

**Patricia Matisz Smith Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Patricia Matisz Smith  
**Interviewer:** Ivan C. Browning  
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**Biographical Note**

Patricia Matisz Smith served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia from 1973 to 1975 as a high school science teacher.

**Access**

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Oral History Interview

with

Patricia Matisz Smith

February 12, 2017  
Cary, North Carolina

By Ivan C. Browning

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

**BROWNING:** [00:00:00] Today is February 12th, 2017. This is Ivan Browning, and I am interviewing Patricia Matisz Smith, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia from 1973 to 1975, in a teaching project. So tell us what you were doing a year before you went into the Peace Corps.

**SMITH:** [00:00:29] Hi. Okay. The year before I was in the Peace Corps, I was on the George McGovern Shriver campaign. I was national campaign staff in New Jersey, and I had started out in western Pennsylvania on the campaign staff. And then we followed the campaign. I went to New Jersey, I went to New York, I went to Michigan. And I was supposed to have gone to Keene, New Hampshire, but it snowed that day, so I didn't get to go to the, to the primary for that day. So that was what I was doing that up to November. And then I applied and the Malaysia group was going in September. So I just kind of hung around there for a few months. I was at home and I was working and I was waiting to go into Peace Corps.

BROWNING: [00:01:13] Well, let's go back to, uh, earlier in your life, um. Where did you grow up?

SMITH: [00:01:21] Um, Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, a small town near Pittsburgh. And my dad worked in a mill. My mother was a homemaker.

BROWNING: [00:01:29] And what size family did you have?

SMITH: [00:01:31] I have two sisters, and I have a brother who's 16 years younger than I am.

BROWNING: [00:01:38] The, uh. Did you really have any kind of international experience or exposure, you know, during the time you were growing up with your family?

SMITH: [00:01:50] No, not at all. No. My aunt had, you know, gone to Europe on, you know, one of those trips, but that was the only one that, that ever, you know, left the country in those years. That was in the '60s. So, you know, things were pretty tight in those days. So people didn't, didn't travel that I knew very much about.

BROWNING: [00:02:07] So you went to high school in?

SMITH: [00:02:10] The Kiski Area [School District] in Vandergrift, yep.

BROWNING: [00:02:13] Mm hmm. During high school, did you study a foreign language?

SMITH: [00:02:18] Oh yeah. I had, I had, what, three years of Spanish and four years of German altogether. And, um, not, not very good at any of them, either of them, I guess.

BROWNING: [00:02:29] How about extracurricular activities?

SMITH: [00:02:31] Well, I was, I was, you know, just determined to go to college. And that was, you know, basically, you know, what I did in those days was, you know, make sure I got a scholarship. So I was a full ride at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

BROWNING: [00:02:45] When your family took vacations were, what kind of trips did you take?

SMITH: [00:02:50] We never took vacations. My dad worked. You know, there was, there was a long period where there wasn't any money for things at all, much less going places. So.

BROWNING: [00:03:02] Were you the first in your family to go to college?

SMITH: [00:03:05] Well, my aunt went to college and my uncles did. So, you know, on that side. On the other side, my dad's side, no. None of, none of his brothers or sisters went to college. But my mother, her sister and her brothers went to college.

BROWNING: [00:03:21] Were you thinking when you went into college about a particular career?

SMITH: [00:03:29] Well, I was a biology major, and, you know, I did pretty, I did okay my first two years. And then after that I got involved in student government, and I was having too much fun. So, you know, my grades were okay. I graduated, but, you know, I just wasn't that serious about it. So.

BROWNING: [00:03:46] So, uh, in college, uh, extracurricular activities, student government.

SMITH: [00:03:52] Yes.

BROWNING: [00:03:53] And anything else?

SMITH: [00:03:54] Uh, I was in a service sorority. Yeah, that was about it. Yep.

BROWNING: [00:04:00] And in the summertime during college, what did you do?

SMITH: [00:04:03] I had to work. Yeah, I had to, you know, I had to have money. I mean, I had like, no, no spending money at all. So.

BROWNING: [00:04:11] Well, how did you become aware of the Peace Corps?

SMITH: [00:04:15] Well, I had one friend that did go the year after college. He must have been a year ahead of me. And so everybody always talked about how David had gone. I think he went to Nepal, I believe. So it was kind of interesting. You know, I kind of thought about it from, from that time, when I was a senior in college. And I had friends who had, who were able to go. There was a professor that took, you know, students on trips and, and they were able to go. And so I was always very jealous that they got to go to Germany with the, with the professor. So.

BROWNING: [00:04:47] So you thought about the Peace Corps as a way of getting?

SMITH: [00:04:52] I wanted to do, yeah, get away. Yeah, get out, get away. Yeah.

BROWNING: [00:04:55] Leave Pennsylvania and see the world.

SMITH: [00:04:59] Mm hmm. Absolutely. Yeah.

BROWNING: [00:05:01] When, uh, when you applied did you have to take any kind of entrance exam? Do you remember?

SMITH: [00:05:06] I don't remember anything like that. No.

BROWNING: [00:05:08] Okay.

SMITH: [00:05:09] It was all paper, you know, in those days, '72, it was all paper, paperwork. So '71, '72.

BROWNING: [00:05:17] Did you express a preference for any particular country?

SMITH: [00:05:21] No, I said anything. And in fact, I was kind of scheduled to go to Uganda, and that was the year that, uh, you know, there were, there was a lot of problems there. And somehow that, that particular, um, you know, group just didn't go or something. And then they said Malaysia. I said, oh, sure, whatever. You know. So that's why I ended up in Malaysia.

BROWNING: [00:05:43] So you were accepted into the Peace Corps. And, uh, when did your training start?

SMITH: [00:05:52] Yeah, September '73. We went right to, in fact. Well, we went to, it was, um, the staging was in San Jose, California, and we were there for about a few days, three or 4 or 5 days. And then on the trip over, um, they were talking to the people on the plane and they said to me, do you want to go on a side group or something? And I said, yeah. And they said Sabah. I said, where's that? So I said, okay, I'll do it. And so they took 14 of us to Sabah, which at those in those days was kind of a sensitive area. It kind of still is. Um, the, uh, Indonesia and Malaysia have a border on Kalimantan and Borneo, and they had, really had been kind of a war in that area. Not, not exactly where I was, but, uh, Sarawak, which is south.

SMITH: [00:06:40] And so, um, it was very sensitive for Peace Corps volunteers to be in that, that area. So they wanted to make sure they had, you know, I don't know, I was a little bit more mature or something that, that they picked up, you know, the 14 of us to go to Sabah that year.

BROWNING: [00:06:56] So in your staging, did you have a few vaccinations or?

SMITH: [00:07:02] No, I don't remember anything like that. I just remember talking to the psychologist that I would, I was, you know, my mother was very upset. My dad was so upset. And, you know, my dad said certain things. And, um, you know, to me about don't go and, and so I was kind of crying and in San Jose and the psychologist talked to me and it was real good. And, you know, then I, you know, I got on the

plane and went. But the punch line to that story is when I got home, my sisters told me that my dad spent the whole two years bragging all over town that his daughter was in Asia so. So it shows you, you know.

BROWNING: [00:07:41] But their initial reaction was less than positive?

SMITH: [00:07:44] Yeah, they didn't want me to go. No. Uh uh. Bloom where you are planted, that was the card my mother sent me.

BROWNING: [00:07:53] The, uh. So you did your training in country?

SMITH: [00:07:58] Yeah, it was interesting because, like I said, there were 14 of us, and it was supposedly, I don't know if it's true, but this is '73, which is very high inflationary times. And we were on an island, which makes it even worse, right? And so the 14 of us went, you know, to be trained and they had to buy everything for us, like bikes and, and every, you know, literally everything. And supposedly, again, it was supposed to be one of the most expensive trainings per volunteer. But I don't know if that's true. But we were in a, um, we were way out in the country. It was beautiful. Uh, but it was a kind of a compound. Um, and it was for the blind people or *orang buta*. And so they, you know, they kind of laughed at the white people, you know, the Americans, the white, the white people were the blind people. So that was kind of, you know, the joke at the time. So.

BROWNING: [00:08:52] Were was your group the first one in the country?

SMITH: [00:08:55] No, there had been volunteers in Sabah, but they were long gone. This was like kind of a reentry group.

BROWNING: [00:09:02] Mm hmm.

SMITH: [00:09:02] And in fact, one of our volunteers, um, well, it was kind of a, kind of what happened was the trainers kind of encouraged us to, you know, talk to the government officials. And this one young lady got real friendly with the governor's daughter. And so she was always going there and staying there. And they, you know, got real friendly. And at

some point I don't know what happened, but she was expelled from the country. And I think it was because of her friendship with the governor's daughter. So it was kind of, kind of a weird situation. But nobody else ever had any problems like that at all.

BROWNING: [00:09:37] And, uh, in comparing yourself to the others in the training group, what were they like compared to you?

SMITH: [00:09:44] Yeah, I was a little bit older. I was a couple years older than most of them. Uh, but we were all science or math majors. So, uh, and then a few of us got, I got sent to an English language, English speaking school. So I taught science, and I taught biology and physics in English, and many of them got sent to Malay speaking schools. And they really learned the language, you know, of course, when they had to do it every day. So I was kind of spoiled.

BROWNING: [00:10:11] The, uh, and about how many were in the group?

SMITH: [00:10:15] We had 14.

BROWNING: [00:10:16] Okay.

BROWNING: [00:10:17] And what was the mix of men and?

SMITH: [00:10:20] Yeah, it was uh, it was four women and the rest were men. Yeah. And of the 14, um, nine of us finished two years. Seven of them went, uh, four years. And a couple of the men who married local women stayed, you know, seven, eight, nine years long altogether.

BROWNING: [00:10:40] I see. Uh, nobody was married at the time?

SMITH: [00:10:44] No, no, we were all single. Right.

BROWNING: [00:10:46] Okay.

SMITH: [00:10:47] Yeah. No couples in that group, no.

BROWNING: [00:10:48] Did anybody in the group, had you, have any teacher, uh, training or teaching experience?

SMITH: [00:10:57] I don't believe so, no. I think we were all math science majors and, you know, and that. And I'm not, I can't. Well, yeah, actually, um, you know, it's kind of the same format for universities now, um. If you're an education major, that's your major. And then you take science courses. Whereas if you're a science major, you don't take any education courses, you just take science, right? So that's, that was the model for all of us.

BROWNING: [00:11:24] The, uh, what kind of facility was it where you were trained?

SMITH: [00:11:28] Where we trained? Well, like I said, it was this kind of compound way out in the country and, um, uh, you know, uh, with, uh, squat toilets and no running water in the, in the houses. Nice little houses. And, um, we had, uh, some people that brought in food for us, so it was kind of primitive. We were a little bit far out from the town, so we had to have the bikes to get into the little town.

BROWNING: [00:11:51] I see. And what was the little name of the little town?

SMITH: [00:11:55] Oh, Tuaran. Tuaran in Sabah.

BROWNING: [00:11:58] Okay. And who was running the training program?

SMITH: [00:12:02] It was staff. And then of course, there were local staff. One of those people was on the Facebook page now, which is kind of amazing to me because, you know, in those days when we left, I mean, we left, right? It was, you know, there was hardly any way to get in touch with people except by, by mail. But now, you know, I see their pictures and it's kind of fun.

BROWNING: [00:12:23] Mm hmm. Um. Your schedule in training, how did that work out?

SMITH: [00:12:30] Yeah, it was good. We had a, you know, the language and we had teacher training, kind of a, you know, rudimentary, you know, how to make a lesson plan and, and a little bit about, you know, the system in Malaysia is based on the, the English system, right? So I taught form four, form five, which is roughly 10th and 11th grades. Except that sometimes the students have to go for bridge class for a couple of years, which is language. So after, say, sixth grade, they might have a couple extra years in there to try to shift over from Chinese to English or Malay to English or whatever. Um, so anyway, um, that was our training, it was a mixture.

SMITH: [00:13:11] And we had of course, we had a homestay, I had a wonderful homestay. Um, and the people were really, they were very nice to me. They were always, they, every couple of months, as you know, through the two, through the years I was there. Every few months they would come and take me to something or a party or take me to their house. So that was very nice.

BROWNING: [00:13:28] Mm hmm. So you're, you really didn't have to have any language training or did you?

SMITH: [00:13:36] Oh, yeah, yeah, we had Bahasa. Yeah, I had language. Yeah, yeah. But when I taught in the English speaking school, I didn't really practice it as much. Um, and then, but, but then it's funny, you know, Malaysia's, you know, they had so, so many. I mean, they had the advantage of having really high level of English. But yet my school a few years after that turned into a Malay language school. So somehow, you know, they have this, you know, kind of flip flopping where they, you know, you know, they have the English, but then they say, well, we want Bahasa, we want Malay language. And so it's kind of, um, you know, they kind of gave away that advantage because then, you know, now, I mean, anybody that speaks English, right, in the, you know, the high tech world is, it's a very big advantage. So anyway.

BROWNING: [00:14:22] Mm hmm. What was, uh, the method of teaching language, conversation?

SMITH: [00:14:28] Yeah. No, it was the, uh. Yeah, it was the repair repeat, the basic Peace Corps. Um, there's probably a term for that, but, yeah, we would sit in a circle and repeat, repeat, repeat. So that was really good. I really learned it very well.

BROWNING: [00:14:43] Mm hmm. Did you do any student teaching?

SMITH: [00:14:46] Yep, yep. We had a week at a school. Yes.

BROWNING: [00:14:53] And did you feel confident going into your assignment that you were?

SMITH: [00:15:00] Yeah, I did, yeah, I liked it. Um, my school was kind of the, kind of the odd school out for some reason. Um, there were kind of quotes the better schools in that area. And my school was, um, when, when I first got there, we were sharing with another school, which was kind of the, you know, the upper, you know, the more, more advanced school. And they had, they had the facility in the morning and we had it from 1:00 to 6:00. And 1:00 to 6:00 in Malaysia is like killer, right? You know, the heat is just unbelievable. And then about six months into it, the new school was ready and it was brand new. It was beautiful. And it was built with funds from the World Bank. See, Malaysia in those days was developing. And so they were, you know, using this World Bank funds to, to expand their, their school system.

SMITH: [00:15:47] So the school is still there. They had a compound for the teachers, that's gone. There's like a ten story building in that spot right now. So it's kind of kind of, you know, weird to think about it, that my little house is gone. It was brand, everything, like I said, was brand new in those days. New equipment, all new wonderful science equipment, unbelievable science equipment. Much of which, you know, we didn't even, we couldn't even use. But it was all there.

BROWNING: [00:16:15] Did anybody from Peace Corps Washington show up during your training?

SMITH: [00:16:21] I don't know, I don't remember anybody. Um, I mean, we had the, the local, um, you know, our, our director. I'm not even sure the country director ever came. I don't believe so. I think one of the, we had, like, a state director or something, that was there for a while. And then he left, and then I don't think there was anybody in my state that was Peace Corps. I think it was, uh, Kuching in Sarawak, the next state, had, had an office. We never had a Peace Corps office where I was.

BROWNING: [00:16:52] Where was your, uh, assigned school in relation to the training site?

SMITH: [00:16:59] Oh, Kota Kinabalu was, is the capital, and Tuaran was, say, 25 miles north of Kota Kinabalu. And so the other volunteers were scattered all over the state.

BROWNING: [00:17:15] So did you, did they ask if you were interested in a particular area or you just take whatever?

SMITH: [00:17:23] Yeah. It was just. Yeah, yeah. Like I said, you know, when they asked me to go to this, you know, side group and I said yes. And so we were in Kuala Lumpur for a day or two, and then we just went, then we flew over to, um, to Borneo, to Sabah.

BROWNING: [00:17:40] And you said you, you spoke with a psychologist in California before you left?

SMITH: [00:17:46] Right, right.

BROWNING: [00:17:46] Was there any psychological component to the training in country or no?

SMITH: [00:17:50] I don't remember anything like that. No, no.

BROWNING: [00:17:54] Um, was everybody that came over, did they all successfully complete the training?

SMITH: [00:17:59] Well, like I said, the one young lady that was expelled. And one guy wanted to go to Nepal, he was determined to go and, um, you know, he, he got, he got himself transferred. He finished up successfully in Nepal. And one guy was kind of let go and one other guy something. He just, he never finished. So most, like I said, most of us, that was, that was. Nine of us finished out of the original 14.

BROWNING: [00:18:25] Mm hmm. Finish the training or finished?

SMITH: [00:18:29] No, finished the two years. Yeah.

BROWNING: [00:18:30] Oh, the two years. Right. Okay. Did you have any contact with home during the training period?

SMITH: [00:18:36] Just letters, just, you know, airmail.

BROWNING: [00:18:38] Okay.

SMITH: [00:18:38] That's it. Yeah. That's all.

BROWNING: [00:18:40] Uh huh.

SMITH: [00:18:42] Yep.

BROWNING: [00:18:42] And did you become friends with any of the folks in your training group?

SMITH: [00:18:49] Oh, yeah. Yeah, they're on the Facebook page. Yeah, but now they're all scattered around the country. We, we got together a couple of years ago, so.

BROWNING: [00:18:58] Uh huh. And how long did the training last until?

SMITH: [00:19:01] The three months. Regular, right, three months.

BROWNING: [00:19:04] Mm hmm. Did, at the end of it, did you have a swearing in ceremony or did everybody just say?

SMITH: [00:19:09] Oh gee I can't remember that at all. Sorry. No.

BROWNING: [00:19:13] All right.

SMITH: [00:19:13] But you know, you were saying about our contact. When my grandmother died, you know, they don't send you home for grandmothers, right? And so they came to tell me and, um, so I had to call home. So in 27 months, I tell my, I tell my students this at Wesleyan, where I teach, that I called home one time in 27 months. And in those days, what you had to do was, well, there was a phone at the school, but I, you know, I didn't know how to use it. So one of the other teachers said, you can use my phone. So I went to her house and I had to make an appointment. You had to make an appointment with the overseas operator. And so I made the appointment and the appointment's for the next day from noon to five. And so I went back to her house the next day and waited, you know, and the operator calls you to make that connection because it all had to be, you know, literally plugged in, you know, everybody had to, to make the connection. And I must have paid her for it. And I can't remember how I paid for it. But that was one call I made in 27 months when I called home.

BROWNING: [00:20:16] Um. So the flight was from where in California to where?

SMITH: [00:20:25] Yeah, that was, that was strange. Yeah, it was, um, San Jose, San Francisco, I guess, airport. And then we flew to Alaska and there was a stopover in Alaska. But, you know, we always kind of laughed because it was an open bar flight. Like who, who planned that, you know? And some of them got pretty. I didn't drink, you know, I might have had, I had a little bit, but some of them were pretty drunk.

SMITH: [00:20:49] And then, um, then we flew over Taiwan and to get to KL [Kuala Lumpur], I believe we were over Vietnam and some of them said there were explosions. But I don't know if that's really true. But, you know, the war was still going on when we flew there. And you couldn't fly over Russia. You couldn't fly over China in those days.

Right now, the polar routes, you know, you go from. Well, the last time we went to China is Detroit to, to Shanghai is like only 14 hours. And I know we were on that plane for like 24 hours. And that, you know, because of the stops. And we stopped in Taiwan too, that that was the second. So there was a there were at least two stops on that, that flight.

BROWNING: [00:21:30] What was the arrival at the airport like? Is this, the airport was Kuala Lumpur?

SMITH: [00:21:36] Kuala Lumpur, yeah. I'm sorry, I don't remember that. I remember waking up in the, you know, in the middle of the night, of course, jet lag and the smells and the people and, and it was this kind of old fashioned hotel. I do remember that the, the old, the old style hotel where they had us. And I, you know, I was groggy and my roommate and we were kind of groggy and we woke up in the middle of the night and kind of looked around, and I think we went outside and walked around a little bit. But, you know, that was our first impression was, you know, jet lag.

BROWNING: [00:22:04] Mm hmm. So you were able to get by pretty much just using English.

SMITH: [00:22:14] Yeah. All Malaysia is very. And it's like I said, especially in those days because it was a colony up till '63. It was a British colony. And um, so there was, you know, you know, most people spoke English. Yeah. In the bazaar, you could get, you know, you could, you could use your Malay, but you really didn't need it that much. And like I said, my school was all English speaking school, English speaking, you know, teachers. The instruction was all in English.

BROWNING: [00:22:42] And at your school, you were the only volunteer there?

SMITH: [00:22:46] Yeah, yeah, yeah. There was a Canadian, a CUSO, Canadian University Services Overseas. And, you know, she, she had just departed. I, when I went there for the visit, um, you know, I stayed with her and then she was done. She was kind of a funny, funny lady,

but, um, then she went to Indonesia and she was determined that she was going to start a preschool or something there. And of course, that didn't work out for her, so I don't know what she did after that.

BROWNING: [00:23:14] And while you were at your school, um, you had. Yeah, they had a telephone in case of an emergency?

SMITH: [00:23:22] Yeah, I guess. But, you know, like I said, you know, it was, you know, it wasn't for me to use, of course. So, but when I went there, you know, form four and form five is, you know, like I said, the high school and there were supposed to have been three science teachers and pretty much quickly, like a few months in, the chemistry teacher left. So I kind of filled in on the physics side. And then the other guy kind of took a little bit of the chemistry, because I was, chemistry was just not my thing at all. Neither was physics, but I kind of muddled through it. So I taught, I taught basically everything. Biology, human and social biology, English. I taught English for a while. I taught literature, I taught commerce. You know, anything that they, you know, they needed a fill-in for, I would just do it. So it was kind of, kind of intensive.

BROWNING: [00:24:09] How many students did you have in your classes?

SMITH: [00:24:11] Well, that was kind of funny because, um, form three, kind of like what I said. This school was kind of, you know, the kind of the extra school. It's kind of, you know, it was a government school, but it didn't get the best students. And after form three, which is what, ninth grade, they take an exam. And so the form three at this school had been, say, 150 kids. And that exam, literally ninth grade, only in my year, um, 30 students passed to go to form four. And just think of that. All those kids were done with, they were done. That was it. There was no more education for them. And that's ninth grade. How old is that? You know, roughly, you know, 14, 15.

BROWNING: [00:24:55] 14, 15 years old.

SMITH: [00:24:56] So the form four science, I had like 20, and the form, 15, say in the form four arts had maybe another 15 or 16 kids. So there were two, two form fours. And then, then, then, then of course, I followed them to form five. And then they took the, the Cambridge exam, the C that's, that's the O level exams, ordinary level. And by the way that's what, you know, they, Princess Diana, they always, you know, kind of, um, snarkily said, you know, she couldn't pass her O levels. Well, that's what I was teaching too. So the Cambridge O level exams.

SMITH: [00:25:33] And out of my, out of the whole, say, 30 kids, none of them scored well enough to go to a university. A couple of them made a good enough score to go to teacher college, which is, you know, in British system, college is not the thing. You know, you go to uni, you go to university, right? And so none of my students made it. Um, so it was kind of, you know, disheartening. But, you know, that's, that was the system in Malaysia. So that's based on the British system, like I said.

BROWNING: [00:26:04] How close was the nearest, uh, Peace Corps volunteer?

SMITH: [00:26:08] Yeah, Joanne was in Tuaran. And, you know, I, you know, I tell the story, you know, sometimes, one time I, uh, came home and there was a note on the door, and the note said that Bruce. Bruce was another volunteer nearby. That Bruce had stopped by and he left a note and he said, it was so ridiculous. It was something like Steve said, that Joanne said, that she wanted to meet me at our favorite restaurant on a Saturday at noon, and I showed up and she was there. Okay. And that's how we communicated, you know, that she told one and one told the other and the other told. And that's how, that's how we got. You know, somehow we made it work without, no phones. You know, we never, I never used a phone.

SMITH: [00:26:48] Um, the neighbor had a television. I never had a radio. And again, that was a British system. You had to have a, um, what do they call, license in the British system to have a television or radio? And so we never, never bothered to do anything like that. So it was kind of, you know, you were cut off. We got mail but that was about it. So.

BROWNING: [00:27:09] Did they have a library in town that you could get books from?

SMITH: [00:27:13] Yeah. Uh, yeah. I must have gotten some books from. Yeah, it was a British consulate that had a library. That's where it was. So that's where we, you know, if anything were to happen, we were supposed to talk to the British Consul. Uh, he was very nice. So they used to invite us for things once in a while, to the British consulate.

BROWNING: [00:27:31] Did they have a movie theater in your?

SMITH: [00:27:33] Oh, yeah. Yeah. Gee, uh, the one movie played The Godfather for six months, I think. Uh, but they, they really emphasized, you know, of course, on the weekends, the big boon pong and all the big theaters played the Chinese movies, right? And then the Hindi movies. And, uh, once in a while, an American movie would come on like a Thursday night. And so we would rush to go to the, to the movie on. I think we saw The Way We Were and a couple other things, you know, that actually did make it over there. But like I said, it would play on a Thursday and that was it. You know, if you didn't, if you missed it, it didn't come back. It didn't play again. So.

BROWNING: [00:28:12] What were your, uh, living conditions while you were?

SMITH: [00:28:16] Well, like I said, I had a brand new house. It was beautiful. It was a nice little, you know, no air conditioning. It had, you know, water and, you know, sewer, of course, but, um, you know, screened in bedrooms and, um, you know, kitchen. And it was a kind of nice little wooden house, up on stilts, of course, you know, um, to keep, you know, animals and bugs away. And so we, you know, I had. It was a three bedroom house, and they put two other teachers in with me and the Peace Corps, of course, paid for that. So those, those two ladies were happy because they didn't pay, you know, the year they lived with me. So that was kind of nice. And it was, like I said, it was a little compound, ten houses built purpose for, for teachers at that school.

BROWNING: [00:28:59] Um, were the, were your roommates, um, nationals of the country?

SMITH: [00:29:05] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, they were Sabahans. Yeah. Yeah.

BROWNING: [00:29:08] Okay.

SMITH: [00:29:08] And it was, it was division three government housing, right? There was one division one house, which was very nice and. Oh, no, I had division two house that was kind of in the middle. Then division three was like a little bit less, less nice, you know. So they had it all, all worked out for government housing.

BROWNING: [00:29:26] But did it have electricity?

SMITH: [00:29:28] Oh yeah. Yeah. Mm hmm.

BROWNING: [00:29:29] Was it furnished?

SMITH: [00:29:30] Yep. Yep.

BROWNING: [00:29:31] So. So would you say it was, uh, pretty comfortable accommodation?

SMITH: [00:29:37] Oh, it was very nice. Yeah. Yeah. But like I said, there's no air conditioning and those. I think now there's malls and everything in that, in that city. It's like amazing. But that's what I said when, uh, when Joanne and I would go to this, it was *istimewa*, uh, restaurant, and that was air conditioned. That was like the one hour a week that that we would sit in the air conditioning. Um, but you get used to it in Malaysia, you know, it's very hot during the day, but it cools off at night. So it's not like, like North Carolina. You cannot sleep in here in North Carolina at night with, you know, without air. But over there, I mean, the evenings were 70. There was a couple of nights I might have put a sweater on because it got so cool. And of course, in the tropics, the, you know, the sun. What's the, you know, I guess, Kipling. The sun

crashes down. I forget the direct quote. But there's hardly any dusk and hardly any dawn, you know? So it's like really dark, you know, and gets cooled off really fast at night. So it was very comfortable.

BROWNING: [00:30:38] Did you do all your shopping and cooking and cleaning?

SMITH: [00:30:42] Yeah, yeah, we did all the shop. Yeah, I learned how, I cooked a lot. Dory cooked and our roommates all cooked. Yeah. But it was, you know, but, but we'd go out and eat a lot because, you know, the *kadais* were right there, you know, the little shops, and you'd get *nasan maki*. *Makan nasi*, I said it backwards. Um, and you just order, like, the set dinner, and they would bring you the rice and a couple of dishes and it was kind of, you know, just, oh, just give me whatever you have, you know? So we would go out a lot for that. Um, we went to dim sum once in a while. That was fun, too.

BROWNING: [00:31:15] Mm hmm. Was the, uh, what kind of, uh, cooking was it? Uh.

SMITH: [00:31:22] Uh, Malaysia's amazing. Um, you know, the people there were, of course, uh, it's, uh, Cantonese based, like, um, Hokkien and Teochew Chinese people emigrated there. And of course, the Indian, you know, from India, the Indian cooking's, you know, uh, unbelievable. I mean, the curries you get here are not, not, not hot. Okay. When you say, they say make it hot, it's, it's not. I mean, and over there. So that's the Indian cooking. The Malaysian, the Chinese cooking, um, and it's just unbelievable. The amazing, you know, um, you know, when you talk about, you know, Asian restaurants in the U.S., it's not the same, right? Because the Malaysian cooking over there is just unbelievable.

BROWNING: [00:32:07] Did you have any health issues? Uh.

SMITH: [00:32:11] No, I never did. Uh, you had to be careful, though. Um, um, I would wear long skirts a lot because, um, I would get, um, like, rashes from, you know, you know, going out, you know, sitting on seats and things, you know. So I kind of stopped wearing short skirts because, you know, or long pants, we would, we would wear long pants a lot.

But I never had any problems at all. No. Um, we, we were given the, it was a pill and I should remember the name of it, but you would take it every day against malaria and, um. But where I was, I didn't need it because it was in the city. And I don't think, I'm not sure if any of them ever took it on a daily basis.

SMITH: [00:32:55] But, you know, the family I mentioned, um, that that was my homestay. Um, you know, like I said, they had been, you know, coming to, you know, get me for different things, like a party or, you know, visit or something. And there was a stretch there when they didn't come at all. And I was like, because it was getting towards the end of my service and I was getting worried because I had no way to get in touch with them. I mean, I didn't, they didn't have a phone. I mean, and he was a government official. He kind of moved around. And, and then finally, you know, after this long stretch, he came and he took me, you know, back to the family's home. And it was a different place, which, you know, I had no way of knowing, you know, that they had moved there.

SMITH: [00:33:32] And the reason that they hadn't contacted me for this like six months, say, was that the whole family was down with malaria for months. And this is a government official. So it was kind of, you know, it's like a bad flu. The mother, a couple of kids, it was, you know, to me it was like a shock because here he was like a you might say a, I don't know, a township not, well, maybe even more like a, not a governor exactly. But, um, kind of a mid to upper level government official in government housing and yet his family was exposed to malaria at some point, you know, and they were really sick.

BROWNING: [00:34:13] So, um, total number of teachers on the faculty there?

SMITH: [00:34:18] Oh, my school would have been, uh, 30 or 40. We had an imam and an imani, uh, religion teachers. This was a government school, and there was religion and the mosque, Islam. You know, the Muslim kids would go for their religion hour, and the rest of them would sit in the classroom. You know, this is, you know, British system, of course, is prefect system. So the teachers never had to do anything.

You know, the prefects would, would kind of discipline, you know, you know, they cleaned the classrooms and all that. Um, so while, while the, uh, Muslim kids were over with the religion class, you know, the other kids were kind of hanging out in the classroom.

SMITH: [00:34:57] Um, we had, we had a teachers' room, so, we had a desk in the teachers room, and then we'd go from classroom to classroom. So we, you know, the teachers never had to, you know, like, like you think of American teachers, you know, impose discipline or whatever. I had to collect, um, um, uh, tuition. This is a government school. And my students were always in arrears. They never paid. They never paid up.

BROWNING: [00:35:20] There were, uh, they were staying at home and coming to school every day, or was it a boarding school?

SMITH: [00:35:26] Yeah, some, but we had some boarders. Yeah. And that's the other thing. I mean, there were no adults in these, these dorms. There were dorms. Uh, there were about 8 or 9 students in each room. And there were these long halls, they were exposed. They were like the second, uh, no hallways, right? They were just outside, um, and young, young girls and boys. And I never heard of no problems at all. And like I said, there was no adults over there. Um, so the prefects ran the, the dorms as far as I could tell. So it was very strange situation. But some of them, you know, like I said, you know, um, they, they were really needed at home, you know, they really had to be, you know, they couldn't, couldn't, um, you know, when they, when they didn't make the grade in that ninth grade exam, that was fine with their family. You know, they just went home to work. Help out at home.

BROWNING: [00:36:19] As far as what you taught, was there a set curriculum or a text?

SMITH: [00:36:25] Yeah, we have, in fact, I brought them today. There were a couple books. They were in English, New Biology for Tropical Schools. And again, that was a British publication, right? So I'm not sure what kind of textbooks they use, but they just gave me the book and said teach it. So I had to figure out my own curriculum. So they didn't, there

was no guidance at all on that. But like I said, the Cambridge exam. Uh, one of the parts of the Cambridge exam was a lab exam. And it was very strange because Cambridge, England, would send these instructions. And so you'd get the first set of instructions and it would say, assemble your lab and get ball bearings or something. And so I'd have to find, you know, the pieces that it would say in this booklet.

SMITH: [00:37:11] And then it said you had to, you had to close up all the windows, you had to cover all the windows. So I had to get black, um, uh, cloth. And this is the tropics, okay? When you cover those windows with black cloth, you know, and I had to work in there and it was just roasting. And then a couple of weeks later, you get another instruction that would say, get rulers or something. Then I had to find the rulers and then, and then. And the idea was, is that the students then on the day of the exam, they would be told, you know, to manipulate whatever it was like, um, in the physics exam, it was, I think, I think it was they were bouncing the, the ball bearings or something and measuring the energy. Um, but, but again, you know, um, to get that put together, it was just unbelievable because I, you know, I had to find all this stuff and I, you know, I was kind of, you know.

SMITH: [00:38:02] The Ministry of Education kind of helped, but not really. Um, and I had to put together the one for physics and one for biology for the kids. And, and they just couldn't, they just weren't. You know, it was funny. You'd think of high school kids here, like, there would be a high school kid who had studied astronomy or a kid that had read, you know, all Tolkien or something. But my students there, they didn't, they didn't have toys. You know, you think of Lego, you know how boys have Legos or girls have something, um, they had no crafts. They had no. You know, it was very simple culture somehow in that sense. And so you couldn't count on a student who knew how to do something or who had an interest, like I said, in astronomy or whatever. They just didn't. They were, you know, just country kids, you know, this, you know, very simple life.

SMITH: [00:38:51] So anyway, the point of my story is, is that when they had to do these, these, um, practical exams, well, between me and, you

know, between me not, you know, having so much difficulty putting the exam together and then they just, they just couldn't do it, you know. The, you know, their results were not good for the physical exam, for the practical exams, they called those.

BROWNING: [00:39:14] Did you give quizzes and homework?

SMITH: [00:39:18] I didn't, no, I didn't really have to. I did it at some points, but there was no, no rule about homework or tests or anything. No. I think I did, I can't remember exactly, but I must have done some kind of quizzes. Um, but there was no rules or anything. There was no, you know, minimum. Just get them ready for this Cambridge exam.

BROWNING: [00:39:41] So that was everybody's objective to try to?

SMITH: [00:39:44] For the O-levels. Yeah, yeah. And then, then, then if they got to form six then they would take A-levels, which is advanced. And that was, that was really university level work.

BROWNING: [00:39:57] What was the school calendar like?

SMITH: [00:40:01] It was very nice. We started in January and it was three semesters. Three, uh, three sessions, I guess. Um, and in between would be a two week break, which is really nice. And we were done in November, say? Mid November. And that was the end of the school year, was November. So that worked out great.

BROWNING: [00:40:19] The school year was more like a calendar year.

SMITH: [00:40:21] Yeah, exactly.

BROWNING: [00:40:21] Instead of overlapping like we do.

SMITH: [00:40:23] Yeah. And then we had these two week breaks that we traveled. I went to Indonesia, I went to Thailand, I went to Singapore.

BROWNING: [00:40:32] Well, that was good.

SMITH: [00:40:32] Yeah, that was a great part. Yeah. And all around, all around Sabah too. There was, you know, we made trips around, around the state as well.

BROWNING: [00:40:42] And you didn't handle any discipline?

SMITH: [00:40:44] No. No, teachers didn't do anything like that. Nope. Never. I never had any. I had problems with one boy. One time he was kind of mouthing off to me and the and the other, the Chinese lady said, oh, he's, you know, he's different, he's from the north, and his family. What, the north of China, you know? And his, his, probably, his, you know, it was like a hundred years ago that, you know, his family emigrated. Uh, but she was still kind of saying it's kind of like, you know, Italians talk about Sicilians or something. It was very weird. Uh, but, but again, you know, I didn't have any, you know, it was no big deal. I mean, he was just mouthing off to me, and somehow it just went away. So.

BROWNING: [00:41:23] So, uh, once you got to the school and started teaching, were you fairly comfortable right away, or did it take a while to get comfortable?

SMITH: [00:41:34] Well, it was hard. Well, it was hard because I hadn't taught at all, right? And of course, you know, I had the textbooks, so I kind of had to figure it out myself. So I would make a lesson plan every day. Um, so. And like I said, I would teach a lot. And the physics, I wasn't supposed to teach physics at all. I was supposed to be biology. And so, you know, it was all these different subjects. So I spent a lot of, I worked hard on, on the, you know, trying to trying to make it.

SMITH: [00:42:00] So, um, one of the I tell you, one of the hardest things I had to teach in physics was static electricity, because, you know, now, you know, how would you explain it? Like you would say, well, at night when you have a flannel nightgown on, like you see the sparks? Well, they don't wear flannel. There's no sparks. It's, you know, it's, it's 100% humidity almost all the time. Or, or, you know, you walk across a rug.

Well, there's no rugs, you know, in those days especially. Now there may be, there's a lot more houses like that. Um, so I had a lot of trouble with the electricity part because it was hard to, you know, make the, you know, how you try to make a simple example and kind of build up to it. And so that was that was kind of, you know, I was kind of perturbed or perplexed, I guess, about that, because I couldn't think of a way to explain.

SMITH: [00:42:49] Oh, they were okay with snow. I mean, they knew all about snow and ice. And, you know, when we were doing the, you know, ice type, type things in physics, but static electricity. No idea what that was. Yeah.

BROWNING: [00:43:02] So did you, uh, get feedback from anybody like the administrators of the school or anything?

SMITH: [00:43:09] No, not really. Uh, the one, the second principal didn't like me very much. I don't know why. Uh, when I went on a trip to Indonesia, um, kind of a, I don't know, quixotic, uh, journey for this, uh, Canadian volunteer asked me to do something in Indonesia. So I went and I tried to talk to the people that she wanted me to see. And I had gone to Bali, and I got on a train in Bali, and I went, went back to Jogjakarta, where these people were, to try to, you know, to talk to them that that Wendy was trying to get back into the country and Wendy couldn't come. And I was trying to explain all this.

SMITH: [00:43:44] But anyway, um, so I'm trying to get back home and I got to a place called Pontianak in Kalimantan, Indonesia, and I was on an airline. It was, uh, Merpati, which is an Indonesian airline. And so we flew to this, this city, and the plane was supposed to go on to Kuching and then I would go home. And they got to the airport and they said, oh, we're not going to Malaysia today. And I'm like, what? And they said, oh, we'll go next week. The plane's broken. I said, well, what? You know, and I didn't have, I had no credit card. I had no, no checkbook. I, you know, I had some, I had kind of spent all my cash because I thought I'd be home the next day. And they said, well, you

can go back to, you can go back to Jakarta and wait for a week till the plane goes.

SMITH: [00:44:28] I said, I don't know, I can't go back. They said, well, you can go, you can go to the embassy. I said, I'm not going to the embassy. So the people in this little town put me up for a week and we stayed. And there was actually two other travelers. They kind of hooked on to me because I was making such a fuss, you know, and they were Americans, and they kind of said, we're with her. And I said, I'm not going back. And so then they put us up, the three of us, for a week. And I, we lived in Indonesia.

SMITH: [00:44:56] So anyway, the point of the story was, I was a week late getting back to school, so my friends had to tell the, they. My friends, you know, the teachers at the school, you know, the local teachers told, told this principal I was dead. Oh, she's dead. Oh, she went to Indonesia. She's, she's got to be dead, right? That's why she's late. So I said thanks, thanks a lot. But anyway, so I was a week late. Oh. And I tried to I, I tried to send a telegram and I paid a lot. I paid almost all the, all the cash I had left, basically. And it never got to the school. So somebody took my money and pretended to send a telegram.

BROWNING: [00:45:33] Did you ever get any, uh, complaints or compliments?

SMITH: [00:45:38] Um, you know, it's funny. You know, they kind of, you're kind of there, you're kind of okay. Yeah, I mean, they were nice to me. Yeah. Everybody was very nice. I had some, a lot of good letters when I got, you know, got back. People, you know, we miss you, Miss Patricia and all that. So it was fun.

BROWNING: [00:45:54] Were there any, uh, after school projects that you participated in?

SMITH: [00:46:00] Yeah. See, that's what I was saying. You know, there wasn't, um, I can't, you know, nothing really. Yeah. You know, like I said, you know, when you, you know, a high school in the U.S., you'd

think there'd be like an astronomy club or, you know, something. No, there was no, no. No co-curricular at all.

SMITH: [00:46:20] There was, we had sports day. That was the only thing that they had at the school, and the college. The school was divided into houses, kind of like Harry Potter, except it was Red House, Blue House. So I was in Red House. And so we had sports day and it's all field sports. It was anything that you could do like out, out with no equipment, basically just a ball. And so then they competed, jumping. And we were the, we were the, you know, the faculty, the teachers would take, you know, measurements and times and stuff. And we would do that for other schools. I did that a lot, you know, like a, um, official of a sports day. So I have all the little buttons from, from being the official. And that was about it.

SMITH: [00:47:05] Uh, Muhammad Ali came to, uh, Sabah the year I was there. And, you know, he had been at the "Thrilla in Manila," and, um, so that was a big problem. Like here, who did he fight? Was it Foreman?

BROWNING: [00:47:18] Frazier.

SMITH: [00:47:19] Frazier. Okay, so, um, Frazier's, is Frazier white or Black? I can't remember. He's Black. And that's, that was it. And Muhammad Ali is Black. So the teachers at the school were just, uh, they can't figure out who I, me, Patricia, should be for. Because you got to be for Muhammad Ali. But yet Frazier. And it was, and I was like, I don't care, you know, I don't care.

SMITH: [00:47:45] Okay, so Muhammad Ali's coming to Sabah, so we spent a day practicing for Muhammad Ali to come to Sabah. And so we were out on the streets and all the lining up the road, and all the kids are supposed to be waving flags for Muhammad Ali's arrival in Sabah. So we practiced that a day. And then the next day Muhammad Ali came and we were out on the streets and we waved the flag. And the next day, school was canceled because everybody was sick from being out on the, you just don't stand in the heat. Nobody does that, right? So

everybody, so we had three days off of school when Muhammad Ali came to Sabah. One to practice, one when he came, and the next day because everybody was in, you know, dead tired from being out in the sun.

BROWNING: [00:48:30] So any other opportunities to spend time with students outside of class other than sports day?

SMITH: [00:48:37] See, that was just, that was it. Yeah. Then everybody went home. And like I said, this was kind of the, you know, like I said, the poorer school, you know, poorer school, uh, in those days so that, you know, just kind of the extra school that, you know, that they didn't really, you know, spend a lot of time on, except that we had this beautiful new building that was very nice.

BROWNING: [00:48:57] Did you feel like you got to know the students?

SMITH: [00:49:00] Yeah, yeah. Pretty good. Yeah. Um, they were, they were, you know, high school kids, right? And like I said, there weren't that many. I mean, I didn't have that many in my classes because, you know, so many of them had, you know, failed the, the exam that, that year. It was kind of a scandal, really, not a scandal, but, you know, sad in a way, you know, that they had lost so many kids.

BROWNING: [00:49:24] So you had one group of kids for a year?

SMITH: [00:49:29] Right, form four and then. Yeah. And then I followed them.

BROWNING: [00:49:32] They'd take the exam.

SMITH: [00:49:32] Yeah.

BROWNING: [00:49:32] And the second year?

SMITH: [00:49:34] No, I was with the form. Well, I taught four, I taught all the science, I taught all the biology for form four and form five. But my homeroom was, was four, and then I followed them to five. And then,

then I was done, right? That was my second year, and that was all. So that when they finished my, when, when my homeroom finished, then I was done.

BROWNING: [00:49:55] Did you become friendly with any of the host country nationals?

SMITH: [00:50:01] Yeah. Dory. Dory was my, was what? Lived with me. Yeah. Uh, Dory was kind of interesting. She had also this O-level exam. She didn't do very well. Dory was really smart. Dory could speak, like, six languages. She could converse, you know, and she could read a couple of languages. But, I mean, like I said, that O-level exam was really hard. And so she said, you know, she wanted to live with me so that she could, she wanted to kind of get away from the family because of course, when she was home, she had to do, you know, work, you know, basically taking care of the little kids and everything. So she lived with me, and the idea was she was going to study and take the exams again. And she did, but she never passed. But now she's got, her husband recently died and, um, she had four, four kids. So she went after, you know, she grew up.

BROWNING: [00:50:52] Was how was your income, uh, lifestyle compared to your counterparts?

SMITH: [00:50:59] Oh, it was really nice. I mean, I had 400 ringgit a month. It was, you know, which is, you know, basically what the other. Uh, but, but there was a fellow, you know, like I said, in the little houses, you know, that government housing, um, and he had his sister and brother with him, and he had to pay for them to go to the school, right? He was a teacher at the school and he had to pay tuition for the for his brother and sister. He had to buy their uniforms. He had to buy all their books. He had to buy their, their paper, right, you know, booklets, papers, and pens. Um, he had, he had to feed them, right, in his. And he did all of that on the same salary that I had just for me.

SMITH: [00:51:39] So, you know, when you, when you think about, you know, the other teachers, you know, especially like I said, Basu Karen, he

had, he had a, you know, a hard, hard deal in those days trying to help his brother and sister along, you know. So he used about the same amount of money, you know, for that, that I had. And like I said, I took these trips and, you know, Indonesia and, you know, and we went to Chiang Mai in Thailand. Boy, was that nice. So.

BROWNING: [00:52:09] What was, uh, the political situation have any impact on your work?

SMITH: [00:52:15] Not on, no, not for, but like I said, that one young lady that was, uh, was involved with, um, you know, her friend that was the governor's daughter, you know, she was asked to leave. So. And I think it was because of, you know, being friendly with the wrong political, political, you know. And it was kind of, you know, not, I mean, what did she ever, I mean, she couldn't possibly have done anything, right? But and she was devastated. She cried and cried. She came to my house. And you know, what could I do? You know, they, they asked her to leave and she didn't have a work permit. She had to go. So.

BROWNING: [00:52:52] In terms of your health, you said you enjoyed the food.

SMITH: [00:52:56] Mm hmm. Oh my goodness. Yeah. I'm going back in, um, in May, May and June, for a week. So I'm going to Sabah in 2017.

BROWNING: [00:53:07] No. No sickness or medical treatment or anything?

SMITH: [00:53:11] No, I was never, no, I was fine. I had a, um, a impacted wisdom tooth so I had to have that done there. Boy, that was, you know. Wisdom teeth are no fun at all. So I had had one of those done while I was in Malaysia.

BROWNING: [00:53:25] So that, that was your worst health challenge?

SMITH: [00:53:30] Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

BROWNING: [00:53:32] So did you feel isolated at all or?

SMITH: [00:53:36] No, I was in Kota Kinabalu, so I was, it's a city. I took tai chi. I would go on a bus every day. It was three days a week and that was really good. It was all in Chinese. And then, um, you know, so there was one guy who would try to, there was a lot of people who didn't understand, you know, because it was all like philosophical, you know, so this one guy would try to kind of translate for, for the most of us who didn't understand. So he would, you know, talk about the, you know, what chi? And, you know, and so it was, it was the old school. I mean, you would stand there and do one pose for like 20 minutes, you know, and go through all the, all the steps. So I took that for about nine months. That was very nice.

BROWNING: [00:54:17] Mm hmm. Um, but um, anything in the culture that, uh, you reacted to that you thought was strange or unusual or.

SMITH: [00:54:32] Hmm. No. Well, I don't know. Let me think here. Um, well, one of the things that I don't know when the. The family that was my host family, um, and even Dory's family, too, it was kind of like I thought of it like, as kid lib. Like I would go to. Liberation. I would go to, to see them. And they'd say, oh, where's Edith? And oh, well, Edith. Oh, she's living with the cousins for, for the half, for 20, for a couple of weeks or something, you know. Like this little kid like, oh, she doesn't want to stay here. So she goes to live with somebody else for a while. I thought that was kind of funny. It's cute in a way, because, you know, of course, families are so big and so close, you know? So if a kid wants to move somewhere, they just.

SMITH: [00:55:12] And like I said, Dory living with me. You know, she just, she just up stakes and went to live with somebody else for a while. And she was, she, she was only like, what, 16 or 17 when she, the year she lived with me, um, in my house. So, um, it's like, okay, I'm going to go live somewhere else now. It's like, you know, America, you know, you wouldn't think of, you know, your kid just going somewhere else to live because they got, you know, because they wanted to. So that, that was kind of cute.

BROWNING: [00:55:40] Did, uh, um, you write letters?

SMITH: [00:55:44] Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. And in fact, I have all the letters I wrote to my mother. Um, and I'm in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, and the little newspaper is kind of funny because they'll get a features editor and they'll say, oh, let's do a, let's find a Peace Corps volunteer to interview. And they find me. So I've been in that paper like three times. But anyway, this last one, um, they sent a photographer out and I had, you know, some stuff there for, you know, the photographer to look at. And it was this, it was a box of the letters I had sent to my mother. And she looked at them and she said, your mother saved these? And she was like this young, this was like a couple of years ago. And this, this photographer, this young lady. And she was like, what? You know, and she was astonished that anybody would save all those letters. And I'm like, yeah, that's what we did. And, you know, we sent letters.

BROWNING: [00:56:36] And were you able to send any photos or is just the letters?

SMITH: [00:56:43] Yeah, I think we must have sent some. Yeah, yeah. But of course it was all developed pictures. Of course, you know, you know, film.

BROWNING: [00:56:52] Right, right. Of course. And what was Christmas like and?

SMITH: [00:56:56] Oh, good question. Well, the first one we were in Thailand and, um, so it was a little trip that we took. Um, that was '73. '74, gee, I wonder what we did in '74. I can't remember. '75 I was home for Christmas, 1975. So there were two Christmases. But the one thing we did was 4th of July. The group would always get together because that seemed like the, the holiday that, that kind of fit, right? Because it was so hot. So we always had our 4th of July get together for the our, you know, little group in Sabah.

BROWNING: [00:57:33] I see. So in your, uh, uh, in your free time on the weekends, what was the usual activity in school holidays?

SMITH: [00:57:44] Well, school holidays, we usually traveled, right, either around the state or, like I said, to, to Indonesia or to Thailand. See, because we had the two weeks and like I said, I had, and travel was cheaper, even, even with inflation in those days, it was cheap to go to Southeast Asia. Um, and I was used to, you know, how cheap things were. When I went to Bali, I mean, everything was cheap. On my way home, I went to Japan and I couldn't believe it because, you know, you had to pay to get into all the temples. It was so, Japan was so expensive compared to Southeast Asia, especially in those years. It was. You know, Bali, I think the year I went, I saw some, some statistics, you know, in the '70s there might have been like, I don't know, 20,000 tourists in Bali. Now there's like 10 million or I don't know, you know, millions of tourists in Bali. So it's, you know, really exploded since then.

BROWNING: [00:58:38] What, uh, how did you travel?

SMITH: [00:58:41] Yeah. What went, well, local travel, you know, get a taxi, busses around the town. And of course, we were on an island. And that was a problem because we had to, you know, you had to fly. You know, people would fly to Hong Kong for, for a couple of days. There was direct flights, you know, so people would do that, you know, on, some of the teachers would go just for breaks. Or there was direct flight, I think, to, uh, Bangkok, if I'm not mistaken. But, um, you know, in those years, by the way, we got, uh, boat people from, from Indonesia, you know, the war was just winding down, uh, from, uh, yeah. I'm sorry, from, uh, uh, from, um, you know what I mean? Vietnam. Sorry.

BROWNING: [00:59:21] Right.

SMITH: [00:59:21] Um, so from Vietnam, we had boat people escaping the war. And when I went to Thailand, it was all military. It was, you know, it was really a shock because I'd been in Malaysia for such a, you know, for so, for how many times. And over there, I mean, you could use American money. There were like bowling alleys. I was like, what is? You know, it was like, it was kind of a culture shock when I went to

Thailand because it was so Americanized in those days. Compared to Malaysia anyway.

BROWNING: [00:59:54] So was there a noticeable difference between your first and second year on your?

SMITH: [01:00:00] Not, not really. No. Except, you know, like I said, I had to, you know, teach, teach a lot of variety because like I said, the one teacher had left and left us with two science teachers instead of the three we should have had.

BROWNING: [01:00:15] Um, the, uh. Did you have any special goals that you wanted to accomplish before you wrapped up your service?

SMITH: [01:00:24] Um, well, like I said, I was taking the tai chi. I really enjoyed that. And I liked to cook. We cooked a lot. Um, I'll tell you a story about Mrs. Tong. Mrs. Tong was the English teacher, and her English was very good. But one day she came up to me and said, Patricia, what does it say? It says an apple a day keeps the doctor away. She said, what is it about apples? And I'm like, oh boy. Well, okay. It's in a cold climate. Apples are, you know, come out in the fall and they are able, you can store apples in a, you know, cold climate. And so I was trying to explain to her that in a cold climate, that's the only fruit.

SMITH: [01:01:03] Well, think of Malaysia. I mean, it's fruit heaven. I mean, there's, you know, every kind of fruit, there's all kinds. There's like many varieties of bananas, for instance, and rambutans and durians and jackfruit. And you know, I was trying to explain to her that there's nothing about apples. It's just, it's the fruit that, you know, people could get. And that was, you know, why the saying. So it was kind of like cultural imperialism, right? You know, saying look.

SMITH: [01:01:31] Oh, and then my neighbor. You know, these new houses, like I said, they were, you know, a little compound of houses. And my porch kind of faced the other way, my back porch. So a couple months after we moved in, I kind of happened to be walking behind his house, and I looked and there's a papaya tree. It's almost as tall as the house.

And I said, oh my gosh. I said, what is that? He said, oh, we're eating papaya off of that. I said, he said, I threw some seeds out. I'm like, oh, I should have done that. You know, he just, they just, you know, there's this huge papaya tree. He's getting papayas off of it. I was like amazed. I liked that part.

BROWNING: [01:02:06] Um. So at the winding down your Peace Corps service, what, how did you feel about what you'd accomplished?

SMITH: [01:02:18] Yeah, I liked it. I was, I, you know, it would have been easier to stay for a third year. That would have been the easy thing to do. But I just, you know, felt like I had to come home, so. And like I said, so many of them did stay because, you know, it was so nice to be there. And four, four of the guys married local ladies. So that's, you know, they, they get, you know, of course they go back every, at least every year, maybe sometimes more. Uh, so that's very nice for them. But the problem is now I want to go back, but there's nobody there. So I'm going to have to go back by myself because. Um, like, for instance, the one guy is going, but he goes for a wedding in July and I just can't go in July, right? So it's kind of interesting that they have such close, close contact with it.

BROWNING: [01:03:10] Did you think about staying on for an additional?

SMITH: [01:03:13] Oh yeah, but that's how I said it would have been easier, but I can't. I thought it was time to come home, so, um, I don't know.

BROWNING: [01:03:21] What plans did you have for yourself on returning to the U.S.?

SMITH: [01:03:25] Not really anything. I just, you know, it's kind of, kind of up in the air for a while. I worked as a recruiter for a year. That was fun. And then I went to grad school. So then I got my MBA when I got back. And in those days, you know, it was so cheap to go to grad school. It was nice, you know? So, you know, I had, I had, I had my readjustment allowance. And so that helped get me through the year of grad school.

BROWNING: [01:03:52] When you returned to the U.S. was, did you go straight back or did you take any?

SMITH: [01:03:59] Yeah, I went to, yeah I did, I went to Hong Kong and I went to Taiwan. And I was, you know, like I said, National Palace Museum. I remember that was wonderful in Taiwan. And Japan. And it was so cold in Japan. It was, it was, it was November, right? And into December. And I was freezing and it was so expensive. So I spent, that was my trip home. And like I said, that would have been easier to stay because I would have had more, more trips then, right? You know, going back and then the break, break trips and everything. So.

BROWNING: [01:04:34] What, uh, how did you feel about being back in the U.S. after being away for a couple of years?

SMITH: [01:04:40] It was fun. Um, we went to, um. My mother and I went to Ponderosa, uh, shortly after I got back, and it just kind of made, I'm sorry, it made me sick because the people were eating these big steaks, and, you know, in Malaysia, in those, we didn't eat that much meat. You know, if you had meat, it was like little bits in a, in a stir fry or something. And so it was kind of like, oh, how could they eat all that? I was, I was, I was probably a little bit anemic too, you know, because, you know, I'd been traveling and, you know, and um, and living in a, in a tropical climate, you know, you kind of adjust to that. So. But that was, that was. I remember looking at those people eating and I couldn't eat that.

BROWNING: [01:05:22] The, uh, you mentioned before that, uh, Vietnam was, was going on.

SMITH: [01:05:27] Mm hmm.

BROWNING: [01:05:28] What was the what was the feeling of the Malaysian people about, uh?

SMITH: [01:05:35] Uh, sorry. I don't remember that. Yeah, we might have talked about it, but I'm sorry. I just don't remember. But I do, I can say

that they, they. There was a lot of why, why would you come this direction? Like, everybody wants to go your way. Why? Um, another, another story. When I, one of my friends, uh, at the school, you know, in the teacher's room, you know, kind of sitting around talking between classes. Where are you from? And I said, Pittsburgh. And I showed it to him on the map, and he said, wow, you're from the interior. And I'm like, no, no, no, wait a minute.

SMITH: [01:06:09] You know, because like in, in Malaysia, um, most of the cities are along the coastline, of course, and especially where I was in Borneo, the interior is where there's wild rivers and jungles and mountains and, you know. So I was kind of trying to say no. Well, no, no, you know, that, you know, inside, you know, in the U.S., you know, there's a lot of, you know, you know, places, you know, cities inside. So it was kind of another one of those things where I had to kind of say, no, no, no, the geography is completely different. You know, in the U.S. the development occurs in different. Whereas of course in Sabah there will never be a city, you know, in the jungles, right? But that wouldn't make any sense. So I thought that was kind of an interesting.

BROWNING: [01:06:56] This trip you're going to take in a few months. Was that the only time you've been back?

SMITH: [01:07:01] Yeah, I have not been back to Malaysia. No, uh uh. It's just, uh, you know, when, when my kids were little and growing and, you know, it just didn't work out. So now I have some time, so.

BROWNING: [01:07:13] And you, you mentioned that you did have a reunion with your?

SMITH: [01:07:17] Yeah, we, it was in Georgia. Yeah. And they, we had one, um, in, in, um, not Michigan. I think it was Wisconsin like in the '80s. So really early on we had one and, and I think I missed one when my kids were little. And I know I missed at least one. Um.

BROWNING: [01:07:40] Well, how do you think your Peace Corps service impacted your work and your thinking once you returned?

SMITH: [01:07:48] Oh, you know, it was, it was worth, I mean, I'd. I've often, you know, I teach at Wesleyan, North Carolina Wesleyan College, and I've, you know, tried to, you know, every once in a while, a student will say kind of they're interested. And I kind of try to talk it up. I've never had a student that actually went. I had two that applied. I was kind of like disappointing that, that I've never been able to, you know, to have an actual student who actually did it. So. But I really would recommend it.

SMITH: [01:08:15] And now, of course, it's a completely different, you know, they're not so isolated. They have internet and so on. And people could travel like, like I said, in those days, I mean, I don't. None of, none of our volunteers had anybody come to visit them. So the whole time. So it just, just was so impossible in those days to get there. Now it's, I'm going to, I'm flying to Beijing and then I have a, um, it's a study tour, and then it ends in Shanghai, and there's a direct flight from Shanghai to Kota Kinabalu. So it's an overnight flight. So and in those days, China was completely closed, right? So I mean, people didn't go to China. So this is kind of new.

BROWNING: [01:09:02] And you have, are active in the local returned Peace Corps volunteers group?

SMITH: [01:09:10] Yeah. North Carolina Peace Corps Association, yes.

BROWNING: [01:09:12] How long have you been doing that?

SMITH: [01:09:13] Oh, gosh. It's like more than, like five, eight years. Something like that. Yeah.

BROWNING: [01:09:21] I assume you enjoy it or you wouldn't, you wouldn't stick with it.

SMITH: [01:09:24] It's interesting. Yeah. It's great. Yeah.

BROWNING: [01:09:27] Anything else about your Peace Corps experience you'd like to mention or, um, share?

SMITH: [01:09:33] Well, Malaysia, you know, again, in those days, it was a developing country. Now it's, you know, pretty much. It hasn't been a Peace Corps country for a long time because it's developed. So. But, you know, these kids that get to go to China. I thought about it when I retire, but I just couldn't, I don't know, teaching English. I don't know if I could do it, you know. But anyway, so, you know, now it seems like something that you could do as a, you know, as an older adult to get to get that experience again. So.

BROWNING: [01:10:07] Well, very good. Thank you very much for sharing your experience.

SMITH: [01:10:10] Oh, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]