

Nicola Dino Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Nicola Dino served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador from 1993 to 1997 in a public health program.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Nicola Dino

April 23, 2018
Portland, Oregon

By Patricia Wand

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

WAND: [00:00:02] Hello. Today is April 23rd, 2018. This is Patricia Wand, and I'm interviewing Nicole Dino, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador from June 1993 to September 1997. And I am delighted to have this opportunity to be in Portland, Oregon, and interviewing Nicole, or Nicola as she often is called, in her own home. So Nicola, thank you for agreeing to interview, be interviewed with me.

DINO: [00:00:49] Thank you, Pat.

WAND: [00:00:52] And we're delighted that your story can go into the John F. Kennedy Library and represent the thousands of Peace Corps volunteers who have served in various countries.

DINO: [00:01:02] I'm really honored. I am.

WAND: [00:01:05] We're delighted to have you joined this group. So we're going to start by covering a little bit of your pre Peace Corps years. A lot of the interview will be focusing on what you did in Peace Corps and how you experienced that. And in the end, we'll have some reflections about the Peace Corps and how it's influenced your life and what you're doing now, for example. So let's start about before you joined the Peace Corps and think what were you doing in the year just before you went into Peace Corps?

DINO: [00:01:41] I've been a nurse since 1970 and so I was working. I was working in a hospital and preparing, because I had filled out the information to go to Peace Corps and was just working and waiting to hear.

WAND: [00:02:05] Great. So let's go back even further. Your family of origin, where did you grow up and was your family exposed at all to international things? But just talk about your family of origin.

DINO: [00:02:22] I am actually third generation in this country, my parents. No actually, second generation. My parents were first generation. All of my grandparents were from Sicily and they came to this country around 1880s, 1890s. So both of my parents were the first born here in 1908 and 1916. So very, uh, a very quote Italian family. And I was born in actually East St. Louis, Illinois, in 1948. And basically lived in Illinois, around there and in St. Louis, Missouri, up until I went to Peace Corps. Other than I had a two year time away from St. Louis when I was living in Tacoma, Washington. I had been married at the time and my husband then was in the Army. So I came out to Washington state and I was in nursing school at the time. And so I actually finished my diploma school nursing program, which is something they had back then that they don't have now, and was able to graduate at a hospital in Tacoma, Washington. And from that time on, I did nursing.

WAND: [00:03:58] And what year was that that you finished your diploma for nursing?

DINO: [00:04:02] Yeah. 1970.

WAND: [00:04:06] OK. And then so you went to high school in East St. Louis?

DINO: [00:04:09] No, I went to high school in the suburbs. Well, sort of like the suburbs of St. Louis. It was a neighborhood called Bell Fountain Neighbors, and that school is still there actually. They changed the name of it. It was a, it is still a Catholic high school. It was called Rosary at the time. And because of the economy and lots of things, a number of the Catholic high schools have closed and they consolidated them to the actual school where I went to high school and they now call it Trinity High School so.

WAND: [00:04:52] And what about college? Where did you go to college?

DINO: [00:04:54] So after high school, I went to work and I was one of those kids that said, I'm not going back to school. And so I went to work for American Express in their travel agency because I just I loved, even as a kid, I would pull maps out and study maps. I just thought, I just loved to look at the world. And so to go to a job where it was about travel was kind of cool. In the meantime, my sister had met a student nurse at a local hospital when she was having one of her kids. And so I ended up hanging around them, her and her friend, who was a student nurse, and it kind of piqued my interest in nursing. And long story short, I actually applied to that school then after I had worked at American Express for a little over a year and was enrolled there. And so went there for a couple of years and finished in Tacoma. After that, I just I worked, had a family, and the opportunity came up to continue my education. And at the time I'd been working, what I really enjoyed the most was working in prevention, and I did a lot of work in smoking cessation and worked with the Y and did nutrition stuff.

DINO: [00:06:44] And I found that it made sense to me to work with people to help them prevent the diseases that I learned how to help treat in the hospital. When I realized as a very young person, I think there's things we can do ahead of time so we don't get sick. And so there was a school there called, it's now called Lindenwood University. At the time it was called Lindenwood College, and Lindenwood is in St. Charles, Missouri, which is just outside of St. Louis. And they had a bachelor's degree

program for adults who were working, and they had one particular curriculum that dealt with community health and that kind of idea. So that's the program that I went into and. I had started, though, prior to that going back to school, and I got a bit of a scholarship through the Rotary International, a group there. And they gave me some money so I could go back to start to go back to school, and I went to St. Louis University for about three semesters and that was also one of those programs that was an accelerated program for adults. And so I got so far there, and then I switched over to Lindenwood because they had really what interested me more.

WAND: [00:08:24] So it was with Lindenwood that you finished your diploma in nursing?

DINO: [00:08:29] No, I didn't get a diploma. I didn't get a degree in nursing because I wanted really wanted to do kind of that community health piece. And, you know, they didn't really have that kind of thing. Like at St. Louis University, what they had was a bachelor's degree in nursing and it just that's not where I wanted to go with that. So my bachelor's degree was just in, um, and like, what do you call it?

WAND: [00:09:03] Community health or public health?

DINO: [00:09:04] It was more like personnel, that's where they had this health community aspect going. Human resource development actually was the official title. So that's where I got that. And during that time and right after that time and like right before, during and after that time, I decided to just go on my own. And I did a lot of work at different, like consulting work, at different hospitals and venues. Again, like with the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, different human resource places and some hospitals where I presented programs and did wellness days, things like that. And I put together some of my own lectures and programs and went out and did that for a while, which it was. It was more like play than work.

WAND: [00:10:09] But you got paid for it.

DINO: [00:10:10] I got paid for it.

WAND: [00:10:12] Wonderful.

DINO: [00:10:12] It was a lot of fun.

WAND: [00:10:13] So during this time, you now have a bachelor's degree. You have a family. You have children at this point and how old are they?

DINO: [00:10:20] Yeah, my kids were late, no, early teens. Yeah. Early teens.

WAND: [00:10:32] While you were in college, they were in their teens?

DINO: [00:10:36] Late, you know, like eighth grade, yeah, right around there. Thirteen.

WAND: [00:10:41] And then you worked. And so I'm going to, if I'm jumping ahead too fast, you tell me. But how did you find out about Peace Corps then?

DINO: [00:10:51] Well, you know, I always had, it felt like there was in my heart, something to do in addition to, you know, some kind of helpful thing, in addition to just, quote, just being a nurse. I just felt like I had another calling, something else to do, and I did a lot of research for a while on what kinds of things that I could do. And I was just talking to somebody one day and this person said, you know, it sounds to me like something like Peace Corps would be something you should look into. And I remember thinking, oh gosh, I'd never even thought about that. I was just throwing this wide net out and looking at all kinds of things. And Peace Corps never was on my radar screen, so to speak, until she said that. And I said, yeah, yeah, I'll think about it. And so at sometime later, it wasn't right then, I decided to. I called them, because this was pre internet.

WAND: [00:12:04] So this would have been in the early '90s.

DINO: [00:12:07] Yes. Yeah. This is pre-internet, so basically you just made phone calls. So I called. I called Peace Corps, and I don't know if I called the local office in the Midwest was in Kansas City, and I don't know if I

called them or if I called Washington, D.C. And pretty much right away they interview you. They don't waste any time. And I told her, you know, what my profession was and, you know, what I felt like I wanted to do. And you know, she asked me a bunch of questions and then after a while, she said, well, you know what? I'm going to send you an application. I said, yeah, OK, fine.

DINO: [00:12:57] So I got the application and, of course, was quite surprised about how long it was. And it took me a while to get it filled out and to get all the paperwork together and the requirements that they asked about, but I did finally get all that done and sent it in. And you know, I did hear from them at some point. And in the meantime, when they called me back, there was some things I had to take care of with my kids. So I told them, I said, well, there's some things I need to deal with first before I'm free to leave the country. So I will call you when all that has been dealt with and taken care of. And so basically, what I waited for was for my daughter to graduate from high school. And when she graduated from high school, then I called them back and I said, OK, I'm free to be able to travel.

DINO: [00:14:07] And again, I don't remember how long it was that I waited and they called me and they said, well, we have a spot available for a nurse in Yemen. And, you know, it was really interesting because when I filled out the application, they ask you where will you go in the world? And I told them I'd go anywhere but the Middle East. I know. It was pretty funny. I said, did you read the application?

WAND: [00:14:48] Did you really say that?

DINO: [00:14:50] I thought it. But I think I said, you know, well, did you see that I wrote on there that you know that I didn't circle the Middle East and they said, well, yeah. And you know, they said, is there any particular reason why you don't want to go to the Middle East then? And it was very personal. It was like, I just I couldn't fathom being in a place where women were treated badly. And I felt like women weren't treated very. Well, we all know that women aren't treated too great in most places or a lot of places. But for some reason that point in my life, I just felt like, gosh, I just, it would just, I just don't think I could, I don't think I could handle it

emotionally. You know, to be in a place like that where women are treated so bad.

DINO: [00:15:41] And so the gal said, well, there's a nurse who's on leave right now, who is a volunteer in Yemen and she's in the United States, she's going to be here for a short period of time. May she, will you give us permission to have her call you and will you talk to her? And maybe she can, you know, relieve you of some of your concerns? And I said, sure, I'll talk to her. And yes, we did talk on the phone. She was really very nice and answered my questions very clearly and honestly. And she said that, you know, she felt safe there. She didn't have any issues and she thought it was a, you know, a great place to serve. And, you know, we had a nice conversation. And when I got off the phone, I called Peace Corps back and I said, yes, I did talk to her and I still don't want to go to the Middle East. I just, you know, that's what's in my heart basically.

WAND: [00:16:46] Right.

DINO: [00:16:48] So they said, well, OK, the only thing is is that means that it might take a little longer, you know, for you to get an assignment. And you know, I say that's OK. I've waited, I'm in my forties, I've waited this long. I mean, what's another couple of months or whatever? So it wasn't too long after that I got a letter asking me if I would be interested in going to Ecuador.

WAND: [00:17:16] Was that a few months?

DINO: [00:17:17] Yeah, it wasn't that long really. It couldn't have been more than three months, I don't think. And so, and the funny part was, you know, I answered right away and I said, yes, and, you know, then I had to go and look at where exactly is Ecuador? You know, I mean, I knew it was south, but I didn't know that how exactly where it was a relation to, you know, the other South American countries.

WAND: [00:17:42] Right, right.

DINO: [00:17:44] So yeah, I said, yeah, I'll go to Ecuador. And they asked me if I had any language skills, and at that point, I really didn't. I grew up in a family that was bilingual, but I had parents who, because they were so fresh, you know, in the respect of their parents did not. English was not their first language, and they wanted to make sure their kids could speak well in this country, and so they did not teach us to speak Sicilian basically. And so but I had, I always had an ear. You know, I always heard at least one other language at home, even though, you know, I didn't really get what they were saying. And then in Catholic high schools back then, you had to take Latin. So I took two years of Latin and I took two years of French. And so I, you know, I had kind of the building blocks, the basic building blocks of learning a language, and I said, I'm going to be OK. I'll be able to learn whatever.

WAND: [00:18:53] Great. So I'm going to, I want you to talk a little bit about the training that you had. But before we talk about training, tell us about how your family responded to this decision to go to Ecuador as a Peace Corps volunteer. You know, what did your children think? What did your parents and your siblings or your family and friends think about it?

DINO: [00:19:14] So my parents had been dead for a while so. I think my mother would have been thrilled. You know, pretty much anything I did, it was fine. She supported me with pretty much everything. I'm not sure about my dad. He loved the fact that, you know, I was a nurse. So, you know, he was somewhat supportive in that way. My kids. Because they were in their early twenties by then, because Terry graduated then. Well, no, she was 18, 19. And my son Patrick, he was already like 21 or whatever. They did, they really didn't have any idea about Peace Corps. They didn't really know what that meant. And so I explained to them in the only way I could is, how much that it would mean to me, why it meant this to me. You know, and that was it. There was, that was the only, it wasn't about anything else. Because this is what I felt like, I felt like there was something inside of me screaming to get out. And I said, this is how I feel, and I have to do this, you know? And because I hadn't, you know, I hadn't done anything quote that selfish ever. And so my friends were excited about it, they thought it was really cool.

DINO: [00:20:47] My sister at the time was very angry with me. Very angry. She didn't get it, no matter how I explained how important that was to me. She just, she just kept saying, you know, there are people here that need help, you know, and that was true. I mean, it's true still. I said, I get that, you know, I still, this is something I need to do. So it took her. From the time I really, you know, like, filled out the application and said, you know, I'm wanting to do this till the time I went, it was probably a year and a half, something like that. And for almost most of that time, she quit talking to me. She was very upset, very upset.

WAND: [00:21:38] That must have been very difficult for you.

DINO: [00:21:39] It was. It was very hard.

WAND: [00:21:43] Right.

DINO: [00:21:44] So in the end, you know, she did go to the airport and wish me well, you know. And so that was, you know, I felt a little better about that, but she, it took her. It took her, well, I don't think she ever really let it go until after I came back. Yeah, it was just, it was hard. Yeah, it was really hard for her. And because, you know, her and I were very close. We were the only, I was her only sister. She was my only sister. And we did a lot together and we lived fairly close to each other. And so, you know, I mean. It was hard, it was hard. Because, you know, I didn't want to leave her, but I knew I had to do this for me as well. And I just kept saying, you know, the kids are grown up, they're gone basically. And, you know, I feel compelled. This is how I want to give back. And I said, I know it's going to sound corny, but I have been so blessed in my life with having been gifted so many things with my education and, you know, the work that I've been able to have, and I just feel like I want to give back.

WAND: [00:23:21] Right, right.

DINO: [00:23:23] You know, and I'm not going to go in the military, but I can do something for this country. You know, that's what I can do.

WAND: [00:23:30] Right. And for other people.

DINO: [00:23:31] And for other people.

WAND: [00:23:32] OK, let's skip ahead now to you got on that plane.

DINO: [00:23:37] Got on the plane.

WAND: [00:23:37] And went to Ecuador. Did you start your training in Ecuador or did you gather someplace in the United States and then go to Ecuador?

DINO: [00:23:45] Yeah, we went to Miami.

WAND: [00:23:48] Everybody in your training group?

DINO: [00:23:50] Everybody in my training group went to Miami. We were there a couple of days. And you know, it was just, you know, just the basics. This is, you know, what's going to happen. And you know, here are the people that you're going to like, the health volunteers, we got together and we met each other. And, you know, it was the beginning there.

WAND: [00:24:15] And how many were you then? How many gathered in Miami?

DINO: [00:24:19] So my omnibus had, let's see. There was probably, oh gosh, 40? At least that many. There was health. Uh, *ganadería*. What is *ganadería* in English? Like animal husbandry.

WAND: [00:24:42] Oh, OK.

DINO: [00:24:44] And youth development. And they also I think they still had a water program there, so there was like those four programs. While we were there, they closed the water program. So there was just the youth development, the health, and the animal husbandry kind of people.

WAND: [00:25:06] And so you all trained together, that was in 1993. What did you say, was it was June that you gathered?

DINO: [00:25:13] Yeah, we, yeah, it started in June.

WAND: [00:25:15] OK. And so tell us about your training program. What were the components? And where were you living?

DINO: [00:25:22] We were in the outskirts of Quito, which is the capital of Ecuador, and we were in a town called Tumbaco. And I'll just back up a little bit because as excited as I wanted to do this and as much as I knew this was the right thing for me to do. I'm going to get emotional. As soon as the plane landed, I went, oh shit, what have I done? You know, and it's like, holy cow, this is real. I mean, it seems sort of real in Miami, but it's still, we still were in Miami, you know? So we spent one or two nights in Quito with the country director and the assistant country director. Again, you know, I think we had papers to fill out and forms to sign. And we met the, you know, the nurses there and whatever. I think as soon as you get off the plane, they start shooting you up with the vaccines, so you know, that kind of stuff. And then we met our individual, you know, program director. And so, you know, that was fine.

DINO: [00:26:42] The funny thing is, is that so they put us on a bus to go to Tumbaco and there's a little town between Tumbaco and Quito called Cumbayá. And so, yeah, you know. And so anyway, the minute we saw the sign Cumbayá, the whole bus just broke out in "Kumbaya, my Lord, kumbaya!" That was funny. That was really funny. So we get to Tumbaco and they assigned us families. And so everybody, then we went with our family, and that was kind of scary because I really didn't have much Spanish at that point. Actually, before I left the United States, I had a little bit of time and I took a little nighttime Spanish class at some local, you know, community college. So, you know, my Spanish was totally basic. And so that was a little freaky, you know, to do that. But they gave us like one day crash course of how do you say the basics. And I went with this wonderful family that they, they were just loving and they understood. They'd had trainees in their home before and so they were great. They were just, they were really super.

WAND: [00:28:19] So you're staying with families at night. What did you do during the day?

DINO: [00:28:24] So from where I was at, it was an easy walk to get to the training center and there was three components to the training. There was the language component, which, it was like in thirds. So the language component, the cultural component, and the program component. So language. And the cultural component was kind of like, you know, the history of the country and what the culture's like, what's acceptable, what isn't, how to be safe in the country, how to conduct yourself so that you present well, I guess you could say. You don't want to, you know, they wanted people there who, we're representing the United States. And so, you know, we have to. I remember them saying, you are 24/7 here. Don't think that you, you know, at nighttime, you know, you're not being watched because you will be watched. People watch what you do, watch what you say, and they judge the United States by each one of us, so.

DINO: [00:29:43] So you know, then they took us on little trips to places, which was fun. And then the program component, which is. So I was in rural public health and we learned what that meant, even though I was a registered nurse. I could basically say whatever I knew as a nurse really kind of went out the window because I had to work within their system, work within their environment, and understand the hierarchy and how things are done, either politely or how things are done. You know, how you're expected to do things and how you talk to people. So. Yeah. And then, you know, and then at night when I went to my family, you know, that's another whole cultural learning experience because one of the first things that my family did was there was a wedding. And they went. They said, you know, we're not going to leave you here by yourself, you're brand new, you don't even know, you know, you know how to get to the training center and that's it, you know. So they took me with them to this wedding. And I don't know, we drove somewhere and we ended up staying overnight.

WAND: [00:31:14] You know what village it was in?

DINO: [00:31:16] No, I didn't even know then. I don't remember. But, um, the thing that stood out to me the most was that after the wedding, the wedding lunch or dinner, because I was the North American, they wanted to give me the best soup, the best chunk of soup or whatever. So they

served me this soup with a chicken head looking at me. I went, oh geez, I can't eat this. So I just, I kept pushing the chicken head around in the soup. And, you know, kind of playing with it. And there was a man sitting next to me who obviously was watching what I was doing. And again, this is so early that my language was practically zip. And so he just looked at me and I looked at him and I picked up my bowl and I had this like quizzical expression on my face, like, would you like this soup? And he right away shook his head yes. So I gave him my soup and he gave me his soup and then we were fine.

WAND: [00:32:37] Wonderful.

DINO: [00:32:39] We traded soups. But I didn't watch him eat the soup.

WAND: [00:32:43] You couldn't watch.

DINO: [00:32:44] I couldn't even watch him eat the chicken head. It wasn't going to happen.

WAND: [00:32:47] But he did eat it?

DINO: [00:32:48] Yeah. Yeah, he did.

WAND: [00:32:51] Well, probably it had a lot of nutrition.

DINO: [00:32:53] You know, it's good protein and stuff. And you know, at the time, I didn't know that, you know, you don't waste anything, not a thing. And, you know, but I just said, well, OK, you can, I can do this. I kept saying to myself, I can do this, I can do this.

WAND: [00:33:13] Any other memorable occasions about that wedding party, for example?

DINO: [00:33:17] Well, the only other thing that I remember is so traditionally in Ecuador, a wedding is a 24 hour event or more. Which I wasn't aware of. And even if they could have told me, I probably wouldn't have understood. So we go there and, you know, it's, I don't know, it's late, it's really late.

And I'm like going, when are we going home? Well, there was no going home. And my quote parents, you know, realized that this was my first time out and I didn't, I was not up for it. So they found me a place. There was, we were somewhere near a clinic of some kind. And so they said, oh, we'll find you a place to lay down so you can just rest. So we went into this clinic and they put me on an examination table so I could sleep.

WAND: [00:34:24] In the meantime, they were dancing.

DINO: [00:34:26] In the meantime, they were dancing. And you know, they pass the.

WAND: [00:34:31] Aguardiente?

DINO: [00:34:31] The aguardiente. And it's one cup and everybody drinks out of the same cup. They just keep pouring it, you know?

WAND: [00:34:38] How big was the cup?

DINO: [00:34:40] The cups are like, you know, like little kid sized cups.

WAND: [00:34:43] Like shot glasses?

DINO: [00:34:44] No, they're a little bigger than that, but not like glass size, you know, maybe like eight ounce cups, like a Dixie cup.

WAND: [00:34:52] Mm hmm.

DINO: [00:34:53] Yeah. So, you know, I just said, oh yeah, gracias, gracias. I've got to go somewhere to lay down. It wasn't exactly comfortable, but it was a little quieter. And, you know, I could turn the light out and just kind of rest. So.

WAND: [00:35:09] So that was your night.

DINO: [00:35:10] That was it.

WAND: [00:35:11] And the next day, where they still partying?

DINO: [00:35:14] And the next day they were, you know, they were dragging a little bit. But, you know, in the morning, then you start over with the leftovers from the night before and you have a big breakfast and then you go home.

WAND: [00:35:27] Yeah, right.

DINO: [00:35:28] So that was that was my introduction to the Ecuadorian wedding culture.

WAND: [00:35:34] And fiestas.

DINO: [00:35:36] And fiestas. Oh yeah, lots of those later. And those are serendipitous. Could happen any time.

WAND: [00:35:45] Yeah. And they could go on for a long time.

DINO: [00:35:48] And they did. And they don't let you sit down a minute. You gotta dance and the dancing and the drinking thing, which I, you know, it was hard. You know, I was already in my forties. So I, you know, it was like, I'm not, you know, I'm not a young spring chicken here.

WAND: [00:36:09] So let's go back a little bit more to the training part. How many hours a day did you spend learning Spanish?

DINO: [00:36:18] It was half of the day. So for, you know, we had like two classes a day, so I would say four hours.

WAND: [00:36:26] Mm hmm. Did you have other components of training, any kind of physical exercise or hiking or anything like that?

DINO: [00:36:36] Not, no. Not anything formal. You know, because we were at somewhat of an altitude. So there was a lot of people who weren't used to altitude. It wasn't that bad. But you know, and we were walking back and

forth to where we were staying in and the training center, so there wasn't anything formal for exercise. No.

WAND: [00:37:02] And what about the people who, the other trainees who are in the health program, for example? How many were you in the health program and did you enjoy their company? Did you make friends or were you all sort of operating independently or?

DINO: [00:37:23] So there was 12 of us and there were actually two couples. So before I went to Peace Corps, you know, because I was already in my forties, I thought, oh gosh, I'm going to be like the old lady in the group, but I wasn't. There was one person older than me. Two people older than me. And the other, there was three other ones who were somewhat my contemporaries, you know, we were a little bit, you know, five, 10 years, at least five years younger. So I was surprised that there was that many of us who were older. And one, two, three, four of us were already are RNs. So that, you know, we bonded pretty almost instantly, instantaneously.

WAND: [00:38:27] We meaning the 12 of you?

DINO: [00:38:29] The 12 of us, but especially the nurses, the RNs. You know, RNs can I guess be maybe a little snobby at times, I don't know. I never felt like I was snobby, but maybe. You know, like I said, I had to learn how to, you know, be a health care worker. Not so much an RN, which was fine. So, you know, we did really well, and a couple of the people in our group had already, were Spanish speakers, so that helped too. They were able to, you know, we were able to use them as kind of resource, like, how would you say this kind of medical thing in Spanish, that kind of thing and that kind of stuff. Yeah, yeah, that was nice. Yeah, that was really nice. I enjoyed that and um. I mean, I can fast forward because this, we're talking about my friends from that group. So we all stayed in pretty close contact. Well, we tried to visit each other when we could.

WAND: [00:39:53] Why don't we do this part now, the what it was like to be in country in your assignment?

DINO: [00:39:59] Yes.

WAND: [00:40:00] Unless there's something else you wanted to tell about training.

DINO: [00:40:05] Um, if it comes up, if I remember.

WAND: [00:40:07] Yeah, let's explain. We'll come back to your after Peace Corps years and the bonds that you created that still affect your life. But tell us now how you learned about your assignment and what was your assignment, et cetera.

DINO: [00:40:22] OK, so that's.

WAND: [00:40:24] That was three months, after training?

DINO: [00:40:25] It's kind of like the Yemen experience.

WAND: [00:40:29] All right. Sounds like a good story.

DINO: [00:40:31] So, um. They asked me to go. This is really funny in a way. They asked me to go to the coast. So there's three regions, well, yeah, there's actually four regions in Ecuador. There's the coast, the mountains, and then the transitional zone and the Galapagos Islands. So is that all four?

WAND: [00:41:02] Hm hmm.

DINO: [00:41:03] Yeah. And they wanted me to go to the coast and there's a big city on the coast of Ecuador called Guayaquil. And so they wanted me to go to a, um, like a organization in Guayaquil that was a health organization, and I don't remember the name of it. So, you know, I said, all right. And I went there and it just didn't, it just didn't feel right to me. It didn't click well. The woman that was assigned to me, she. So, you know, I passed my language requirement, but kind of like by the skin of my teeth, so to speak. I mean, you know, it's like three months was fine, but it was just bare bones.

DINO: [00:42:02] I get there and she's wanting me to make a presentation to these campesinos, to the farmer guys who were there representing part of this organization that needed someone to help them. And I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. And she kept saying, you know, you have to talk to them. And I kept, well, I knew how to say yes, I know. Yes, I know. *Yo lo sé*. And that's about as far as I got. And I felt, I just felt really, I felt really bad. I felt like, oh my gosh, I've come all this way and I'm not doing my job. I'm, you know, whatever. And in the meantime, I was looking for a place to stay and pretty much everywhere I went, they said, oh no, we don't have a place, we don't have a place. And so I go back to the training center and I just say it was a terrible experience.

WAND: [00:43:02] How long did you stay in Guayaquil?

DINO: [00:43:06] I was only there, like two, two and a half days. And in the meantime, there was at one point I was by myself standing on a corner, waiting for a bus, and some guy came up behind me and cut my watch off my wrist and took off running. And I was like, what? You know, it's like, this is not a good sign, I don't think I'm supposed to be here, kind of thing. So fortunately, it was, you know, it wasn't a good watch. It was just a watch. So when I got back, the program director said I really would like for you to give it another try. You know, I'm going to send you back to Guayaquil with our, um. So there was a guy in charge of showing us how to do gardens. That was part of the cultural training as well.

WAND: [00:44:04] And that would have been part of the health problem?

DINO: [00:44:06] Yes, that's also part of the health program. It was a double thing. Sweet man.

WAND: [00:44:11] So he's Ecuadorian?

DINO: [00:44:12] Yes. Yeah.

WAND: [00:44:13] But bilingual?

DINO: [00:44:14] Tomas, his name was Tomas. So Tomas and I took off and went back to Guayaquil. He said, I'm going to find you a place to live. OK. I was still, you know, I was still going to give it my best.

WAND: [00:44:29] Yeah.

DINO: [00:44:30] Tomas and I went all over the place for like an entire day. And even with his, he's the Ecuadorian and explained everything and said, you know, this is why we're here. You know, this is who we're going to work for and blah blah blah. And they just go, oh no, we don't really, you know, we just don't have a place, whatever. Well, actually, it wasn't Guayaquil. We had gone to Guayaquil, but that was where I had interviewed with that woman, she wanted me to talk to people. The actual little town, which is right outside of Guayaquil, is called Jipijapa. It's a cute little name, isn't it?

WAND: [00:45:12] Isn't it.

DINO: [00:45:14] Spelled with J. So it's like Jippy Japo. We, you know, we were always making kind of jokes about Jippy Japo. So we were in Jipijapa, and, you know, we ended up sitting, at the end of the day, we were sitting on a park bench. And he said, I don't, I don't think you're supposed to be here. He said, no, we're going to go back and we're going to tell him, no. You're not, you're not coming here.

WAND: [00:45:41] Let's think about it. Or do you have any idea of why there was no housing for you? Do you think the landlords were afraid to have a North American live in their housing?

DINO: [00:45:56] You know, I mean, sure, it could have been. I mean, as a woman, I don't know that I would pose much of a threat.

WAND: [00:46:04] No, but be a target yourself and cause trouble for them. You don't know?

DINO: [00:46:10] Well, because I didn't really know the culture. So the culture in the coast is different than the culture in the mountain area. So I didn't have a good feel of the coastal climate, so to speak. I do know that one of my

buddies from my training group, one of the other nurses, she ended up. I think she was near Guayaquil also. And so then later, I heard about the difference in the culture between the coast and the mountain area. So yeah, it was a lot. It was, you know, the coast area is a lot faster and, you know, more open. And you know, it's a hotter, hotter climate, where in the mountains, you know, it's more subdued. You know, you're in more heavy clothing. That's part of it anyway. But yeah, it could have been. Maybe they just didn't want a North American in their home because they would, you know, for the same reason the guy came up behind me and slit the watch off my wrist. You know, maybe I had things that somebody might want to break into their house and get. So, um.

WAND: [00:47:32] So Tomas took you back up the mountain.

DINO: [00:47:35] Yeah.

WAND: [00:47:35] How long did it take you to go from Guayaquil to Quito and then Tumbaco?

DINO: [00:47:43] You know, that's a long ride. It's a long ride on the bus, it's 12 hours or so. It's a long ride. Yeah, and they have these busses that they call them *lujo* busses, and they're supposed to be the best bus because they're nice. They're like a big, nice Greyhound bus. But they were to me, they felt like a boat. And when they're going around these curves and stuff, it was like being on the ocean and with the waves. And I was always like going, I think I'm going to not make it. I am. It was crazy.

WAND: [00:48:17] So Tomas takes you back.

DINO: [00:48:23] So Tomas takes me back and he said, I'm telling him you're not going to Guayaquil, you're not going to Jipijapa, it's a done deal, so don't worry about it. I said, thank you, Tomas. Because I just, you know, there is a part of me generally that I, you know, I know when things are right and they're not right for me and it just didn't seem. Like the thing with Yemen. I just knew that wasn't right. That was not where I was supposed to be.

WAND: [00:48:53] Yeah.

DINO: [00:48:57] So the program director said, you know, OK, I have another place, but I'm going to go with you. So him and I went and we went to a place called Juan Montalvo. And it was a teeny tiny little town at the end of a mountain road actually not too far from Colombia. About a 45 minute bus ride.

WAND: [00:49:22] What was the largest city?

DINO: [00:49:25] The largest city was called Mira. And we were only about, from there, about a half an hour to Otavalo. So it was, yeah. So I went there and, again, the housing was an issue. There was one person in this little tiny town that had a room. And so that's where I stayed.

WAND: [00:49:56] Had your village, Juan Montalbo?

DINO: [00:50:00] Juan Montalvo.

WAND: [00:50:01] Juan Montalvo ever had a Peace Corps volunteer before? Never?

DINO: [00:50:06] No.

WAND: [00:50:06] And how long had Peace Corps been in Ecuador by that time?

DINO: [00:50:11] That's a good question. I'm not even sure.

WAND: [00:50:13] Well, when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from '63 to '65, there was Peace Corps already in Ecuador. So I think that Ecuador must have had Peace Corps from about 1962, is what I'm guessing. '61, the first volunteers went to Colombia and I think it probably in '62, it began. So if you were there in '93?

DINO: [00:50:39] Yeah, they, well, they probably.

WAND: [00:50:41] More than 30 years.

DINO: [00:50:42] They probably, maybe some of them had heard about Peace Corps, but there had never been a volunteer in that town.

WAND: [00:50:48] Let's tell us about that town.

DINO: [00:50:51] So it was a town of about 80 families. It was literally at the end of the road. And there was a very small health clinic, you could say. It really wasn't a clinic. It was just a, you know, they call them *puestos*, just this little like little place where the person who ran it was the equivalent of like an LPN. And that's what her main job was, she did have a. They were farmers, but she didn't do the farming. She lived with her brother and he did the farming. And so we went there and, you know, it seemed OK. She was a little wary, though, because she had no experience with North Americans, but she was willing. You know, she had a good heart.

WAND: [00:51:58] And what was her name?

DINO: [00:52:00] Mercedes.

WAND: [00:52:02] Mercedes, OK.

DINO: [00:52:05] And that's who I ended up living with, in her house. So we worked together and I had a room in her house and, you know, we were, her and I were 24/7. She was very patient with me most of the time because again I was struggling with the language. And so for the first couple months, at least, no, maybe a little longer than that, I didn't walk out of the door without my dictionary. And whenever we went anywhere, people would ask her, you know, who's this and what are you doing? Why is she, you know, why is she following behind you everywhere you go? And she would, you know, she would explain. But as we as I studied and listened and learned a little bit more, there came a day when I really knew what they were saying. Way more than what I had started out with anyway, I don't know if I could tell you word for word, but you know, you get the gist. So whoever this person was said, started asking her questions about me. And all of a sudden I thought, well, I can answer that question. And so I said, well, ask me and they both look at me like what?

So that was the day she quit having to talk for me, but she was very patient. She was really patient.

WAND: [00:53:32] So many months into it was that?

DINO: [00:53:34] I would say it was probably six months, yeah, before I really felt really comfortable.

WAND: [00:53:40] Like you could open your mouth.

DINO: [00:53:42] That I could, yeah. Yeah. And I studied every day and I listened and you know, we watched TV and, you know, I worked really hard at, you know, most of the time when you learn a language, you learn, you understand more than that. It's easier to understand what people are saying than for you to say what you want to say, you know, so. And what I learned was one native language. We have, in this, probably in a lot of other countries too, but we have a lot of ways of saying things that are not directly translatable. And I had to stop thinking in those little colloquialisms, as you would say, and I would. So I had this slight delay of answering people because I had to first understand what they were saying, and then I would think about what I wanted to say. And then I go, no, there's no direct translation for that. And then I had to think about how I'm going to say that. So, you know, I kept thinking, they're going to think I'm really stupid, you know. But it's like, well, you know, I'm learning.

WAND: [00:54:59] So that sounds like a kind of a watershed event when you were able to speak for yourself.

DINO: [00:55:05] Yeah, it really was.

WAND: [00:55:07] And you demonstrated how much you were comprehending and then you were able to respond and then think out loud, so to speak.

DINO: [00:55:16] Yeah.

WAND: [00:55:17] So did that change your relationship with Mercedes?

DINO: [00:55:20] It did. Yeah, I think she was a lot happier that, you know, she didn't have to do all the talking and that her and I could actually have a real conversation. You know, we had been working on it a lot because I was with her all the time. But I think it was really good for her when I was able to, you know, speak to people directly. Yeah. Yeah, made a big difference, I think, for both of us.

WAND: [00:55:49] It sounds like it. Now what were you actually doing with her every day? What were the kinds of things, programs that you worked on with her?

DINO: [00:55:57] So we went, every day we'd go to the to the little clinic. And so, you know, she would organize things. She had, twice a month, she had a day where pregnant women would come and we would do prenatal checks and stuff. So we did that. Any time anybody got sick or had an accident, they would come there and so she would take care of them. She, you know, she wanted me to help with, you know, cleaning. We did a lot of cleaning. We did a lot of sorting. We did a lot of trips to the, there was two schools in the town. Even though it was tiny as it was, there were two schools. There was a grade school and a kind of like a middle school. So we, you know, would talk to the teachers. It was interesting because once I started, you know, talking more with the kids, they wanted to come and see me. And I had all these, you know, they give you all kinds of fun things to play with. And I had all kinds of paper and pencils. And, you know, so the kids were coming and I was doing little projects with them.

WAND: [00:57:19] To the *puesto de salud*?

DINO: [00:57:21] Yeah, and she didn't like it. She said, they're not here to color and play. I said, yeah, but every time they come in here, they freak out. I didn't say it that way, but you know, they come here, they're afraid, you know, because they're sick, they're going to get an immunization or something. And why can't they come here and we can teach them things and it'd be fun. And I don't know. I have to look around. Sometime I'll show you. I still have. I had an each make a card and I gave them. I said, I want you to draw a picture of where you live. And I still have those cards. They're really sweet.

WAND: [00:58:03] Yeah.

DINO: [00:58:06] She didn't like it. She said, no, they're not supposed to be here for that. And I said, well, you know, I think it's OK, I'm OK with that. I said, well, this is your place, so you know. And when I finally got enough language, we had an argument. And she basically said. Well, we had a disagreement on how to treat somebody. And I was always, I always wanted to err on the side that this is not my country. This is, you know, you're in charge here, I'm your guest. And you know, I usually, you know, said, if this is how you do it, then that's fine. But it was totally contradictory to what I knew how to do something. I don't even remember now exactly what it was, but I said, no, you can't do it that way. And she was not happy with me. And I said, I'm sorry, no, we're not going to do it that way.

WAND: [00:59:04] Was it like a?

DINO: [00:59:05] It was some kind of a little treatment of some, oh gosh, what the heck was it? If I think about it, it was. Oh, I wish I could remember exactly what it was, but I just said, no, I'm not going to do that. And that's not, from a nursing point of view as a nurse, that's not how I was taught to do things. And so I think she finally said, OK, you know, but that was the only time. And then that went into. She told me this really heartfelt story about how badly she was treated by the doctors in the hospital up the road, and they never gave her any credit and they were always coming down. You know, they'd come into the little clinic every once in a while and just, you know, tell her how she wasn't doing things right. And so for me to tell her, you're not doing something right, that opened up a huge emotional thing for her.

DINO: [01:00:10] And I, you know, we both ended up crying and hugging and I said, you know what? I'm not here to tell you what to do. I'm a guest in your country. I'm a guest in your home. I'm learning from you. And I want to keep it that way. You know, I said so, you know, we'll, we can, you know, let's make sure that, you know, we take care of the people who come here. That's my bottom line. I'm learning. I'm not. No, I'm not here to tell you you're doing a bad job, you're not doing a bad job. So that was another huge day in our lives together and that kind of sealed the deal.

WAND: [01:00:50] And so that argument, if you will, which led to it sounded like a really good, healthy exchange between the two of you, that led to a different level of relationship?

DINO: [01:01:03] Yeah. Oh yeah, we were. We, you know, after that, we had a lot more laughter. We had a lot more fun together. You know, she got into the drawing thing that I was doing and we. I made up all kinds of little games, health games. You know, they taught us certain games. We did this one thing called Jose Caca and Jose Caca is a, we called it a *charla*, it's a little talk on hygiene, and I still have my Jose Caca cards with me. And actually, every once like, I don't know, now this year I remember they haven't called me yet, but there's a school here in Portland that somehow somebody got my name. And they wanted some Peace Corps volunteers to come and talk to these students about working in an international thing with health. And I just thought, you know what, I'm going to do Jose Caca. So I took my Jose Caca cards that I have used in Ecuador, and I did this little talk with these doctoral students, so to speak. And they had so much fun. They had a blast. So we did Jose Caca there. We did all kinds of really creative ways to teach health, and she really got into it.

WAND: [01:02:27] So health means things like hygiene?

DINO: [01:02:31] Basic hygiene. You know, the washing of your hands, boiling the water. We did, her and I then decided to do a garden project and I got a whole bunch of seeds when I went into the Peace Corps office one time. There was a large plot of land behind the clinic. So I mean, her and I dug and dug and dug, and we planted and we planted and I went over there every day pulling off the little *gusanos*, you know, the worms and the butterflies, and I planted more broccoli than I've ever seen in my life practically. And you know, we had we had a great time and she taught me a lot. I mean, you know, I kept telling her, you're teaching me.

DINO: [01:03:14] We got to the clinic one morning and there was a doll head on the step. And she put her hand, she put her arm in front of me and said, don't go any farther. I said, what? She said, and don't touch that. And I said, it's giving me goose bumps, talking about it right now. And she said,

somebody is trying to like put a hex on us. I don't know what, you know, I had no idea. And so she went and she found a stick and she picked up this head with a stick and we walked, you know, somewhere away. And she made a little pile of brush or whatever, put the doll head on it and burned it. And she said, I don't know. She said there are people in this town who are very superstitious and they're, you know, because she also was the only person in town who delivered the babies. And, you know, so she was it.

DINO: [01:04:16] And there was a shaman in the town, which I hadn't, I didn't know right away. And so people would go to him for treatment. So, you know, we went over there one time and so I got to see what he did. You know, he waves things around and he spits alcohol on them and, you know, all kinds, says prayers and, you know, that kind of stuff. And so I understood that there was a lot of things under the surface that I was not even aware of. And she was really, she was very protective of me. She did not want any. She didn't want anything bad to happen to anybody. But, you know, she explained to me that, you know, that there were people there that believed in that kind of stuff and don't even go near it. And I was surprised because it was, you know, there was a Catholic church in this tiny little town, you know, and everybody's Catholic, but there's still some other belief. Some other spiritual kind of thing going on there.

WAND: [01:05:28] Native American.

DINO: [01:05:30] Yeah. Which kind of reminds me of a really funny story when I first got there. So each town has a celebration of their, the blessed Virgin Mary, but each of them have a different name, and I think the one from Mira was called the Charity Virgin or something like that. And so once a year, they have the days when they have a lot of processions and prayers and, you know, honoring of that particular, of their particular version of the blessed mother. And I hadn't been there that long, but they, because I lived with them, you know? And she didn't want to leave me by myself. You know, she said, oh come on, you're going to go with us. And so the other, there was a couple who ran the grade school. They were teachers and they had a truck. So we took the statue of the Virgin and we drove

around that day to all the different little towns, so people could be blessed and feel like they were contributing and all that kind of stuff.

WAND: [01:06:51] Was there a priest involved?

DINO: [01:06:52] The priest? They did have a priest, yeah.

WAND: [01:06:55] But he didn't go on this caravan?

DINO: [01:06:56] He didn't. He didn't go with us. You know, I think we met him in different places, but he wasn't actually with us. And so it was like 6:00 or 5:00 at night and it was getting kind of dark. And they said, oh, well, you know, we're going to this one more place. And you know, as culturally, as I was trying to be culturally aware of everything, without even thinking, I just, because they were saying, OK, we're going to take the Virgin Mary over here. I was so tired, I just blurted out, no more virgin! Without even thinking.

WAND: [01:07:37] *No más virgen.*

DINO: [01:07:38] *No más virgen.* And they about fell out laughing. They reminded me from then on, *no más virgen*, no more virgin, no more virgin. It's like, I'm tired. I want to go. I want to go back to my room, please. You know, that was just like, that was like the thing I think I'll probably always be remembered about was yelling out, no more virgin.

WAND: [01:08:06] Right.

DINO: [01:08:08] Yeah, that was.

WAND: [01:08:10] So it sounds like you over time became, felt quite integrated into the community.

DINO: [01:08:17] Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Definitely.

WAND: [01:08:22] Wonderful. And how often did you get out to pick up mail or visit other Peace Corps volunteers or?

DINO: [01:08:29] Well, once a month when, you know, when we were getting paid, we went to the bank in, um, I think it was in Ibarra, and the bank at the time was Banco de Fomento. And we always had to make, I always had to make sure that I had enough money. Well, first of all, to get out of my town, to go to Mira, to go to Ibarra, I had to. There was only one, there was one guy that lived in that town who worked for the electric company. He had a big truck. And so every morning he'd leave at 5:00 or 5:30 in the morning, and anybody who wanted to leave Juan Montalvo to go to Mira had to be in the truck by 5:30. So that was how you got out of there. And then from Mira, you could catch a bus to Ibarra where the bank was. But I had to make sure I always had enough money to do two trips because probably at least a fourth to a third of the time, I'll say a third of the time, the money wasn't there. So I have, you know, I'd have to come back on a different day. But we always made sure that the other volunteers who were sort of in that general area, we would meet and go and have lunch, and it was like the only time we heard or spoke English for an entire month. So that was like ahhhh. We had a breath of.

WAND: [01:10:02] Did you have mobile phones?

DINO: [01:10:04] No. There was one phone in that town.

WAND: [01:10:08] A landline?

DINO: [01:10:09] Yeah.

WAND: [01:10:10] Attached to a wall?

DINO: [01:10:11] Yeah. And they didn't tell me about that phone until about a year later. I didn't even know there was a phone in the town.

WAND: [01:10:18] Who had, who kept the phone?

DINO: [01:10:20] There was a family that had a little store and they had it.

WAND: [01:10:26] So how did you and other volunteers know that each other was going to be in town on a certain day?

DINO: [01:10:33] Well, that was the day that the money came to the bank, or supposedly. So we would meet at the bank.

WAND: [01:10:38] A lot of you would meet.

DINO: [01:10:39] We would try to meet at the same time and be there at the same time. And then, you know, we'd go to find a place to go eat and then go from there.

WAND: [01:10:54] OK. Wow. Well, we've learned quite a bit about your life in Juan Montalvo.

DINO: [01:11:02] Juan Montalvo.

WAND: [01:11:07] Juan Montalvo. OK. Now. Before we talk about the last phase, let's, in fact, let's move to kind of the last phase, the last few months. Were the things in particular that you remember about the last few months? And how did you prepare to leave?

DINO: [01:11:32] So when my two years was up, so all my nurse buddies, we were, we were doing so many things that we all, we got together and we said, we're not leaving. We're going to ask to be extended and all of us asked to be extended. Not all us. One of us didn't stay so.

WAND: [01:11:57] So three RNs?

DINO: [01:11:58] Yeah. And we did. But what had happened was, is that I had so many projects that I was doing by that time. I just said, well, and I got the people who I was working with to write letters and say we need her. We can't do without her.

WAND: [01:12:21] People in the community wrote letters.

DINO: [01:12:23] And so yeah, they allowed me to stay. So I went home for six weeks and then I went back.

WAND: [01:12:37] So Peace Corps lets you go home, you said for six weeks.

DINO: [01:12:41] Yeah.

WAND: [01:12:43] And then you went back. How was that?

DINO: [01:12:48] You know, that was, it felt like again, I just at that time, I knew I wasn't done. I just knew it was, I knew I was supposed to stay longer. And in the meantime, I had an Ecuadorian boyfriend, so that helps.

WAND: [01:13:02] Was he in the village?

DINO: [01:13:04] He, so then the last, towards the end of my time and then the third year, I actually moved into an apartment in Mira because what was happening was I was working with Catholic Charities. I was working with some other international organization from Canada, and I just had a lot of projects that made it so that I had to have more ease of transportation. And the program director kept asking me to do extra stuff. So there was one incident where there was a Peace Corps volunteer in a small town in the Amazon region, and she was working in a school. And this was a rare occasion, but one of the kids in the school committed suicide, and they just had no clue how to deal with it. So he asked me, would you go there and talk to the volunteer and talk to the kids about, you know, this issue.

WAND: [01:14:08] End of life and suicide in particular?

DINO: [01:14:10] Yeah, so I ended up. Then he asked me one time to go to another town where there was a basically a serial rapist who was having his way with women. So I ended up going to that town and doing a project, you know, just talking to them about that issue and how to protect themselves. And, you know, not to let it, not to keep quiet about it. Because at that point, at that point, they were fuming, but they didn't. They didn't get, you know, they didn't get really much help from the police.

WAND: [01:14:49] The authorities, right.

DINO: [01:14:50] Yeah. So things like that, you know. And they ended up asking me to go back to the Amazon region to work with a health care worker who was just needing some moral support. So I spent two weeks with her going around in the jungle to the different places that she worked.

WAND: [01:15:13] A volunteer? This was a Peace Corps volunteer?

DINO: m [01:15:15] No, that person was an Ecuadorian. And that was interesting because a lot of the places that we went, they didn't speak Spanish. They spoke, I don't know, some other language. I don't know if it was Guarani or whatever they were speaking. So she was translating from Spanish into their language. It was really interesting. So, yeah, that's a whole.

WAND: [01:15:44] So you extended now. Did you ask to extend for two years?

DINO: [01:15:49] I extended for one.

WAND: [01:15:51] OK, so you extended for one.

DINO: [01:15:52] Mm hmm. And I think that's all they were allowing at the time.

WAND: [01:15:56] Right. But I thought you were there for four years.

DINO: [01:15:59] Well, '93 through '97.

WAND: [01:16:02] Yes. So '93, '94, '95.

DINO: [01:16:08] Well, you know, it was the end of one year and the beginning of another.

WAND: [01:16:10] I see.

DINO: [01:16:11] It just sounds longer than it actually was.

WAND: [01:16:14] Right. Yeah, right.

DINO: [01:16:16] So, you know, and in the meantime, I was, you know, having a great time. You know, with my Ecuadorian boyfriend and he had three kids and those kids and I bonded like you wouldn't believe. And we had just a great time. Yeah. Yeah, that was nice.

WAND: [01:16:39] And that was in Mira?

DINO: [01:16:40] Yeah, so by then I was in Mira.

WAND: [01:16:42] And what did he do for a living?

DINO: [01:16:44] He was, you know, he had an avocado orchard, so that's basically what he did.

WAND: [01:16:50] Farming.

DINO: [01:16:50] Yeah.

WAND: [01:16:53] So. Now it's getting close to come home, right?

DINO: [01:16:56] So now it's getting close to come home and they asked me, you know, what do you, how can we continue to serve your community? And, you know, like what I did for a while is I kept a daily diary of everything I was doing. I just basically kept it on a calendar. I made my own calendar and then just wrote every time I was doing something and what I was doing and who, all the kind of, basically bullet points. I didn't write out a narrative. And when I finally handed it all in over the last, you know, six, eight months or whatever to my country director, he said, well, I think we need to continue some of this work that you're doing. And so long story short, they replaced me with three volunteers. Because I just was all over the place. Yeah, I didn't, you know, I just didn't sit around and think, oh gosh, I'm a short timer. No.

WAND: [01:18:10] Kept digging.

DINO: [01:18:13] I loved it.

WAND: [01:18:13] Yeah. So what was the Ecuadorean department or agency that you were kind of assigned to, at least initially?

DINO: [01:18:23] Initially, I was assigned to the *municipio*, the Municipio de Mira, which is the, you know, the kind of the county government or the city government for Mira, that's who I had to report to at the very beginning. And then he and the mayor had asked. That was the guy who started, the mayor of Mira asked to have a Peace Corps volunteer.

WAND: [01:18:50] In health?

DINO: [01:18:52] Yes.

WAND: [01:18:52] Uh-huh. And was that mayor then, did you work with him personally?

DINO: [01:19:02] Yes.

WAND: [01:19:03] You interacted with him and he was part of your, if you will, team?

DINO: [01:19:07] Yeah, he was a mayor. He only, he got voted out after about a year. But, you know, it didn't matter. I was already there.

WAND: [01:19:15] Yeah. And did you remain in touch with him at all or once he was voted out, was it?

DINO: [01:19:23] Once he was voted out, he kind of disappeared. I don't. I think it kind of, I think it hurt his feelings that they didn't vote him back in.

WAND: [01:19:33] Uh-huh. Sure. Yeah, that's understandable. OK. So now you're about to come home and anything you want to recall or highlight about those last few weeks or months even?

DINO: [01:19:54] Um. Well, you know, people were, they didn't want me to leave. They just didn't want me to go. And you know, I just said, you know, I

knew I had to stay and now I know I have to go. But you know, I had done a bunch of projects in my town and they wanted to make sure that they sent me off with a bang and they had a huge event for me. They lined, so to go into one Montalvo, this big, long road. They lined up every student in the town on one side. They had Ecuadorian flags on the other side. I paraded right through. It was really sweet.

WAND: [01:20:54] Was that in Mira?

DINO: [01:20:56] No, this was in Juan Montalvo. And in the meantime, I had done a project with middle school kids. And you know, they. Yeah, it was just.

WAND: [01:21:11] What'd they do?

DINO: [01:21:12] You know, eventually I went back when I did training and because I had done this project with them, they decided that they wanted to keep going to school and every one of those kids finished high school. I went to their high school graduation two years later when I came back. And that school had a terrible rep that nobody got out of high school.

WAND: [01:21:41] Are you in touch with any of those children?

DINO: [01:21:43] You know what, I am. I'm in touch with the boyfriend's kids. Yeah. Yeah.

WAND: [01:21:52] Powerful.

DINO: [01:21:54] Yeah, it really was. I just went, well, if I never do anything else in my life, these kids got some education. And it wasn't so much that I was teaching them, you know, the subjects, but what I felt like was so important was to give them the confidence. And somebody who could believe in them to be able to do it because they weren't getting that from their teachers. No. They were just supposed to, you know, be little robots and repeat after me.

WAND: [01:22:29] Memorize everything.

DINO: [01:22:29] And that's how they had to learn. And I kind of forced them to think on their own when we did this project.

WAND: [01:22:38] What was the project?

DINO: [01:22:39] The project was, um, so one of the things that we had to do is health volunteers was to do a health fair. And so the idea was to invite other volunteers to your site and then, you know, everybody got a theme and then you went to their school or wherever it was. And then you did this like little rotation thing and people came in and out of your classroom and then you taught them whatever your theme was. Well, that wasn't going to work in my town because there was no place for people to stay. And so I just said, well, why can't we have a health fair and the kids do it? So I proposed it to my program director and I said, this is what I want to do. And I know nobody has ever done this, but I want to. I want to try. Because there's nowhere for 12 or 10 or one other person. They could probably stay with me in my room, but that's about it, you know? And so I said, I need some supplies and this is why I need it. And this is what I want to do. And I can tell you that I think I can get some of the parents to go along. Because I had to have the parents sign a form saying that these kids could stay after school because most of the kids had to go out and work in the field.

WAND: [01:24:04] Right.

DINO: [01:24:06] And so I actually got 12 kids with parents who said, yeah, I'll let you do it. And it was a rousing success. The kids had so much fun and the parents got into it. They enjoyed it, and the kids were so pumped up about it that we ended up taking our health fair to another town. They wanted to do it again. So we took it to another town.

WAND: [01:24:38] So what did they do for the health fair? What did, were there booths or posters?

DINO: [01:24:42] Each kid got to draw something and put something up, and they each had a theme and they had to do their own. I said, I'm not doing the

drawing, you're doing it. And I brought them some of the stuff that I had done. And I said, well, here's examples if you want to do the same thing, but you have to draw it, you have to put it together. I'm not doing it. And you know, they got creative and they learned what they wanted, how they wanted to say it. And once a week when we got together, you know, in the first couple of weeks, they would all sit there like, you know, kind of watching me, like still, like this. And I kept saying, OK, you have to talk. And you don't have to say *doctora*, because they all call me doctor. But I kept telling them, I'm not a doctor. And I said, you know, please speak up. Well, that was the good thing to say, and not the good thing to say, because once they knew that I really meant it, I couldn't get them to shut up. I kept saying, hey, stop, I've got to get a word in edgewise here.

DINO: [01:25:50] But we had a great time. And you know, they asked questions and we talked about the different, you know, like basic health. We talked about immunizations, we talked about nutrition, you know, all the things that we would have talked about in a health fair anyway. We talked about recipes, you know, gardens.

WAND: [01:26:13] So they then did posters or messages about these things, nutrition or basic washing your hands or brushing your teeth or something like that?

DINO: [01:26:23] Yeah.

WAND: [01:26:23] OK. Right.

DINO: [01:26:25] And I think we also had games, you know. I'm pretty sure we had games because I remember one time drawing this game for little kids. Like it was supposed to be a fishing pond and we had holes and they would fish for something, and it had a card with a basic health message on it. You know, just, yeah, stuff.

WAND: [01:26:49] Games, learning games.

DINO: [01:26:51] Learning games, right. Yeah.

WAND: [01:26:52] Wonderful, wonderful. It sounds like a great program.

DINO: [01:26:54] And all you needed was, you know, paper and pencil. And you know, you didn't need a lot of, you didn't need money, really not a lot.

WAND: [01:27:03] Right. Oh my goodness. Wonderful stories. So let's take, let's, uh. So it's time you have to go home. In fact, they've even given you your *despedida*.

DINO: [01:27:13] Yeah, they gave me the *despedida*, which was just so heartfelt.

WAND: [01:27:18] Yes. Right. So you went home and then what happened? What did you do and I know you went back to help with training, so a little bit about that.

DINO: [01:27:29] So when I went back. I went back to St. Louis because that's where I started from, and I don't know, I was spoiled. I, you know, I interviewed for some jobs, but nothing. I mean, how do you top that? You don't. I remember I applied to this one place and they brought me into this building and they took me all the way to the back of this building. And there were no windows. And they had a desk. It was some kind of like pharmacy company or something. And I felt myself kind of like.

WAND: [01:28:08] Strangling? Suffocating?

DINO: [01:28:09] So I went, I walked back out of there, walked to the interviewer's office and I sat down there and I just said, I have to tell you, I just got back from Peace Corps. I have spent the last three years practically outdoors, and I can't be in a building like this. I said, if you have a desk out in the in the parking lot, maybe I could work here. She said, no, we don't have a desk in the parking lot. I said, well, thank you for the interview, but I can't do this. So I ended up doing some health teaching. There's a company called Health Wise and they do the, they had, I don't know if they still have them, but the books on. Anyway I ended up going to different hospitals and handing out books to hospital employees about doing, you know, self-care and stuff like that. It was it was fun. Yeah, but you know, it wasn't full time.

DINO: [01:29:14] And in the meantime, I heard about the Peace Corps Fellows Program. And I just said, well, you know, I'm not having too good of a luck getting a job. I don't really want to work in a hospital anymore. And you know, I went back to some of the places that had been doing, you know, the prevention stuff. But at that time, prevention kind of got low on the totem pole because of the economy. So they weren't doing as much at that as they had been prior to Peace Corps. So I said, well, you know, you know, this sounds like a pretty good deal, so I applied and I got accepted and then I.

WAND: [01:29:57] Where was that?

DINO: [01:29:57] Illinois State University. And the only program, there was only two programs at the time that, you know, were maybe something I could have done. And one, they had a nursing program at Johns Hopkins, and I just didn't want to do that. I still wanted to do more community, other kind of community stuff. So anyway, Illinois State University had a program called Economic and Community Development. And so I went there. I said, is there a way that I can tailor this education a little bit using the framework of economic and community development in health care? So they said, well, you know, we'll work with you. So anyway, I got my master's degree at Illinois State University.

WAND: [01:30:51] And did you go back and work as a Peace Corps training staff in Ecuador before your master's or afterwards?

DINO: [01:30:58] So in between, actually.

WAND: [01:31:00] Oh, I see. Right.

DINO: [01:31:02] So the first year at Illinois State University was all academic, and then the second year was an internship and my internship was going to be in southern Illinois, part of the time at a farmworkers clinic and then part of the time at a business incubator. And I said I had the opportunity. I said to them, I have an opportunity to go back to Peace Corps and do training for them. Is that going to be a problem? And they basically said,

we can work it out. So that's when I went back and did training. After the academic part was done, and I could go down to the, uh, and that was in Carbondale.

WAND: [01:31:44] OK. So, uh, let's, we sort of need to bring closure to this.

DINO: [01:31:53] OK.

WAND: [01:31:54] This has been a wonderful series of stories and a wonderful, obviously you've had a very important, life changing experience in Peace Corps. Just spend a few minutes reflecting about how that Peace Corps experience has changed the rest of your life and how it's influenced some of the decisions you've made.

DINO: [01:32:15] Yeah. Well, it really changed how I look at things in this country and how I feel like we. There's so much more we can do here to help each other and how we don't necessarily need so much stuff. You know, we're pretty inundated with commercialism and things and that kind of stuff. And so I kind of made a vow that I wouldn't do that, but obviously, you know, you live here, you get stuff, you know, but um. And I determined to work the rest of the time, I am retired now, but I determined to work the rest of my time in a similar situation as I could.

DINO: [01:33:15] So I actually found a job in Portland, Oregon, because at the time I was still living in southern Illinois. I found this job in Portland, Oregon, and worked for the county health department working in a best practices program called the Nurse Family Partnership. And it's a program for first time parenting, and I, as a Spanish speaker, I was able to work with exclusively non-documented pregnant women. Most, I would say, 95 percent of my clients were undocumented Mexicans. And that, you know, I would have never been able to do that without going to Peace Corps. And it opened up another whole wonderful chapter. And I still have some of my clients now are, I still talk to them and in fact one came over yesterday with her family to wish me happy birthday. It's just like you become family. It's just family.

WAND: [01:34:26] Right.

DINO: [01:34:27] So that would have never happened without Peace Corps.

WAND: [01:34:33] Right.

DINO: [01:34:34] And you know, when I came to Portland, I found out about this group who was dedicating time to have a museum of the Peace Corps experience, and I just said, I love that idea. And that's like one of the first things I did when I got to Portland. I went to the Lucky Labrador Brewhouse or whatever they are and met these people and joined up. And that's, I'm still working with you and all the wonderful people in our committee to really make that a reality. Because, I mean, each one of us has these experiences and how? You can't, I don't feel like, we can't let this experience go without sharing it.

DINO: [01:35:35] And how many people have said, oh, I could never do that. But boy, it sounds like, you know, must have been really interesting. Well, it's really more. And don't tell me, oh, how was your little adventure? Excuse me. When people say that to me, I go, I'm sorry. That was, that's my life. That's my life. It wasn't just an adventure. And this is why it's important. We have to share that. And you know, when you look into the eyes of people and hear their stories that are so heartfelt and they're not your culture, they're not your language, they're not anything, but it bridges the gap of humanity. I mean, that's the word. That's what we're talking about. I heard somebody say one time, and I don't, or maybe I heard a quote from some famous person, and they asked this person what's your religion? And the person said, humanity is my religion. And it's like, that's it. That is so it. You know.

WAND: [01:36:52] Your religion is humanity. Right.

DINO: [01:36:57] We're so good. And, you know, I have. So my buddies that I hung out with in Peace Corps?

WAND: [01:37:07] Yes.

DINO: [01:37:07] Unfortunately, of the four of us, two have passed. And the other one, um, called me yesterday for my birthday, and she just kept saying, I love you so much. I am so happy that we met. I would have never met you without Peace Corps and look what we would have missed.

WAND: [01:37:32] Right, right. Exactly.

DINO: [01:37:35] I mean, you know, it doesn't get any better than that.

WAND: [01:37:38] It doesn't. And it was Peace Corps and the Committee for a Museum of the Peace Corps Experience that has brought our lives together.

DINO: [01:37:48] Yes. And I feel the same way about you.

WAND: [01:37:51] That's the way I feel about you, too. I really do. This has been an honor to have this time with you, to hear your stories, and to think, feel your stories through you and know that we have another whole phase.

DINO: [01:38:07] I know!

WAND: [01:38:08] Of Peace Corps in front of us as we work for the Committee for Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.

DINO: [01:38:14] That's an honor in itself.

WAND: [01:38:15] Thank you so much.

DINO: [01:38:16] Thank you, Pat.

WAND: [01:38:17] Bye bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]