

**Kevin T. Dixon Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
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**Biographical Note**

Kevin T. Dixon served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from 1962 to 1964 in a physical education program.

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Oral History Interview

with

Kevin T. Dixon

March 4, 2020  
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:00] This is Evelyn Ganzglass. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968. Today is March 4, 2020, and I'm interviewing Kevin Dixon, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from 1962 to 1964. He was part of a physical education program, Colombia IV at that time. And my first question is always, why did you join the Peace Corps, Kevin?

DIXON: [00:00:36] That's kind of an interesting story. I was a scholarship athlete at the University of Denver, played basketball and baseball there, and my professional association was the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, and the magazine came my senior year. I know what I was going to do, and I'd do Peace Corps. They were sponsoring a Peace Corps group. I said, wow, that sounded interesting, and I sent in an application and eventually got accepted. I mean, I just, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:21] It was just in the magazine and you didn't know what?

DIXON: [00:01:23] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:25] You were a senior at the time?

DIXON: [00:01:27] I was a senior at the time and I'm from Massachusetts, you know. My mother was a very active in the town Democratic committee and knew him.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:44] Knew Kennedy?

DIXON: [00:01:44] And knew the Kennedys, and she thought it was a great idea. My father, he didn't think it was such a great idea, and he says, oh, you should get a job, you should go to, you could play. Try pro baseball. You're a pretty good baseball player. But nobody was knocking down the doors to sign me, so I said, well, I'll go to the Peace Corps.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:12] So he didn't object too much about that.

DIXON: [00:02:14] No, no.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:16] So you grew up, where did you grow up in Massachusetts?

DIXON: [00:02:18] Norwood, which is about 20 miles south of Boston. It's about, at that time it was about 25,000 people and just a small town.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:30] And you were a baseball player and then you got a scholarship to the University of Denver?

DIXON: [00:02:35] Well, actually, that time they didn't give baseball scholarships. You had to go to basketball and that, you know, it was. I was the oldest of seven and my mother's Irish and my father was Lithuanian. And he was an all-American football player at Boston College back in the '30s and did box professionally. So everybody in town knew my dad and he was a teacher at the junior high school.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:15] So, so athletics are clearly part of your family. So joining a physical education program is just a natural thing to do.

DIXON: [00:03:23] It seemed like it, yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:24] So this association that you read about it in the magazine, it was the group that sponsored a Peace Corps group or how did it?

DIXON: [00:03:33] Yes. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:34] I've never heard that. How did that work?

DIXON: [00:03:36] That was a national organization of physical education and recreation people. And at the university, we all were student members, so we would get the monthly magazine.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:58] But then you all joined as a group or they just did the recruiting?

DIXON: [00:04:02] They did. They did the recruiting, but the group, mostly my group was. There was only one other guy in the group that played basketball in college, but the other guys were boxers. There was a two, there were twins. One was in the Olympics with Muhammad Ali and the other one was boxing the Pan Am games. There was an Olympic rower. He was an alternate on the rowing team. There were swimmers. Track and field. One guy that was a football player, but he was really big into photography.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:47] But you were not from the same place, you were from all over?

DIXON: [00:04:50] All over the country, yeah. The oldest one was that guy, an older guy. He had his doctorate in physical education. Our Peace Corps coordinator or our leader, Eliseo Carrasco. He was a football coach out of California, but he spoke fluent Spanish. And so he was the contact person for all of us. And he went through training with us

and then went to Colombia and was stationed in Bogota. So he coordinated all the activities.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:34] So you applied. You got a letter saying, come to training in Colombia or how did that work? How long did it take to hear back?

DIXON: [00:05:41] Yeah. It happened I had to go to summer school to finish up to get my degree. And because I played ball, I missed a couple of classes, and so I had to pick it up at summer school. And I graduated in July because we were on a quarter system at Denver. And when I went home, I got the letter. Because of course, I didn't know what I was going to do. And I just. Training didn't start until late October, I guess, or November. And so I had a whole bunch of time to find out what the heck is going on. So I picked up some odd jobs and worked.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:28] And what did your friends think about all of this?

DIXON: [00:06:34] You know, it was kind of interesting. They really had no idea about the Peace Corps at that time. I mean, they had heard about it, but it wasn't a thing. The interesting part was when I came home, nobody wanted to know about what I did in the Peace Corps. I mean, I, like I tell Kay, we were social misfits. That's why we got married, because nobody cared what we did.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:02] When you came back, nobody wanted to hear it?

DIXON: [00:07:03] Nah, it was.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:08] Why do you think that is?

DIXON: [00:07:09] I don't know. I never really thought too much about it. I just say, gee, this is, you know, all I wanted to talk about is what they did and what we did in high school and I wasn't. I had gone beyond that and they were still.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:26] They didn't care about the outside world.

DIXON: [00:07:28] Right. I mean, because Norwood, it's a small, small town. I mean, everybody knows everybody and.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:37] Ok, so let's just talk about. They invited you, where was your training?

DIXON: [00:07:44] El Paso, Texas. It was the University of Texas Western. And we, uh, what was kind of interesting. We were with physical education group and the other half of the group was English teachers. They were teaching English as a second language. And my group, you know, the physical education was all guys. The women were in the, it was a mixture of men and women in the English speaking group. But we trained together in El Paso. And nobody on the faculty or any of the training that we had, had been to Colombia. They all read about it, but they had not been to Colombia. But the training was really good. The Spanish labs and everything else were really good. And our group, we went through different program on soccer because that was the most popular sport in Colombia at that time. And it still is. So we had to learn about soccer because most of us had no knowledge of soccer at all.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:14] And what was your cultural training like?

DIXON: [00:09:19] It was kind of unusual because nobody had been there. You know, they had met, they had known Colombians and stuff like that, but nobody had actually been to Colombia. So I didn't think that was a very it was a very strong part of the program.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:38] Well, was it all classroom based or?

DIXON: [00:09:47] Yes, it was lecture, classroom.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:47] Did you work in a Hispanic neighborhood?

DIXON: [00:09:47] No, no. We were encouraged to go over to Juarez and practice our Spanish. But no.

DIXON: [00:09:57] Because at that time, you could just walk across the border and go over to Juarez. But it was a Spanish, the labs and the classes, a lot of the classes were done in Spanish to get us acclimated. And then we went. We actually, at the end of training because it was in December, it was middle of December and we could go home for Christmas. And they wanted us. They asked the physical education group, actually the English group too, they voted down to go to Puerto Rico. For Outward Bound training. All the physical education people were going. So the day after Christmas, we had to get on the plane and go to Puerto Rico. And the English group decided they would stay over because we weren't doing Bogota till middle of January. And so they decided they would stay home for that period of time, whereas the physical education got, we're going. And that was really a fantastic experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:13] What was it like?

DIXON: [00:11:14] Well, it was a camp in the rainforest out in Arecibo, and they had a swimming pool there and they had an Outward Bound training program where there were obstacle courses and where they, like, take you out and leave you in the. You had to, taught you how to build a lean-to out of banana leaves and eat snails. And we had a, one of the exercises was there was four of us on the team and we were given a compass and a map. And they said, here's where you are now, in three days we're going to pick you up at this point. Well, one of my guys in my group was an Eagle Scout, so he.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:17] He knew what he was doing.

DIXON: [00:12:18] He knew what he's doing. And we pushed like heck. So instead of three days, we got there in two days. They were camped outside this little village and the police chief comes out and says, what are you guys doing here? And we say, well, you know, we're waiting for a ride back to the Peace Corps camp. And so they invited us into town and that was an excuse to have a big party. And you know, I tell people, I mean, being a Peace Corps volunteer is like being a rock

star. Everybody knows who you are, where you are, what you had for breakfast and what you're doing. And so I mean, it's, uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:03] So is it a good bonding experience for everybody?

DIXON: [00:13:06] Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Yeah. And one of the interesting things happened. We had a visit by Harry Belafonte, who was on the Peace Corps council at the time, and they were doing a show in town, the capital city, I can't think of it.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:27] San Juan?

DIXON: [00:13:28] San Juan, yeah. They were doing a show and he was with Carol Burnett and Robert Goulet, and they came out to the camp. And because they were still the camp was still being constructed and there was we lived in tents, but the tents were on wood platforms and stuff with bunks. And so one of the tents was under construction and it was still just a platform. So they get up and Harry, you know, got up and sang a few songs, answered questions and stuff, was really a great guy. And Carol Lawrence was unreal. She went through the obstacle course where you had to climb nets and swing on ropes, and she went through it like nothing. And she says, I want to do that again. Because she was a dancer and she was, you know, she was very strong upper body and could do a lot of the exercises through the course. So that was a. Robert Goulet, he was kind of a jerky guy. He, well, I don't have my music. I can't do it. You know, he didn't.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:45] Not a strong guy.

DIXON: [00:14:46] No, no. He was just, he was along for the ride. I mean, but the I was very impressed with Carol Lawrence. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:58] So you finished training?

DIXON: [00:15:00] Yeah.



GANZGLASS: [00:15:01] So I guess, what happened after Puerto Rico? Where did you go? Did you go back for more training or did you go straight overseas?

DIXON: [00:15:07] No, we went directly to Colombia. But in training, everything with the group, everybody wanted to know what the record was for this particular exercise. You had to swim. We had drown proofing. And you had to swim underwater the length of the pool and come back. You didn't have to come all the way back, but you know, that was one of the exercises. Well, we have one guy. He goes down, he comes back up, he goes down again and he's on his way back. They jump in to get him. He had, you know, he was, you know, oxygen debt, whatever. They had to bring him up because he was going to drown. But we had all kinds of crazy things happen to us, but it was great. Rappelling off the dam, taught us how to rappel off this large dam that is there. And it was good.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:06] Perfect for a physical ed group.

DIXON: [00:16:07] Oh, our physical education group, we just ate it up.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:12] You liked that. OK. So you flew from Puerto Rico to?

DIXON: [00:16:16] Directly to Bogota.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:17] And what happened when you got to Bogota?

DIXON: [00:16:19] Well, we got put up in the hotel and we were had a kind of an orientation program there. The English group had now arrived and we met all together to get our assignments. And one of the things, kind of funny. We were invited to the ambassador's residence for a, you know, a reception. Well, the physical education guys, you know, they're all athletes. So they said, well, a reception, there's going to be food there. So they gave us money for food. Well, everybody just put the money in their pocket. So we go to the ambassador's, they bus us down to the ambassador's residence and, yep, there's food. We ate

them out of house and home. The ambassador's wife was embarrassed.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:16] There was no food left.

DIXON: [00:17:19] I don't think they invited a Peace Corps group back, but it was, that was our induction into the, you know, the ambassador and the, what we call it, the civil service, you know, there. But anyway, she was really embarrassed by the whole fact that that they ran out of food.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:49] Probably only had daughters and didn't know about young guys.

DIXON: [00:17:53] Yeah, apparently not. Apparently not.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:55] Yeah. So where were you assigned?

DIXON: [00:17:59] I was assigned to Medellin, the Universidad de Antioquia, and I found out later that they, when they were looking for placing people, the head of the English department, John. Oh, I can't remember his last name, though. But anyway, he was married to a Peruvian gal and he was head of the English department. And so they were looking for English teachers to teach a, you know, English as a second language at the university. So he's going to the face book and he sees a Kevin Dixon played baseball at the University of Denver, and he says, oh, we can use him in the physical education. He was the head coach of a local baseball team that played in the league, which was made up of Americans that were working in Medellin, and it was sponsored by Coca-Cola. And so he alerted the physical education department that this guy was available, and they should get them. Anyway, that's how I ended up there and playing baseball for Coca-Cola.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:37] With other Americans, the whole team were Americans?

DIXON: [00:19:39] Yes. And the thing is in training, nobody told us that they played baseball in Colombia. They said, yeah, there was a little baseball on the coast, but not in yet here.

DIXON: [00:19:52] And you know, I didn't bring any baseball stuff. I didn't have any spikes and didn't have my glove. So there was a fellow that worked for Kellogg's, and he traveled around South America, so he got left handed. So he picked up a left handed glove and got some spikes and I'm ready to go.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:17] So who did you play? Did you play other Americans?

DIXON: [00:20:19] No, we played other Colombian teams. Universidad de Antioquia had a baseball team. And by, let's see, below the Viana, there were four or five. It was a league of six teams. Oh, the military had a team of cuatro beguile. And most of those guys were custodians. They had come in the interior from the, you know, they were in the military. So yeah, we.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:48] How did they all learn baseball, was it taught in school?

DIXON: [00:20:50] They had already played somewhere else before. But because the gringos were playing, they would have two or three thousand people would show up for the game on Sunday morning. And they would bet on what the next pitch was going to be, a ball or a strike, or it was going to be hit in the air or on the ground and by that they were all drunk as skunks. Then they would go across the street to the football stadium, you know, the soccer stadium, because Medellin had two professional soccer teams. The Millonarios and oh shucks, I can't think of the other. The Nacional. Yeah, Nacional and Millonarios. And they played every week. It was going to be a soccer game so they would go from the baseball game over to the soccer stadium. And the soccer stadium was huge. It was about 100,000 people and people come in from the campo all over the place for this thing. It was a big social event.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:03] So this was a big part of your Peace Corps experience.

DIXON: [00:22:06] Yes, that I love to go to the bullfights too. They were fun.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:11] So what did you do as a volunteer?

DIXON: [00:22:14] OK. We helped set up the physical education department, and basically the department at the time was basically the soccer and track and field, gymnastics, stunts and tumbling, that kind of thing. Team sports were not, except for the soccer. The popular sport in Colombia at that time was bicycle races. They had road or bicycle races, you know, they had a metro dome, and then they would have the cross-country type of races, which attracted a lot of people. But basketball was not a very popular. It was played, but it was marginal. My counterpart at the university was a fellow by the name of Edison Christopher. And he was on the national team, basketball team, and he was from the San Andrés, the island of San Andrés, which was given to Colombia by Queen Victoria. So he spoke English with a British accent.

DIXON: [00:23:25] And he also was, you know, huge black fellow. He was about 6'6", real big guy. But he was a very good basketball player, a very talented guy. And he also played baseball for the university team, which I didn't play for. But he got me involved playing ball all over the city for his teams and stuff and coaching. And it worked, worked out very well. We conducted physical education classes at the university. They had a school that they had teacher training with. And I worked primarily with those teachers and expanding the curriculum and then setting up programs.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:20] You did that for two years?

DIXON: [00:24:22] No, I did it for one year.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:25] What did you do the second year?

DIXON: [00:24:26] Oh, well, that's kind of an interesting deal. At that point, they kept the first year. Because we were working in the universities, there

were leagues. The hierarchy of the sports programs were the *ligas*, the *liga de* basketball, the *liga de* baseball. And they said, well, geez, maybe we should be working with the *ligas* rather than at the university level. And there was a program opening up at Santa Marta on the coast. And Chandler Thompson, who was in the English department group, didn't like teaching English as a second language. But he was a very good tennis player and he also played on the baseball team. He was my catcher because I did the pitching. They wanted somebody to go to Santa Marta and work with the *liga de* baseball and the *liga de* basketball in Santa Marta. And he said, you want to go? I said, why not?

DIXON: [00:25:50] You know, I had visited Santa Marta because we had, on the school vacations. The Peace Corps had a traveling basketball team where we would go to the barrios, the villages. There had to be a Peace Corps volunteer there to set up a place for us to stay and eat, and we would give basketball clinics in the morning and then in the afternoon and then in the evening we'd play an exhibition game against the local team. And that always attracted a lot of the villages and stuff would show up, and it was a big deal. I mean, the gringos are in town. It was always Estados Unidos contra, you know. It was never a Peace Corps against. Estados Unidos, you know?

DIXON: [00:26:51] But anyway, so because the school vacations, we had to fill in the void. And so Eliseo came up with this program and it really took off. So I probably saw more of Colombia than the Colombians did because we traveled all over. And then when the A.A.U. would send down teams, university teams from the United States, they would sponsor trips and we would be the interpreters. We would travel with them on their schedule. And we would be the teams that they would, you know, play against and help them because they didn't speak Spanish. And we would work that way.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:50] So you had a good time doing all of this.

DIXON: [00:27:52] Oh, I had. It was just an extension of my athletic scholarship, really. It was fun. I met a lot of interesting people. And my

counterpart, Edison, was really pivotal because he introduced me to, you know, everybody in Medellin that was anybody. I mean, it was. And because at the baseball team, the American consulate played second base. I could walk into the consulate office and, oh, hey. They'd rush me right in. Because the baseball team was kind of interesting. The catcher was Chandler and the first baseman was John. And then the American consulate played second. There was a shortstop was a guy that was logging oil wells. And the third baseman was the Rice Krispie salesman of South America. The outfield was other Peace Corps volunteers and one was a banker, the banker of the local bank. So, I mean.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:02] So not your traditional Peace Corps experience.

DIXON: [00:29:04] Not, hey, if we were having a Peace Corps party, they'd say, Kevin, we need some Coca-Cola. So I could call up to Coca-Cola, we need five or six cases of Coca-Cola. I never got a bill. But the main drink in Colombia, it was rum and coke. I never developed a taste for it but.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:33] So you traveled all around the country? You were based in Medellin the whole time?

DIXON: [00:29:37] Yes, I've been in Bucaramanga, Cartagena, Barranquilla. What's it? Popayan. And I also travel for the university basketball team, too. So I mean, I got to see.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:57] So you had your professional career, just in Colombia?

DIXON: [00:30:00] Yeah, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:02] Have you maintained contact with any of these people?

DIXON: [00:30:04] Well, kind of, but we became partners in the Americas. I was working as superintendent recreation in Norwood.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:14] After you came back?

DIXON: [00:30:16] Yeah. And anyway, the partners was a program sponsored by the State Department. And anyway, the governor of Massachusetts, Sargent, his wife was running the program and Kay sent a letter in and said, hey, you know, we were volunteers. Because they're the sister state. Massachusetts and the sister state in South America was Medellin, but Antioquia rather, it's capital city is Medellin. And so she invited us to meetings and we would go and all of a sudden they needed somebody to go to Colombia to set up programs, exchange programs, and they asked me to go. And I wasn't going to go without Kay. And anyway, we found out what the per diem was. You know, it was first class hotels. Well, we could stay at pensions, so we knew where to stay. And so all it was a plane ticket to go. We went and I was able to set up basketball coaching exchanges, and she did a program for adoptions, you know, for eliminating a lot of red tape for people that wanted to adopt.

DIXON: [00:31:39] But I arranged for Edison, who was still working at the university, you know, six, seven years later, he's still at the university and he's coaching. And so I arranged for him to come to Massachusetts, and he stayed at my parents' place. And he worked at, what was it, at Massachusetts Bay Community College with coach John Syrie, who I had arranged earlier to go to Colombia and run basketball programs down there for them. You know, clinics, and Edison came up and he got to go to, you know, preseason training methods, which were lacking in Colombia at the time. And he went to Massachusetts Bay Community College, then he had, he visited with Boston College, BU, and also Providence College. My brother was playing basketball down in Providence at Providence College, so we got there. A classmate of mine was, at that time, was the publicity director for the National Basketball Association. So when the Celtics were playing at home, we had tickets. Give a call to Nick and we had go to will call and tickets to go to the Celtics basketball games. And what Edison had played against Bill Russell, and he just was in awe. You know, this guy was just. And so for him to go to the Celtics games and watch them play? I mean.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:34] So how long did Edison stay in Massachusetts?

DIXON: [00:33:36] He was up, I believe he was here for about a month.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:40] Oh, a short term.

DIXON: [00:33:42] Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:44] Still in touch with him?

DIXON: [00:33:45] Well, he died last year. I regret not, you know, connecting with him. But yeah, he's got a couple sons, of course, Colombians have large families. He's got a couple. One played in basketball in Texas, at a school in Texas. And there's a couple still teaching at the University of Antioquia. I mean, he's one.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:12] So you did stay in touch with?

DIXON: [00:34:14] Yeah, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:15] That's great.

DIXON: [00:34:15] Yeah, we had Christmas cards and that kind of thing.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:17] Did you stay in touch with the Peace Corps volunteers as well?

DIXON: [00:34:21] That's right. We used to have reunions every once in a while, but we just, you know, everyone's well, get e-mails and stuff. We just, you know, who's died and that type of thing. But yeah, yeah, that's about the extent of it now.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:37] So what was the impact for your career from all of this? It sounds like you came back and worked in recreation?

DIXON: [00:34:51] Well, I did. I did. But I was in Norwood and I went to the selectmen and I wanted a \$1000 raise because we had just won a



national award for our recreation programs. That's worth a thousand bucks. Yeah, this was back in the seventies, early seventies. And they said, oh that'll mess up the whole pay scale of the thing, you know? No, can't do that. So I got a job in Orange, New Jersey, for \$6000 more than I was making in Massachusetts. And I had two kids at that time and Kay was pregnant. We got to, you know, I've got to do something. So I went to Orange, New Jersey, and it was interesting in the interview because I had worked in the Job Corps and everything else after I came back. But they, the interviewer was a black commissioner. I had gone to the library, local library, and read up some before I went into the interview. And so I knew that I was going to be interviewed by a black commissioner. And anyway, they asked me all kinds of questions and I answered them. And then the final is just, how would you like, how is it going to be, you're going to be working for a black commissioner? I said, well, you know, all due respect, commissioner, I think the problem is how do you have white guy working for you?

GANZGLASS: [00:36:38] Hmm.

DIXON: [00:36:39] And he said, go ahead outside. And then a couple of minutes later, they invite me back and they offered me the job. I said, Well, wait a minute, going a little too fast. I haven't talked to my wife. I haven't heard. So I said, give me, you know, 48 hours so I can go back home. And he did, and I accepted the job. Well, two years later, he doesn't get elected. And now my new boss is the former mayor because they had a type of. Orange, New Jersey was a very interesting community and it was mostly Italians. But because of the Newark riots, we had a lot of black people come. So Orange High School was predominantly black, but the Valley High School was predominantly a white Italian. And I wasn't Italian and I wasn't black. So I fit in really good. You know, everybody, you know, had a problem with me.

DIXON: [00:37:37] So at that time, I said this doesn't look good, my commissioner's gone. And at that time, there was a lot of civil rights programs that we qualified. We were doing a lot of crazy stuff. We would go to the governor and we'd get this grant and we get another

grant from somewhere else and marry it. And we were building playground, knocking down buildings, and building playgrounds and running swimming programs and stuff like that. So it was, it worked out nice, I mean.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:08] It's good.

DIXON: [00:38:08] But now so I end up, I went to Long Branch, New Jersey. And Long Branch, New Jersey, is a very interesting place again, multi-ethnic group. They were in a midst of remodeling or, you know, modernizing the programs there because the fellow that preceded me had been there for, you know, like 30 years. And so I'm new on the block. They had bought, through a grant, property on the oceanfront and they had a, uh, it was actually a compound that was used by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Circus or whatever when they were summering. Anyway they were going to build a boardwalk along the front. And New Jersey is kind of interesting. You can walk along the boardwalk, but if you go off the boardwalk, out to the ocean, you've got to pay. And we built this boardwalk along the ocean. It was a couple of miles and we had to hire. We had these grants. We had grants to hire the electricians, carpenters, and masons and stuff because the employment was down. So there was all kinds of money available. And the, you know, we had

DIXON: [00:39:57] We had about 60 people on the crews working and we had lifeguards. We had another, because Monmouth College, had a swimming team. So we got most of our lifeguards from Monmouth. And we worked to put all these things together. Well, I had a huge staff. Well, I wake up one morning. I realize, hey, there is no way we can support this on the taxpayers' dime, because we have all this grant money, you know, clean and safe streets and Seeda, and it just, it was no way. And so I said, gee, this is not going to last. This is going to bottom out at some point and I'm going to get left holding the bag as the director because they can't afford to pay me.

DIXON: [00:41:01] So I, my wife had sent a letter and she saw an ad for a job with Raytheon looking for our community services manager in Saudi

Arabia. And I said, oh, why did you do that? So we got we can't stay. We have to make a change. And anyway, I went for the interview up in Massachusetts and my sister was up there, so it was good excuse to visit her. And anyway, eventually they offered me the job. And all of a sudden, now we got to sell the house. We have three kids at the time and we're going to go to Saudi Arabia. Well, Kay's attitude was she could change diapers anywhere. That's no problem. Let's go. And that worked out very nicely. I went over there with Raytheon, I worked there for two years. And then Raytheon was a good company to work for, but it didn't pay as much as the other American companies over there. And so I signed on with Ralph M. Parsons Company that were building a city for 150,000 people on the Red Sea, as a community services manager because they were having problems retaining employees because the climate, the culture. And so I set up programs and services for families.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:45] So this all goes back to Peace Corps, right?

DIXON: [00:42:47] Yeah, right. We had beauty parlor. We had a video library. We had T-ball teams, we had swimming teams, we had softball leagues for the adult men and we had trips for the women into the souq.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:04] So, let me ask you, we skipped over this. You keep talking about your wife. How did you meet your wife?

DIXON: [00:43:11] Oh, I tell you, you got to read the book.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:15] Well, tell me. So it's part of this interview.

DIXON: [00:43:19] I'll give you my elevator version.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:24] Yes, the short version.

DIXON: [00:43:27] I got a call, at the university Antioquia, I got a call one day that the Peace Corps had requested that they needed some help setting up sports programs out in Barrio Antioquia. So I went to my

boss. I'm going to go out to Barrio Antioquia. Oh no, you're not going out there. I had met volunteers that worked out there. I had met Kay, probably at a party I don't recall. But I had, you know, Peace Corps volunteers are out there, so I says, I can't be there. You know, how bad could it be? So I went out to Barrio Antioquia and met with Kay and Jimenez and one of the male volunteers that was out there. Having a senior moment here. Anyway, he was on the baseball team, so, you know, I wasn't in unfamiliar territory. And when I went out there, they wanted to set up these programs because that was what they were doing in community development. I said, well, sure, we can do that. And that's what I did. I, you know, I would go out there part-time and help them with the programs. It turned out, you know, Barrio Antioquia was second largest red light district in South America. And I mean, I'm sure Kay told you about the story about how they how she ended up out there, the political ramifications.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:27] Yeah.

DIXON: [00:45:27] It was all. So I don't need to reiterate on that, but I like telling people I met my wife at a red light district and they look at you, oh, so they can't wait to meet her. You know, they think I married a Colombian. And so when she walks in, you know, she the blonde. And so they can't wait. Your husband said he met you at a red-light district and she gets all red. I said, well, it's true.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:54] So did you get married in Peace Corps?

DIXON: [00:45:57] No, no, no, no. We were, it was nothing serious as volunteers. We saw each other at parties and social events and stuff. I mean, it was funny because the Peace Corps girls, they would go to the barrio dance and they would all say, you know, the club is, they think they're really romantic guys. They were always making passes at girls and they want to. So they would be saying to the girls, well, you know, they said, why I can't go with you because my *novio* is here, and they would point to me. I'm the tallest person in the place. So then all these guys are hanging around me. I don't know why, but they want to know which one I'm taking home so they can then go.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:53] To the other ones.

DIXON: [00:46:54] Yeah, I wish I knew that at the time. I didn't know that at the time. But anyway, that's, I thought that was really funny. But yeah. When we got back to the United States, I had gone to graduate school at Boston University and got a master's degree in education. And that was a year program. So in the meantime, Kay had gone to Washington, worked on the commission on civil rights, but she didn't really like doing that. And she came up to Boston for a job interview and I picked her up at the airport and brought her to my house. Of course, big table and everybody's, all my brothers and sisters and my mother, father, my grandmother lived with us. So yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:51] Pretty intimidating.

DIXON: [00:47:51] Oh yeah. So she's sitting there and you know, the food comes out of the kitchen. it gets the passed around, everybody helping. When she comes out, there's nothing on Kay's plate. You know, it's family style, you know, and she's really embarrassed. Yeah. So we all have to take stuff off our plate, put it back in. So then the ice cream comes out. Well, she gets a plate, so she thinks she's supposed to take something out of that and puts her there. She doesn't realize that's hers, because we used to get big portions of ice cream for dessert.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:37] She made it through all of that.

DIXON: [00:48:39] She made through. The thing is, she interviewed at the job and she talks to the guy. And, you know, I guess I know where they ask her about whether she's engaged or whatever. She said, no, she wants to come to Boston to work. Well, hey, I pick her up after the interview, show her around Boston, and I take her to Durgin-Park, which is a restaurant on the and it's family style where they just have long tables and they just sit everybody and you don't know who you're going to be sitting next to. You know, you just and it's old time. It's got the when they convert it over to from electricity, they get wires are just

hanging around. I mean, it's kind of an interesting place. Anyway, who do we sit next to? The guy that interviewed her. So after lunch, she said, I'm never going to get that job now.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:41] Small world.

DIXON: [00:49:42] Yeah, small world.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:44] So other than meeting your wife in the Peace Corps, what do you think the impact has been on your life?

DIXON: [00:49:52] Quite a bit. You know, growing up in Massachusetts and you know, I traveled a lot when I played basketball at the University in Denver. I was never really exposed to poverty or, well, even like prostitution was legal in Colombia. You know, that was a whole different thing. I mean, a lot of the players that I coached were, you know, they really didn't have a lot of things. I mean, gee whiz, I mean, they basically just had the clothes on their backs. So, you know, even shoes were a problem. And I just had never, you know, even.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:51] Been exposed to any of that.

DIXON: [00:50:52] No, no. And because once you left the urban areas and you went out into the countryside, I mean, I mean, they didn't have a heck of a lot. I mean, it was just subsistence living from, you know, hand to mouth.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:14] So what did you take from all of that? But how has that changed your life? Has it?

DIXON: [00:51:23] Yes, it does. I mean, I try to impress upon my kids how lucky we are to be, you know, Americans. I mean, when you come back to the United States after being in the Peace Corps, you know you, you realize how really lucky we are. I mean, it's just, you know, I don't, I'm not a real big flag waver. But boy, I tell you, it made a big impression.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:53] Yeah. What do you think the impact of your physical education program, your activities in particular, were? In all the communities in which you worked?

DIXON: [00:52:04] Interesting. Edison, when he went back to Colombia after being up in the United States, he became the national coach of the team. Coached the Olympic team, the Pan Am, any time Colombia played in international competition, he used to coach. And he would pick the ball players and of course they never won a lot of things. But right today there's a professional basketball league in Colombia that you're allowed to have two outsiders, you know, from U.S. mostly, to play on the teams. And it's still a loose organization. We went back about five or six months ago for the flower festival, and I went out to the baseball field where we played and there was a team. It was a bunch of kids out there playing. So there's a security guard on the, you know, at the gate. And so our guy is talking to security guards to get permission to go on the field. I said, hey, I just go out. And the guy, the guard, doesn't know what to do, this big guy's going up. Turns out Major League Baseball has training programs for kids in South America, and Medellin has one of those teams.

DIXON: [00:53:44] Of course, I go out, my daughter Kimberly, who's her apartment here, was with us and the guard is still up in the stands. He doesn't like. I get a bat from one of the kids. I go out to home plate to have Kimberly take some pictures. You know, I'm just hacking around and I go back and the coach is in the dugout. He's an older guy. And I said, yeah, 20 years from now, you're going to be doing the same thing I just did. You're going to go out there. And he laughs. So we start walking out, anyway, this kid comes running after me with a hat. And gives me it because I had noticed a hat, had a major league logo on the hat. I didn't understand the whole thing at the time. So this kid gives me the hat. Well, he wasn't Colombian. He was from Venezuela. He's 14 years old. He's there because he wants to be a catcher. And he's not, he didn't look like, catchers are more, but I'm sure his parents couldn't wait to get him out of Venezuela just because of what's going on there. But anyway, he's there and they train.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:18] American baseball?

DIXON: [00:55:21] Yeah, he's training to be a professional baseball player. I said, look, you've got to learn to speak English because when you go to the United States, if you don't speak English, you're going to be taken advantage of. So you better, you know, work on that as much as you're working on your baseball skills. But this is apparently a training program that is about seven or eight cities in Colombia that have these programs that are sponsored by Major League Baseball.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:01] And you were there at the beginning, getting a lot of that started.

DIXON: [00:56:04] Yeah. Well, I don't know if that was a definite outgrowth, but it's a whole, it's a whole different approach to things. There are a number of Colombians playing Major League Baseball today. Might be five or six, but there's a bunch of them in the minor leagues, I guess.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:26] Hey, that's an impact.

DIXON: [00:56:29] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:30] And I guess the third goal of Peace Corps is bringing the world back to the United States. You talked about the sister program when you were in.

DIXON: [00:56:39] Yeah, Partners of the Americas.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:41] Partners of the Americas, when you were in Massachusetts. Have you been involved in other activities as well?

DIXON: [00:56:50] Mostly just when we were in Massachusetts, we were always invited to the Kennedy, any time there was something going on at the Kennedy Museum there, we would be invited. It's a different aspect when you go out to the state of Washington, it's a different, you know, they just feel so isolated out there. They don't have no connection with Washington, D.C. There's a Peace Corps group in



Spokane that we're active in, but it's mostly old people. There aren't any young people in it. I mean, there's, and I'm in a stamp club, the same thing. I mean, people younger are not interested in collecting stamps, which I started when I was in Colombia.

DIXON: [00:57:52] There was a stamp dealer off campus and we never worked a full week. I mean, the students were on strike or there was some sort of holiday or whatever so.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:02] You had time.

DIXON: [00:58:03] Yeah, I had time on my hands. So it was a guy off the campus that sold leather goods and had stamps, Colombian stamps. So I've got to kind of a nice collection of Colombian stamps that I got at that time. But he was a Jewish fellow. He had the tattoo, you know, because there were a lot.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:28] From the concentration camps.

DIXON: [00:58:29] Yeah, there were a lot of Jewish immigrants in Colombia. German particularly too. Actually, they started the Avianca Airlines. But, you know, former German pilots, they started a. Because in Colombia, the three miles, you know, you couldn't, there weren't any roads going over the mountains. You had to go down to the coast, then go back up the valley to get anywhere. You know, a lot of the villages.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:05] So they had flights.

DIXON: [00:59:06] Yeah, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:08] Ok, well, I end each interview by asking whether there's something else that I should have asked about that you wanted to tell a story about.

DIXON: [00:59:17] I had two daughters that were returned volunteers.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:20] Well, talk about.

DIXON: [00:59:22] Carol, she was in Nicaragua. We went down to visit her and I was very impressed with Nicaragua. And Kimberly was in Niger, in Africa. I can tell you, without a doubt, I never would have survived. I mean, she was living in a mud hut a couple hours outside of the capital city. We had to take a two-hour bush taxi out there and we stopped in the middle of nowhere. And where's the village? Oh, we got to walk another

DIXON: [00:59:59] half mile in. You know, we get there. And because we're the rock stars now and there's only one seat in the village and they insist that I have to sit in the seat. I kept trying to give it to Kay. They wouldn't. I had to sit. And they say to Kimberly, your parents must be hungry. So they sent one of the kids to go track down a chicken, grab one of the chickens. And by the time we leave, the chicken. Kimberly, she doesn't cook, and we go to her place and it's a mud hut. And it's got to, it's about half the size of this room, it's the front end. There's a fenced area around it. And it was a kid in the village whose job was to keep the goats out of her area. Anyway, he comes to the gate and we're sitting there talking, and Kimberly has something. She calls the kid in and she puts the kid behind him, and she's got the mirror and she's got to. He knows it's Kimberly in the mirror. He has no clue who the other person in the mirror is. I just was blown away. I said, this is unreal.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:29] And that was much more recent?

DIXON: [01:01:32] Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:34] We each have our different experiences, right?

DIXON: [01:01:37] I know. I know. I never would have made it in this Niger, I tell you.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:41] Well, you made it through Outward Bound in Puerto Rico.

DIXON: [01:01:45] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:46] So you probably would have made it in Niger.

DIXON: [01:01:48] No, I'm convinced I never would have done it. I have so much respect and pride in my daughter that she could do that. That's incredible.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:04] Well, there's another whole interview about how the experiences were different, but I don't think we'll do that right now.

DIXON: [01:02:09] OK.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:10] OK, so thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]