't dare send out the invitations until I said go. So when Wayne and I both were approved to go on to Puerto Rico or to yeah, Puerto Rico, they did that too. So it was after the Camp Crozier experience where we felt pretty confident. I mean, we had to make it.

SIMPSON: So that's when they cut us off, after that Camp Crozier.

NISHEK: [00:19:25] Right. Right. Yeah. You know, people who happen to scream when they were dangling at the end of a rope didn't fare too well. Anyway, we went home, got our marriage license, had two wedding showers, got married.

SIMPSON: [00:19:50] Wow, you were pretty busy.

NISHEK: [00:19:52] And then we came back to Miami airport on schedule.

SIMPSON: And what happened then, from your point of view?

NISHEK: [00:20:01] From my point of view. Well, three of us who lived in North Dakota traveled together and we were going to meet the rest of our group at the airport in Miami. We thought we were going to get on a plane. And then we were told that there's been a change of plans and we were told that we should they had made reservations at a hotel right at the airport for all of us, who were told to go to our rooms and turn on the TV. And that's when President Kennedy appeared on TV and told us we might be in a bit of trouble, but I don't think we knew. I guess nobody knew what that was all about at the time.

SIMPSON: It was the Cuban Missile Crisis.

NISHEK: It was but we didn't have a name for it at that time.

SIMPSON: No, we didn't have a name for it. But everybody was leaving Miami as fast as they could, except us.

NISHEK: Except us. It's very interesting because that's what I was remembering. And then two days ago, I was reading the letter that I'd written to my parents about that time. And I said, it said in my letter, I had written in my letter, that we were told that some of the teachers in Bolivia were striking and that the Peace Corps thought it was better that we not arrive at that time.

SIMPSON: Well, but that was at the same time as the miners that were striking.

NISHEK: Aha. OK.

SIMPSON: The miners. But that was like two things, two different things. I guess it was enough that they couldn't send us. But it took a while to get that straight.

NISHEK: [00:21:48] Right. Yes. Well because really nobody knew what was happening right at that moment.

SIMPSON: [00:21:53] I always sort of felt that our group was kind of like guinea pigs because we had probably the longest training of any group ever, because of all those things that happened.

NISHEK: [00:22:06] So then we were put in a nice luxury hotel for a couple of days because that's my letter said it was the cheapest place for them because it was off season. It was October.

SIMPSON: And because people were leaving Miami in droves. That's the reason hotels were dying.

NISHEK: [00:22:26] But in my letter to my parents, I never mentioned President Kennedy's speech. I wonder. Maybe I was trying to, I was probably thinking my parents didn't know and I didn't want you to worry about me when I was there. Anyway.

SIMPSON: [00:22:43] And then then we went.

NISHEK: [00:22:45] Then they sent our entire group up to Vermont, the Experiment for International Living building. In Brattleboro, Vermont, in October, the most beautiful town in Vermont. And this was our honeymoon. I mean, this was three days after our wedding.

SIMPSON: You lucked out.

NISHEK: We lucked out. Not much to do there.

SIMPSON: [00:23:10] Well, they did have us practice our Spanish some more. I remember going walking and picking apples.

NISHEK: Oh, I know, it was beautiful.

SIMPSON: After Arizona and Puerto Rico, it was nice.

NISHEK: And it was the first time we had rested, I think, for many months, actually.

SIMPSON: We all went, you remember when they sent us into Boston?

NISHEK: Yes.

SIMPSON: Because a new group was coming in for training and they didn't want any of us older, you know.

NISHEK: Contaminated.

SIMPSON: Yeah. They didn't want us to influence anyone.

NISHEK: Cynical people.

SIMPSON: [00:23:52] Yeah. So we accepted the trip to Boston. I remember some people saying, well, I'm not going to go to Boston, they just want to get rid of us. But I remember thinking, well, I have never been to Boston.

NISHEK: Why not?

SIMPSON: OK, so when we finally got to Bolivia. What was your impression of Bolivia when we got there?

NISHEK: [00:24:20] Well, luckily we had been told quite a bit about Bolivia. So we landed in the La Paz airport, I remember that. And of course, I was looking in every direction and people had warned us that we might have altitude sickness and all that. But, uh, yeah, it was just very, very interesting to see actually see what we've been told about for all these months of training. So I think we were. It was a good experience for us all. We weren't too

rushed. They gave us time to sort of settle into a hotel. I think we were only there like a week.

SIMPSON: I don't know if it was that long even.

NISHEK: Yeah, we went we met the president. We met the American ambassador. So, yeah, that was a good time. Oh, but the horrendous time came next. Driving. Driving from La Paz to Cochabamba on these narrow, narrow, winding roads with a drop off on one side and our little Willis jeep. Oh my. Caution was thrown to the wind there.

SIMPSON: I nearly had a heart attack.

NISHEK: [00:25:40] Yeah, me too. And it was actually our driver, I mean, our good doctor leading the pack. And he was driving way too fast, in my estimation. Doesn't hear me. You know, you can go online and you can get a list the most dangerous roads in the world. And at least three of them are in Bolivia. And one of them is that road between La Paz and Cochabamba. It wasn't paved. And if you met any vehicle, and there were big busses and big trucks on that road, one of the vehicles would have to wait to the side and people would get out and direct each other. And we passed each other, oh. That was the scariest.

SIMPSON: [00:26:31] Yeah, I remember that nobody wanted to wear seatbelts because of the drop-off. Because, you know, if it went over they wanted to be thrown out. They didn't want to go all the way down. So then we went on to Cochabamba. And what did you?

NISHEK: [00:26:56] Well that was a very beautiful place. And I was thinking, oh, I'd like to stay here I think, because I knew about the tropical Santa Cruz that was coming up. And Cochabamba seemed to be so livable. And we had more training there, I think, or introduction to the area.

SIMPSON: [00:27:18] We had Thanksgiving dinner. Yeah, the American community.

NISHEK: OK, I had forgotten that for. It was Thanksgiving time already. '62.

SIMPSON: [00:27:37] So then do you remember going to Santa Cruz?

NISHEK: [00:27:43] Mm hmm. That was another crazy drive. That time I was a little hesitant about getting in the vehicle. I thought, oh, can I be lucky enough to survive two of these trips? And in the middle of it all, I swore that I would never, ever leave Santa Cruz except by air.

SIMPSON: [00:28:07] Oh, did you ever leave it?

NISHEK: Yeah, once I took a bus to Cochabamba. That was even worse.

SIMPSON: [00:28:16] Yeah. Yeah. You know, a lot of those folks I remembered, were not used to riding in busses and cars, so they'd be sick. And so, you know, the windows were open, but they'd be tossing up their cookies in front of you. So tell me about your, what you were doing in the Santa Cruz area, where you went and what you did.

NISHEK: [00:28:46] Ok, Wayne and I and five other volunteers were assigned to Portachuelo, which was, I guess, east of Santa Cruz, further inland even. I was lucky because my background was in home economics education and there was a spot at the Agricultural Extension Service, which is very similar to what we have here in the U.S. There was a home economics extension person there, so she became my coworker. She was a very young woman. She didn't really have any training in home economics, but she was Bolivian and she was very outspoken. And together we made a pretty good team because I had the technical part of it and she had the social part of it. And together. Plus, I had the driver's license and I could take Peace Corps jeep wherever we should or probably shouldn't have taken it. So together, she and I organized homemakers clubs and Cuatro-Ese, which is equivalent to our 4-H, in the entire district. So we went out to villages and organized these groups and then subsequently we went back and had classes and meetings with these groups. So I was lucky to have sort of a definite assignment like that which fit my background.

SIMPSON: [00:30:38] Yeah, that is yeah, because in that sense of community development, people are sort of trying to develop their job.

NISHEK: [00:30:49] The rest of the group in Portachuelo were assigned to the rice cooperative there in various capacities.

SIMPSON: Who else was there?

NISHEK: In our group, it was Tom Woodward and Chuck Glass and Art Andres and Ralph Clarke and Audrey Dorf and Wayne and I. And at first we all lived in the same house, which was the top floor of a very large house and the owner of the house served us our meals together, etcetera. It wasn't the best setup in the world, but it started us off.

SIMPSON: [00:31:33] Yeah, so I was just thinking, you know, Art and Tom and. I was just thinking that Chuck and Tom and Ralph are all deceased.

NISHEK: [00:31:53] That's right.

SIMPSON: [00:31:54] I don't know where Art is. So is that pretty much what you did most of the time that you were there was work with homemakers clubs and the Cuatro-Ese?

NISHEK: [00:32:07] Well, I was reminded again by reading these letters that I did that for, oh, maybe seven, eight months and then realized that I was, Marcella and I were really duplicating each other. So I branched out then into, I hope I helped with her, helped her a little bit with that. Then I branched out into the schools. I was asked by the teachers at the primary and what they call the normal school, which was equivalent to high school, and the kindergarten, to teach nutrition and health classes there, and then some English classes. They wanted English also. So I started doing that as well, because Marcella was doing a perfectly good job on her own.

SIMPSON: [00:32:58] Good. Sort of helped train her then.

NISHEK: [00:33:01] Well, yes. I thought that she would remain there long after I left, which was not the case.

SIMPSON: You can't predict.

NISHEK: Well, because she married a Peace Corps volunteer and she left before I did. But yeah.

SIMPSON: [00:33:22] Can you think about any particular incidents that happened that were really memorable, that you might like to tell me about?

NISHEK: Memorable in a positive way?

SIMPSON: Any way.

NISHEK: [00:33:44] Well, I think, I mean, this isn't very significant but memorable. Were the many, many hours that Marcella and I spent digging our Jeep out of the mud and her willingness to go seek help and the willingness of villagers to come and help us, or to invite us into their home overnight if we couldn't get ourselves moved out of there. This was a real experience. I remember one time we came back to a homemakers group that we had been working with quite diligently. We had a handicraft project going because they wanted to make items which they could sell in the market. And one time we came back and they had burned all their own handicraft. And we later found out that they had thought that Marcella, they had heard that Marcella and I were communists. That was the word they used. Someone had told them that. So they had burned all their handicraft articles. How sad was that? I don't remember the follow-up of that at all.

SIMPSON: [00:35:09] Did you continue going out there?

NISHEK: [00:35:10] Oh, you know, I don't remember that part of it because that memory only came back the other letter I had written to my parents. I'd forgotten that part.

SIMPSON: [00:35:24] Well, there was quite a bit of anti-American sentiment in Bolivia at the time.

NISHEK: [00:35:29] Yeah, even in, remember, even in the Santa Cruz newspaper, even Peace Corps was questioned more than once.

SIMPSON: [00:35:42] Yeah. Well, so what else do you remember? That's fascinating. Tell me some more. Was it challenging trying to teach some of the things you were trying to teach to the women?

NISHEK: [00:36:00] It was in a way, because, well, you know, people are the same really all over the world. Sometimes you get into a project with a lot of enthusiasm and oftentimes that enthusiasm isn't sustained. So sometimes Marcella and I would drive, you know, 15 muddy miles to a village to attend a meeting that had been scheduled the month before, to find only one person there. But then we didn't turn around and go home. Instead, we walked from house to house inviting people. And it was discouraging because we thought, you know, that they would gladly come and get together. And sometimes that enthusiasm wasn't always there. But so what else is new? That happens everywhere in the world.

SIMPSON: [00:37:03] It does. Do you remember in 1963 where you were when we found out about Kennedy being assassinated?

NISHEK: [00:37:10] Oh yes, yes. Wayne had a meeting with Harold Vedato who was our director, our project director, in Santa Cruz. So he and I were in their house actually. Harold Vedato and Wayne and Sandy White, who was the USAID man, were meeting together. And, um, Maxine, Mrs. Vedato, she and I were just in the living room and her radio was on. And it was some news report, but very scratchy. The reception was really bad. And we thought we heard this news about President Kennedy being killed and we couldn't believe it. We put our ear to the radio and then we called the guys in to listen. And that's where we first learned about the assassination. And we still couldn't quite believe it, because while the radio was really scratchy, I don't remember if it was in English. Probably was Voice of America, I don't know. But we were also stunned. And the Vedatos were from Texas. So, you know, that was even more stunning for them. So then I don't know how we got the official word.

SIMPSON: [00:38:43] I was in Santa Cruz at the same time. We were on our way to a meeting in Cochabamba, I think. Some of us, at least. I know I was traveling with someone and I don't remember. And we went to Santa Cruz, Sucre, and then up to Cochabamba.

NISHEK: [00:39:07] Oh, yeah, I don't remember that part.

SIMPSON: [00:39:09] It may be that I was doing something specific. I don't remember.

NISHEK: [00:39:19] But I do remember once we got back home to Portachuelo how people from Portachuelo would come to our house and just knock at our door and embrace us as if one of our parents had died. I mean, they were so, they were in mourning. The people of our village, it was amazing.

SIMPSON: [00:39:40] It was. I remember on the trip I took the flags are flying at half mast, the next day, all the way up to like Sucre, all these little white flags.

NISHEK: [00:39:53] And I think people were wearing bands on their arms. Whether they were bands of mourning, I don't remember. Many people were wearing those bands.

SIMPSON: [00:40:05] People would come up and just wherever and tell you.

NISHEK: [00:40:09] Yeah, and then embrace you and say we're so sorry.

SIMPSON: [00:40:14] Oh yeah. Big jolt for me. I imagine it was a big jolt for you. I didn't think that would happen in the U.S. at the time.

NISHEK: [00:40:20] No, no, of course not. Not what I know now.

SIMPSON: [00:40:27] So OK, so when you got up, when you got down to the end of your time there and you were leaving and all. What do you think you really accomplished there?

NISHEK: [00:41:55] Well, I didn't save the world, but I think that's where I learned a whole lot. For one thing, I learned what it is like to live with other people and to absorb all the love and good feelings that they surrounded us with. I learned that it was possible to be accepted into a community, even though we were somewhat different from the other people there. And I hope that through the classes and lessons I taught, I hope that some people's minds were opened a little bit to maybe change a little bit or at

least to consider what options they had. And then when we worked with especially the Cuarto-Ese groups where children were able to accomplish something. It's the same with us. If we actually accomplish something ourselves, then our self-confidence increases and then we go on to something else on our own accord. And I think and I hope that happens with a lot of people that we had contact with there.

SIMPSON: [00:42:15] Good. So in the long run, what do you think your major contribution was? Just what you said?

NISHEK: [00:42:32] Yeah, just what I said really. We were one more contact that they had that hopefully opened the minds, the minds of those around us, to accepting Americans, to recognizing what Americans were like too.

SIMPSON: [00:42:50] Did you have any health problems while you were there?

NISHEK: [00:42:53] Oh, yeah, I got malaria.

SIMPSON: Oh did you? I didn't know that.

NISHEK: I didn't know it was malaria at the time. And at the time there was no there was no malaria preventative. But I mean I have since had malaria in a different country, so I recognized it. For one month I just wanted to go home to my mommy.

SIMPSON: [00:43:14] When did this happen? Early on in your?

NISHEK: [00:43:16] No, it was sort of in the middle, in the middle of it all. And I was so sick.

SIMPSON: I can't believe I didn't know that had it.

NISHEK: But I didn't know.

SIMPSON: You didn't know that it was malaria. And see the doctors, from my point of view, were at a disadvantage, our Peace Corps doctors, because they

were not trained in tropical medicine. I mean, nobody would have diagnosed Audrey with Chagas, if hadn't been for that local doctor.

NISHEK: [00:43:47] Right. But we had all the mosquitoes. I mean, it was just the typical place to contract malaria.

SIMPSON: Yeah, I pretty much slept under a mosquito net.

NISHEK: Well, we did, too.

SIMPSON: [00:44:00] But then you go out. What about, did you guys travel any while you were there?

NISHEK: [00:44:08] We took one big trip at a Christmas time, so I guess it was '63. So we went down the coast of Chile, way down to the end. And then we came across Argentina in a train, third class. Oh my gosh. With the windows open and the dust coming in and our seats were wooden benches in the train. We went to Buenos Aires. Oh, and then getting home, we were late coming home because we were going to come home by train across Uruguay, I guess. And the trains were on strike. There we were, stuck in this city in Uruguay and trying to fly out. But for some reason, I don't know if there were commercial flights. Well, finally, finally, we went up to this pilot who was flying cargo to Santa Cruz. And after about five days of trying, we were accepted on that cargo plane.

SIMPSON: [00:45:29] Well, what would happen, because subsequently I lived two years in Paraguay. There was just no way if you wanted to go to Bolivia, you had to go to Buenos Aires and then go up to La Paz. You couldn't just fly across.

NISHEK: [00:45:57] Well, we did.

SIMPSON: [00:45:58] Yeah, officially. Unofficially in some kind of cargo plane.

NISHEK: [00:46:02] Because we were planning to take the train. But they went on strike. So and the cargo happened to be raw meat.

SIMPSON: Oh my gosh.

NISHEK: When we got on the plane.

SIMPSON: It must have been coming from Paraguay.

NISHEK: [00:46:17] Yeah, I think so. There were cows at the airport. We didn't know that. So they slaughtered the cows there in the airport and put the meat in our plane that we were on, in the aisles. There were only like about five passengers. Yeah, and we flew to Santa Cruz.

SIMPSON: [00:46:38] It's got to be one of the more interesting flights you probably have ever taken.

NISHEK: [00:47:44] And there was one man, similar to a steward on an airplane, who actually served us 7-Up on a tray. He had to crawl all over this cargo to get to us. But he did it graciously. And that is the truth.

SIMPSON: Oh, that has to be preserved, Marj, for that reason, that story, alone.

NISHEK: It wasn't frozen either.

SIMPSON: [00:47:10] That's probably why they had to get it fast over there, because there wasn't any refrigeration. Oh wow, OK. So the goals of the Peace Corps were like technical assistance where requested, promote better understanding of the U.S., and to promote better understanding of other people by Americans. So in light of those goals, how would you evaluate your time there?

NISHEK: [00:47:41] I think it was time well spent because, yes, I think we met all of those goals. We learned a lot. And hopefully people who were in contact with us also saw us for what we were as Americans.

SIMPSON: [00:47:57] Did you, um, so when you came home, what did you do? How did that experience translate into your subsequent life?

NISHEK: [00:48:09] Well, very directly, actually. First, we had to finish school, go back to school, because neither of us even had our bachelor's degrees at that time. So we did that.

SIMPSON: [00:48:21] Where did you go to school?

NISHEK: [00:48:27] I went back to North Dakota State University. And we had met and I had one year left and I had signed up to be a math teacher in Holly, Minnesota. But that summer, we got a letter from the Department of Welfare in Nevada because we had met, as Peace Corps volunteers on application I was talking about. We had met another Peace Corps couple from Colombia, and we got to know them a little bit on vacation and then never heard from them again. But they had subsequently returned to the U.S. and had taken positions at the Indian reservation in northern Nevada. And they were looking for a home ec teacher and an industrial arts teacher. And Wayne was industrial arts at that time. So they had told their director to go to the Peace Corps office and try to find our names, to locate us. And they found us and offered us the job. So Wayne and I then went to Nevada to work on this reservation.

SIMPSON: [00:49:47] Not too far removed from the Peace Corps.

NISHEK: Very, very similar. Very similar to Peace Corps.

SIMPSON: [00:49:52] So subsequently, what have you been doing?

NISHEK: [00:49:56] Well, we were still then and then we were.

SIMPSON: [00:49:59] You did another tour, didn't you? Of the Peace Corps?

NISHEK: [00:50:03] No. Actually, we were supposed to go back to Bolivia as Peace Corps staff. Wayne was getting the staff position. He'd been accepted for that position. And then Peace Corps, at that time, was discontinued in Bolivia. And that was when we were just, we'd already moved out of our house, sold our car, everything. So instead we were sent to India. And Wayne was associate Peace Corps director in India. But then the war between India and Pakistan broke out. So Indira Gandhi said Peace Corps

volunteers serving could fulfill their terms, but there would be no more Peace Corps in India. And so we were given, oh, just two months to get out. And then we had to, we as staff people, had to leave.

SIMPSON: [00:51:04] When, uh, how long were you in India then?

NISHEK: [00:51:29] We were in India only a year, um, over a year. But it was a two-year contract.

SIMPSON: [00:51:14] Well, same thing happened with me in Chile. We were expecting to go. It was USAID contract to be there three years and after a year it was discontinued because our government and theirs, Pinochet, didn't agree. So, you know, you're always getting up with that.

NISHEK: [00:51:31] Right. Right.

SIMPSON: [00:51:33] So after that then what did you do? Weren't you in Africa?

NISHEK: Yeah. Well, that came later either.

SIMPSON: [00:51:40] Did you come back to the U.S.?

NISHEK: [00:51:40] Because we were supposed to. Yeah. Because we were supposed to continue as Peace Corps staff, or Wayne as Peace Corps staff, in Jamaica. But they weren't ready for us yet. So in the meantime, we learned of a job, community development job, with the Kootenai tribe in northern Idaho. So we thought, well, we're just sitting here doing nothing. Let's go for the interview anyway. And we got there and decided, hey, you know, this is great, let's move here. So that's how that happened.

SIMPSON: I was wondering how you ended up in Idaho.

NISHEK: [00:52:26] Yeah, right. Yeah. In the meantime, while we were in Nevada, our two children, two of our children were born there, so at that time we had two kids.

SIMPSON: [00:52:35] So if you had it to do over, if you were advising some younger person, would you advise them to go into the Peace Corps?

NISHEK: [00:52:42] Depending on their personalities. I think they have to be really open minded and certainly not out to save the world, because that's not what it's all about.

SIMPSON: [00:52:54] Not possible.

NISHEK: No.

SIMPSON: Did you ever regret having gone in yourself?

NISHEK: [00:53:04] No, no, no. That was something that opened me up completely.

SIMPSON: [00:53:11] Do you think it changed what your direction in life?

NISHEK: [00:53:17] Oh, definitely. Because of our working time have been in community development either overseas or with the Native Americans here in the U.S.

SIMPSON: That's kind of like service-related jobs.

NISHEK: [00:53:34] Mm hmm. And, we had one more Peace Corps experience because, um. Two more. Wayne was the associate Peace Corps director in the Lesotho in southern Africa. And then he was country director in the Gambia. But all this time I met more and more Peace Corps volunteers on an informal basis, because I was employed elsewhere, not the Peace Corps, but I just saw the quality of those volunteers that came and went. Yeah, I met.

SIMPSON: Was it good?

NISHEK: [00:54:13] It was basically, yeah, like eighty five percent. I mean, of course the training at that time later, in later years, wasn't as stringent. So sometimes volunteers became volunteers and they really didn't have the fortitude for it, or they came with a I want to save the world attitude and

then were disappointed. But I met a lot of wonderful young, well, not only young. Some of the older retirees who were volunteers were special people.

SIMPSON: [00:54:47] So you are pretty happy that you did it?

NISHEK: [00:54:52] Yes, of course. Yeah.

SIMPSON: [00:54:55] OK, well, I think we're probably at the end here. I'm going to sign us off now. Go ahead, we'll give it a minute. OK, do you want to talk about the work you did later in the Peace Corps, related to the embassy work?

NISHEK: [00:55:20] Oh, yes. Um, well, I spent some time in Tanzania too, like seven years, but that was an agricultural related project. But I think what I remember most, my most recent professional experience, was at the American embassy in the Gambia. And I.

SIMPSON: [00:55:42] How did you happen to get into the embassy? Were you working with USAID or?

NISHEK: [00:55:48] No, no. My husband was country director of Peace Corps in the Gambia. That was our last assignment. And then an embassy position opened up and three of us applied. But it was for the ambassador self-help program, which is basically a community development program. And so I applied for that and got that job. And that was great because it was Peace Corps all over again, except it had some money attached to it.

SIMPSON: Higher salary.

NISHEK: [00:56:25] Yeah. And also, also the U.S. government granted money to projects. Projects that were identified by the various communities, whether, um, whether they be agricultural or income generating projects for communities. Communities would propose a project and many proposals would come in and I would look at them and choose what I thought was the most beneficial ones to fund and pass it through a committee. And then decisions were made about which projects the

ambassador would fund. And then it was, once the project got going, then I got to do the follow-up. The visitations and the evaluation and that meant traveling around the country like a Peace Corps volunteer, actually. Yeah. So it's very interesting.

SIMPSON: [00:57:30] Yeah, that must have been interesting. And you had such great background for it as opposed to people that we used to see coming in when we were in Bolivia that had no clue exactly what they were supposed to be.

NISHEK: [00:57:43] Right. Right. And an additional fact was that oftentimes there were Peace Corps volunteers living in these different communities. And I would correspond with them and communicate with them and get their opinions. And oftentimes, if the project was funded, then they were there to help with it, facilitate it. So it was a combination of all of this rolled into one.

SIMPSON: [00:58:12] And where did you do, in the Gambia?

NISHEK: In the Gambia.

SIMPSON: [00:58:16] Great. That would be fascinating.

NISHEK: [00:58:20] It was very fun. And not too many Americans wanted that job.

SIMPSON: Because you had to get out and get dirty.

NISHEK: [00:58:17] Right. And they probably were afraid of that.

SIMPSON: You know, subsequently I was, uh, my ex took a job with USAID in Paraguay. And we took a pick up, but I worked as a volunteer, a former Fulbright scholar, to do this community development stuff. The embassy ladies had no clue or just not. But, you know, as a former Peace Corps volunteer.

NISHEK: [00:59:00] Yeah. You have to have some background. Otherwise it would be impossible to do a job like that well.

SIMPSON: [00:59:06] Yeah, absolutely. Well, that's really nice. How long did you do that kind of stuff?

NISHEK: [00:59:13] Until, well, that was our last assignment. That was a two-year position.

SIMPSON: [00:59:19] Did you work then again when you came home?

NISHEK: [00:59:21] Nope, nope. Well, then it slid into the same kind of work, but volunteer. No pay. And that's fun.

SIMPSON: [00:59:31] Still in the Peace Corps but no pay.

NISHEK: Exactly.

SIMPSON: But that's interesting, Marj. I didn't realize that you had done that as well. I met people in the course of my work in Latin America who were doing all kinds of things at the embassy in Latin America, you know, in Paraguay and Chile and places like that. But that's interesting.

NISHEK: [00:59:59] And it was fun.

SIMPSON: [01:00:00] Yeah, great. I'm glad to hear that. I guess we are probably done now.

[END OF INTERVIEW]