

**Ben Bryan Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
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**Creator:** Ben Bryan  
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**Biographical Note**

Ben Bryan served as a Peace Corps volunteer in South Korea from 1979 to 1981 and in Fiji from 1981 to 1984 on health education projects.

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Oral History Interview

with

Ben Bryan

October 7, 2018  
Arnold, Maryland

By Julius Sztuk

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

SZTUK: [00:00:00] Okay. It's October 7th. Today is October 7th, 2018. This is Jay Sztuk. And I'm interviewing Ben Bryan, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in South Korea from March of 1979 through March of 1981, and again in Fiji from June 1981 through June 1984. And Ben's program was health education, and he worked with Hansen's disease victims. So, Ben, thanks for agreeing to be interviewed today. Let's start out with, well, what, uh, what got you into Peace Corps? When did you first learn about it and why did you decide to join?

BRYAN: [00:00:52] I think I learned about Peace Corps when I was eight years old. The commercials on TV advertising Peace Corps and see that and that sort of sparked my interest in, you know, so as a kid just, you know, wanting to travel when I get older. Travel to different countries and meet different people and cultures and things and it instilled right through school, high school, right through college. I remember my senior year in

college submitting an application for Peace Corps. And was really surprised when I got accepted.

SZTUK: [00:01:42] Why were you surprised?

BRYAN: [00:01:44] Because I know at the time, Peace Corps was, there was a lot of people applying. And I just didn't, I guess I just didn't have any, uh. I just didn't think I would get chosen because of the number of people throughout the country that were applying to become volunteers and selected to go in.

SZTUK: [00:02:08] Had you done much traveling before, been overseas?

BRYAN: [00:02:12] I had a little bit. I went to England with my roommate. Their father, their parents were stationed in England. Father was a rear admiral in the Navy. And they were going to, he was my roommate at Saint Mary's College in Maryland. And it was during Christmas break. He asked if I wanted to go back with him. And so I took the opportunity to do that and travel back to, um, with him and his brother to England for a couple of weeks during, during the break between semesters.

SZTUK: [00:02:56] Quite different from Korea.

BRYAN: [00:02:57] Yes. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:02:59] So you said you were surprised when you found out you were accepted. What was your family's reaction and your friends'? What kind of reactions did you get from them?

BRYAN: [00:03:09] Well, they actually, I had one, one guy from college told me. He said, he said, man, I don't know why you're surprised. He said, that's you. He said, he said, you know, I've always seen you as a kind of person that, that just, you know, you, you've always talked about travel. You've always talked about doing something different. And, um, so he wasn't surprised. And nor was my roommate surprised that I was able to get in.

SZTUK: [00:03:46] So did you study public health, health education at school?

BRYAN: [00:03:49] No. Actually my background in undergraduate in college is sociology. And I guess that was another reason why I was surprised. Because when I got the acceptance, I remember getting the envelope from Peace Corps and opening it up and, and it said, you were accepted. And then the next page said the program was Hansen's disease. And I remember clearly at that time just kind of freezing at the first line, seeing Hansen's disease. I had no idea what Hansen's disease was. And I, I remember reading, and it was quite lengthy. It was a full page description of health education and Hansen's disease and it described the program and what I would be doing.

BRYAN: [00:04:47] And, and I remember reading it probably ten times in, in a span of 20 minutes. And just kind of staring at it, wondering. Here my background is in sociology now, and I'm going into health with health volunteers. And I couldn't, I couldn't understand. It was kind of confusing. And, um, so actually, the next, either that day or the next day, I actually called up Peace Corps. And, um, because there was excitement, but there was also confusion because what am I going to do here with a sociology background and going into Hansen's disease in the health, excuse me, doing health education.

BRYAN: [00:05:37] And besides the basic biology and the science courses that I'd taken in college and high school, there was a lot of uncertainty there. It was, what was I going to do with this? And how was I going to be successful? And what was this all about? I was really confused, but, you know, excited at the same time. You got accepted in the Peace Corps. But what are you going to do?

SZTUK: [00:06:04] Yeah. Did you, did you have any second thoughts? Did you think they made a mistake?

BRYAN: [00:06:08] Yeah, I sort of, I sort of thought they made a mistake. And actually, I contacted Peace Corps and I talked to the, the person that did the selection. And she actually said to me, she, you know, she explained that during that period of time, I think the Peace Corps director there was, um, a directive by the director that accepting generalists and because in

the past I think they were, they had gotten specific volunteers to specific programs and they wanted to do something different. So I was sort of in that generalist group, one of those persons that they picked. And so it was a little clearer. And then she also said, well, Mr. Bryan, she said, we can always kind of delay this. You know, you can go in another group. And I said, no. No.

SZTUK: [00:07:05] You were ready.

BRYAN: [00:07:06] I'm ready. You know, I'm ready to go in. I'm not delaying this. I, I told her, I said, I've been waiting for this since I was eight years old and there's no delay. She goes, oh okay, fine. She goes, but you'll be provided training. And, um, and also when, when I got it, I remember too, I was in the college dorm grabbing a dictionary off or something and finding out what the heck Hansen's disease was and finding out that it's leprosy. And then, of course, that threw me back even more. It's like, wow. Leprosy. So but after that initial shock and, uh, then it was just pure excitement.

SZTUK: [00:07:54] So, uh, so back to the question of how your family and friends reacted. When they, when they heard that you were going to be working with leprosy.

BRYAN: [00:08:05] Right.

SZTUK: [00:08:06] Did that give them second thoughts or cause any concern?

BRYAN: [00:08:09] Well, it did. There was all kinds of questions and questions that certainly I couldn't answer because I didn't know. I had question even from my parents. My parents were happy, you know, because I knew, they knew I was applying and they knew that I could go to another country for years. They were okay with it, but they weren't okay with leprosy. And my friends were confused because they didn't, first of all, they didn't know leprosy still existed. And nor did I, for that matter. I thought it, you know, after working in it for, learning the disease, you find out it is in the United States and where it is. And, you know, explain to, explain to people that that it does exist in the United States, but it's more prevalent in other countries.

BRYAN: [00:09:04] And so as I did some research to it prior to going in the program, I could, I was a little clearer in my mind what it was all about. I could explain it to other folks. And but there was still, it's like, why would you want to do that? Can you catch it? And I said, well, yeah, certainly there's potential to catch it. But you being a health educator, you know how to prevent from doing that. And so there was a lot of explanation that I couldn't go into depth, but just basic as I researched it prior to going in and explaining it to my parents and so forth. But, uh. So but, yeah, there was a lot of questions prior to, prior to doing that.

SZTUK: [00:09:53] Now, did you select Korea as a country that you wanted to go to or was it selected for you or just offered?

BRYAN: [00:09:58] It was selected for me.

SZTUK: [00:10:00] Did you have any preference when? When you first thought about joining, where did you envision going?

BRYAN: [00:10:06] Well, I guess that was part of the shock too. When I got accepted, I opened the letter up and said, oh, wow, I got accepted. Korea. Hansen's disease. That was part of the shock because I had selected Africa, India, and I can't remember the third choice. And this was like way off the mark.

SZTUK: [00:10:23] Right. Totally different.

BRYAN: [00:10:24] And yeah, so.

SZTUK: [00:10:30] And yet you were ready to go.

BRYAN: [00:10:32] I was ready to go. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:10:34] All right. So you, uh, you got selected. You're going to Korea. Did you do any training in the States beforehand, or did you go straight off to Korea and do your training there? How, how was it done in your group?

BRYAN: [00:10:51] The, um, there was, there was a public service hospital in Louisiana. They did research in leprosy and other concepts of diseases, and leprosy was one of them. It was open at the time. It's closed now. And that's where we did part of our training. We were there for about a week. And it was specifically on leprosy.

SZTUK: [00:11:14] Mm hmm.

BRYAN: [00:11:14] And then when we left there, we went to Korea, and we were in an area in Korea called Anyang. Anyang is, has a, I guess you call it a compound. And it's a hospital compound. And they specifically research leprosy. And outside the compound, there are three villages. And it's like resettlement villages. And those have folks that, uh, it's a community of folks, but a percentage of those folks have active leprosy. Active or leprosy that's been treated there in remission.

SZTUK: [00:12:01] Did you go directly there or did you do some training with the group before getting out to your site?

BRYAN: [00:12:08] Yeah, I did some training beforehand. We were in an area called Cheongchun where the whole group. There were three groups that went. There was the leprosy group, Hansen's disease group. There was the mother child health care. There was tuberculosis. And I thought there was another group. I know there's at least three groups. We went all went to Cheongchun and the focus was on language and culture for about, I think it was about two or three weeks. And then once that completed, that initial prep, then we all went to our sites. And, uh, went not to our sites. But I know we went down to Anyang and then had additional training. It was in language half day, half, uh.

BRYAN: [00:13:00] It was like a half day of training. It was 2 to 3 hours of language and then like two, a couple hours of technical training. And that technical training specifically was on leprosy. And that, that training was really hard. It was, it was, they designed it almost like a, if you were going into pre-med.

SZTUK: [00:13:30] Technical part of it?

BRYAN: [00:13:31] Yeah, it was, it was really. I mean, they went into, they went into physiology, went to the physiology of the body. They even how to suture up a wound, how to do dressings. How did, you know, even pharmacology. It was, it was really hard and, um, well designed, but really hard because.

SZTUK: [00:13:59] On top of learning a new language.

BRYAN: [00:14:00] Absolutely. Yeah. So we go from, from culture and language in the morning and the technical language in the afternoon. And by the end of the day, it's like you have a lot of free time because the afternoon, afternoon right on through until the next day you're off. We all crashed. We're just brain dead because going through this. And so but it was, it was, it was very good. I mean they did it very well. But here again, I'm looking back, here's a guy with a sociology degree going into pre-med.

SZTUK: [00:14:35] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:14:36] And whereas some of my, my colleagues were more prepared for it because they had two folks in there in the pre-med and at time I didn't know that. But they, you know, of course they did very well and some other folks were similar to me. One guy was an English major and so there was a couple of generalists in there. But we all made it through and I mean did fine and gave us a good basis for, for language. And then after that three weeks of that, we went back to Seoul for a couple of days, got sworn in. They gave us a train ticket and just waved to us and said, see you in two years. And I remember being on the train, on the train, and just kind of wondering where am I going? Because I had no idea.

SZTUK: [00:15:33] Were there any other volunteers going with you or?

BRYAN: [00:15:35] No.

SZTUK: [00:15:36] You were on your own. You're the only volunteer going.

BRYAN: [00:15:37] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:15:37] Was it back to the same area that you did your training or a totally different place?

BRYAN: [00:15:41] No, it was to your site.

SZTUK: [00:15:42] To your site.

BRYAN: [00:15:42] Yeah, it was, it was about a five hour train ride down. Our training was in Seoul. Seoul. And the, my training site was in an area called Cheongchun. I mean, I'm sorry, Jinju and which was a, it's about a five hour train ride.

SZTUK: [00:16:01] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:16:01] So I get there and we, for the past two months, we've been instructed in standard, the standard colloquial type of Korean. And, um, so and the standard Korean is spoken in the big city of Seoul. You get down the country, there's a dialect there. So I have no idea with my coworker's talking about. I'm thrown in confusion and can't, because he's speaking a dialect and he's, he's frustrated because I can't understand him. And, and I'm trying to speak Korean, the standard. I'm all confused now.

SZTUK: [00:16:43] And did they have any English competency at all?

BRYAN: [00:16:46] No.

SZTUK: [00:16:46] No. Okay.

BRYAN: [00:16:47] I mean, yes, no. What is your name? How are you?

SZTUK: [00:16:53] Pretty basic.

BRYAN: [00:16:54] Pretty basic. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:16:55] So you really jumped in the deep end?

BRYAN: [00:16:58] Yeah. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:16:59] And were there any episodes during training that really stood out? Any, any, any real big memories there?

BRYAN: [00:17:10] Oh, yeah, I can tell you one.

SZTUK: [00:17:11] Good or bad.

BRYAN: [00:17:12] Well, no, it was, it was one of these, um. There's one day I remember we were in Anyang in our technical training. We had finished training for that day. I think we were, we get out at 1:00, 2:00 or something and we can go back to our, our, our, um. Well, we stayed with families and these were all resettlement villages. And the mom of, of my house, she had leprosy, obviously, obvious leprosy. But the rest of the family didn't. Just the mother did. And so it's a wonderful family. But the, the day that stood out was I remember we were all let out of class and we're going back, walking down the sort of the walkway from, from the hospital. And there's gates. There is a gate fence around the whole complex, and then the village is outside that.

BRYAN: [00:18:13] So we're walking through the gate. And I remember one of my, my colleagues, a girl named Julie, said something to me like, you know, something about tomorrow or something. I don't remember. But I remember turning around to her and acknowledging it. And just as I turned around, turned back around to head to the village, there was a guy standing no more than three feet. He had just came out of nowhere. Just three feet right, like right there. And it just, he wanted to say hi. The issue was, is that I'd, I'd seen pictures and been given the explanation what a leprosy patient looked like, because there are three types of leprosy and there's all variations and there's full blown.

BRYAN: [00:19:11] This guy was full blown leprosy patient with his eyes and like a thalamus, eyes were drooping and ears were, had recessed in, mouth was dropped. He had, he had dropped mouth and lost his teeth and fingers. And I mean, anybody that didn't have leprosy would know this guy had leprosy.

SZTUK: [00:19:34] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:19:34] So I just turned around. He's three feet in front of me and he's saying, he's saying hi to me. But I, because he's kind of spitting and I just froze because I had never seen anything like it.

SZTUK: [00:19:48] Wow.

BRYAN: [00:19:49] And, uh, and so I just said, just and he's like, you know. You know, *annyeong hasimnikka*. And he was saying that, but I didn't hear it initially. He had to say it three times. Finally, the last time I heard it, it still is he was spitting out and I just reached out and, you know, he had no, he had all nubs. He hardly had any fingers. And I just shook his hand and he just had this whatever smile that he could get because all his whole face was paralyzed. He just kind of smiled and just shook my hand and walked away. And I just stood there. I had never seen anything like that in my life.

SZTUK: [00:20:32] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:20:32] Even on Pappy on it.

SZTUK: [00:20:34] Yeah, right.

BRYAN: [00:20:35] And but that, that stood out, I think initially in training for me.

SZTUK: [00:20:41] So yeah, that must have been one of many.

BRYAN: [00:20:44] Yeah. Well, yeah.

SZTUK: [00:20:47] So. Okay, so you complete training and you get out to your site. What, what was the living situation like out there at your site?

BRYAN: [00:20:55] Well, my coworker had arranged initially when I arrived to the site to stay in a hotel for about a week until they got my living arrangements in the village.

SZTUK: [00:21:05] Your coworker was a local?

BRYAN: [00:21:07] Yeah, I was, I was stationed in two places officially, you know, stationed in the health center. And just down the street was a clinic. And the health center, the, my coworker was specializing in leprosy. And the, down at the clinic there was a doctor who I was assigned to. He was a leprosy specialist. And so after I met them, the coworker set me up in the site. So next day after about a week, he took me down, took me, it's about a 40 minute bus ride to area called Pan Sung. Pan Sung is a, there is a resettlement village of about 300 people with 100 leprosy patients. Out of that 100, three of them are what's called active and then the rest were, um, were non active.

BRYAN: [00:22:05] And that's where I was going to live for two years. And so, um, the, so I lived with a family, a family of, uh, of the mother, father, and two sons and two daughters.

SZTUK: [00:22:23] So you didn't have your own place? You had a room?

BRYAN: [00:22:26] A room inside the house, yeah.

SZTUK: [00:22:29] And they did your cooking and?

BRYAN: [00:22:31] They did everything. Laundry.

SZTUK: [00:22:33] Well, there are some benefits.

BRYAN: [00:22:34] Yeah. So. And as time progressed, my living there became a problem. Because here, um. When because I'm assigned and working for the, working for the health center and the doctor, they're giving me medicine. They actually give me bottles of medicine that I distribute every day because relapse is a problem in a lot of the Asian countries. In Korea, it's really a problem. People don't take it every day, especially when the, there's a medicine called DDS, and that's the prevalent one that's used for, for eradicating leprosy. And so we'd give bottles of that. And what I did every day, I'd go around every day and give them the medicine so that they'd get them on a regimen.

BRYAN: [00:23:30] And but what was happening sometimes people were hiding medicine because it's an American made product. Any kind of pharmacy product that's American made, it's like works miracles. So many of the patients would stop taking it and use it for other stuff. So with leprosy, leprosy is kind of complicated because it, uh, it can be very active, but it's so slow progressing that you don't. It can take up to ten years for it to come out. And so what'll happen with many of these patients is they'll feel bad one day and, you know, they'll take the medicine that's prescribed. It's like us when we get a cold. We'll feel bad, we'll take the medicine. And as we start feeling better, we'll stop taking it.

SZTUK: [00:24:26] Mm hmm.

BRYAN: [00:24:26] That's exactly what happens with DDS. They'll stop taking it. Then they'll hoard it. And what they'll do is to sell it, give it to their son, or when they're not feeling well or something, it's like a cure all. They saw it as a cure all.

SZTUK: [00:24:42] What they think it is.

BRYAN: [00:24:43] Right. They think it's a cure all. And, um, and so it results in a lot of relapse medication because they're not taking it as prescribed. Because once they get leprosy and it progresses to a certain type or their immunity and it, they have do it for the rest of their life and they have to do it consistently. So, uh, so. And so this was, um, the point I was making is this, this house that I was at. This guy, this guy of the village, he was what's called a *yakban*. A *yakban* is, uh, a *yakban* is actually in Korean is like a pharmacy, and he was operating a pharmacy in the village. So here I was. I was in conflict because I had medicine that I was giving out, but he was treating people in the village and it became an issue. It became a problem after a while.

SZTUK: [00:25:46] And did you move or did you stay there?

BRYAN: [00:25:48] I had to move, yeah. And, I mean, they wanted me to stay, but it was a problem. So what happened was I was going to move out of the

village and the, the pastor of the village, his wife, she, she sort of cut me off at the path. She came up to me and she goes, you're going to my house.

SZTUK: [00:26:13] Oh.

BRYAN: [00:26:14] And so she actually got my stuff and moved it into her house. And that's where I stayed for the rest of my time. And, um. And it ended up being wonderful because the, at the time, they had a daughter, 12 years old, and it was just the pastor and his wife and, uh. And it's interesting. The daughter is now, she is now in her late forties. And we've maintained contact the whole time. Yeah. We, uh, she has five kids.

SZTUK: [00:26:53] Still in Korea?

BRYAN: [00:26:54] Still in Korea. She's in Pusan and five kids and we still correspond. I send her a birthday card every year. And in fact, I have some pictures on my phone I can show you of the family. And Joyce and I went back, my wife and I went back to visit in 2006 and went to visit them. And it was, it was wonderful. It was, we had a great time. And so, yeah, we still, still maintain contact.

SZTUK: [00:27:27] Now, you mentioned Pusan [also called Busan], which is an area in Korea where you're likely to run into quite a few Americans. But how about where your site and where you lived? Had there been a volunteer there before? Had they had experience with Americans before or was this something new?

BRYAN: [00:27:49] It was totally new. Yeah. It was very new. And, um. They, there's a couple of occasions where they had international folks would come through, like from World Vision?

SZTUK: [00:28:07] Mm hmm.

BRYAN: [00:28:07] Or is it World Vision or, uh, no World Vision. Or maybe it was World Vision. It was one of these organizations that comes through that provides food, supplement food. The one occasion they, they came

through and I remember them coming up and said, they asked, and they would and they would call me Mr. Pak. That's a, you know, and all the volunteers had Korean names. Mine was Pak Min Chi. Pak is my family. And so they call me Mr. Pak. They came up. Mr. Pak, are you going to be in the village today? Why are they asking me this? You know I'm usually in the village. Sometimes I leave. And so I thought something was, something wasn't right. And so they said, oh, we're having some visitors come today and.

BRYAN: [00:28:56] And in Korean there's this thing called nunchi. Nunchi is, I guess, we take it as this feeling that you get or this when someone is talking, you kind of get the vibes, vibes, something's, something. They want you to do something or something.

SZTUK: [00:29:17] Okay.

BRYAN: [00:29:18] I just, what I picked up from this is that I need to disappear for a bit for some reason. I don't know why.

SZTUK: [00:29:25] Oh, they were giving you a message.

BRYAN: [00:29:26] Right.

SZTUK: [00:29:26] You shouldn't be in the village.

BRYAN: [00:29:27] Right. So, so I decided I'd take a trip to Jinju. Jinju is the major city where I was. So I said, I think I might go to Jinju today to the health center. And they go, oh, okay. And they were a little happy, you know? Okay, that's what I need to do. But I don't know why I'm doing it, but this is why I need to do. And I found out there was a German couple coming in and apparently they were from the church and they provide funding and stuff, supplemental stuff. So they come in the village, check it out, and then they send stuff. And whether it's money or support, things like that. So if they saw a foreigner in there, that might cause some problems. So, uh. So that's what I found out later.

BRYAN: [00:30:21] And then it happened again, excuse me, there was from another country came in and they ended up sending grits. They sent like ten bags, I mean ten 100 pound bags of grits. And so I had these people come up to my room one day and they said, can you come pick out some food for us? And I said, sure, what's, what's going on? And I looked and I saw immediately it said grits on it. And I went, oh boy. What are they going to do with this, grits? I couldn't even explain it. I'm trying to explain that it's like a breakfast, because Koreans don't eat breakfast.

SZTUK: [00:31:06] Right.

BRYAN: [00:31:07] I couldn't explain it. And, uh, and I don't think I ever got it through, even trying to prepare it. It didn't, it. I think they ended up feeding it to their.

SZTUK: [00:31:20] Grits isn't your specialty?

BRYAN: [00:31:21] No, no. I mean, I love grits, but Koreans don't know grits are. They don't know what to use it for. And I think they ended up feeding it to their cows and pigs. Because they don't eat that stuff. Like, what are they sending them ten 100 pound bags?

SZTUK: [00:31:38] A thousand pounds.

BRYAN: [00:31:39] Yeah. So.

SZTUK: [00:31:42] Well, that's interesting.

BRYAN: [00:31:43] Yeah. So.

SZTUK: [00:31:47] So arriving at this place where they weren't used to Americans, they didn't speak English. It probably took you a while to, to really fit in.

BRYAN: [00:31:59] Yeah, it.

SZTUK: [00:32:01] Was there, uh?

BRYAN: [00:32:01] It was hard.

SZTUK: [00:32:02] It was hard at first. Any time you thought about packing it in?

BRYAN: [00:32:06] Absolutely. Yeah, it was, I think it was the first six months. I remember sitting in my room, because I used to study every day and Korean is very hard, and especially with the dialect, because you don't. You're there and you can only kind of associate what they're meaning with that dialect. A lot of times they're swearing, you know, and doing other things and but, you know. Then nuances, you pick it up what it means. But, but it's very difficult. You're studying standard and they're speaking a dialect and you try and. So after the, I remember the first six months being in my room and close to tears and wondering, what in the heck am I doing here? Why am I going through this trauma? And, um, with this situation where nobody speaks English and nobody really cares.

BRYAN: [00:33:06] It's almost like you feel nobody really cares and, you know, you want to do this. You waited all your life to do this since you were eight years old to do this. And I remember, I remember sitting there a whole day. I was there from morning till afternoon and just staring at the wall.

SZTUK: [00:33:25] And you had no other volunteers nearby that you could commiserate with?

BRYAN: [00:33:30] Well, there were nearby, but not that close. Yeah. I mean, it wasn't like you can hop on a bus or whatever and just, or walk over the next paddy over. It was, you know, it took a little bit. And you don't know whether they were there, whether they got their own issues they're dealing with. So. That day, that day, by the end of that, probably that end of that afternoon, I, you know, I just kind of looked, introspection, and introspectively into my, what I was thinking and what I'd gone through. And I said, all right, you've got to make a decision. Are you going to go or are you going to stay? So I said, I'm staying. That was it. After six months in, that was it.

SZTUK: [00:34:23] And did it get easier?

BRYAN: [00:34:24] Yes. Got easier and, uh, well, easier in perspective, putting in perspective.

SZTUK: [00:34:31] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:34:32] Korean's hard.

SZTUK: [00:34:33] Got over the hump.

BRYAN: [00:34:34] Yeah, that put me over the hump. It just made everything sort of, um, look at it in a different light. And that, uh, that, yes, this is difficult. Just take your time with it. Learn what you can, do what you can. And, you know, especially coming out of college in our culture, we want to be successful. We want to, we want to make an impact, especially in college being idealistic.

SZTUK: [00:35:08] Hmm.

BRYAN: [00:35:09] And I remember after two years and I had made that commitment to be there, this is what I'm going to do. You're not necessarily change people, but make an impact. After two years, I was there and I was like, I haven't really done anything. After all, I felt like I hadn't done anything. And it was more like the locals have impacted me more than I had, I had helped or impacted them and I felt like I hadn't accomplished. And I felt like I needed to stay longer to really, really kind of convince myself or to have a feeling that I had done something productive, you know.

BRYAN: [00:35:52] And so it was really kind of hard to see that because, because things, because of the culture, none of the culture, but in the village, in that area with leprosy. Leprosy is just so highly stigmatized. And because of the stigma, people didn't want to go anywhere. They wouldn't do anything, wouldn't take care of themselves. And then you had the problem of health care workers, getting them to the village to treat these folks because the stigma. Many of them have the title of, of health care worker and specializing in leprosy but don't want anything to do with it. And so that's why Americans are there, sort of.

BRYAN: [00:36:45] You know, after I realized this, that's why I'm here. I'm sort of helping. Just from, if I do anything, just from a visual perspective of sort of breaking down the stigma of this stuff and trying to help these people and of who I can get out of here to get treatment or who if, you know, I was able to get the mobile team in there to, on a couple occasions, to actually work with these folks and to take blood samples, to take, to do some things and to, to do some, um. Some of the bandaging was pretty heavy duty stuff. I mean, they, they gave me a whole chest full of cotton. I mean, you name it, I had it. I could do operations if I wanted to. And but I, you know, you mentioned earlier, you know, something that's outstanding that, that, that impact, you know, in that time.

BRYAN: [00:37:43] There was one thing, one thing in that village that really stands out. I was making my rounds one day and taking the medicine. Often when I do the rounds, folks would come to me with stuff, with medical issues and, uh, you know, best thing I can do is just note it down and try and get the doctor to help him. But I remember this one guy was pretty stubborn. He just wouldn't, he didn't want anything to do with the doctor. And I kept seeing him and trying to convince him and convince him, a long period. Finally, one day I went there and he had his arm wrapped up. And so I said, Mr. Lee, what's, why do you have your arm wrapped in for? He goes, nothing. So I just kind of lightly grabbed it and pulled. It wasn't even a bandage. It was some kind of wrap he had on, he had wrapped it up.

BRYAN: [00:38:42] I pulled it off and I almost died. He had from, from his wrist and about three inches wide on up to his, and this is, this is up to his, um, I guess, this area here where on the other side of the elbow, three inches wide, he had removed the skin. It was just open. And he had removed the nerve out of, his ulnar nerve out of, out of his arm. And he wanted me to suture it up. I don't know what to do with this. I can't do anything with this. And, and the thing about it is when leprosy patients, when, when it's progressed to the, the most progressive type, lepromatous leprosy, often you will have. It affects what's on the autonomic nerve and that, that affects circulation in the body.

BRYAN: [00:39:46] It wasn't bleeding. It was just open and it was, you could see muscle, tendons, everything. And I was, it just blew me away. I'd never seen anything like this. And, and best thing I can do is trying to kind of keep myself calm and said, uh, you really need to see a doctor and this is what I'll do for now. I, I took a whole thing of gauze because I had mounds of gauze and cotton. I wrapped cotton in gauze and made it almost like a cast and, um, and put some, I had antibiotic ointment. Put that on there. A salve, it's like a salve. Put that on there and covered it up and taped it. And I said, you need, you need to go to a doctor. And I don't know if he ever went or not. Because one thing about, he ended up a week later passing away.

SZTUK: [00:40:44] Oh.

BRYAN: [00:40:45] And so but that was another incident where it was just shock value. I mean, I, I saw a lot of stuff in leprosy, even operations, but I had never seen anything like that before. It was, yeah, it was. It took me back a bit.

SZTUK: [00:41:03] I bet.

BRYAN: [00:41:04] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:41:07] So, uh, in spite of all this, you ended up liking it in Korea and you decided that you wanted to extend?

BRYAN: [00:41:14] Mm hmm.

SZTUK: [00:41:15] But.

BRYAN: [00:41:16] Yeah, the program. I was told by the country associate director that the program was phasing out. This was in '81. And my program was coming to an end. It actually came to an end in June. So I was in Seoul and so the country director, he said, look, what we can do, he says. He said, given that we can't extend you, we'll see if we can maybe extend you into another country. And I said, sure, that's fine. And I was in Seoul for

like two weeks on a per diem, which not a whole lot. Living in a, uh, in a. Hotels, the basic hotel, it's like a motel I guess you'd call it, not standards.

BRYAN: [00:42:18] In Korea, a motel is very different. It's when you say no amenities, you got, you have a door, room. Um. The Koreans call it *yoenevel*. That's a padded mattress on the floor and a comforter. That's it. That's all you got. And I was doing that for two weeks and it was okay for the first couple of days, like, oh, this is cool. I'm being paid to just kind of loaf, loaf around Seoul. So it got old quick. And especially because in Seoul it's so expensive, that per diem was getting eaten up. And so I went to the director and I said, look, I've got to do something here. I can't, I can't just. He says, look, he got on the phone right away. He picked the phone up and started calling. And I'm not sure where he called to.

BRYAN: [00:43:16] And after about a half an hour or an hour or so, he called me back in and he says, this is the scoop. He says, we got two countries. And one is a definite, one is a possibility. And, um, said I'm listening. He said Yemen. He said South, uh, South Yemen is a definite. They'll take you right now. And, uh, the other is Fiji. Fiji is a possibility, he said. We just have to kind of finesse that a bit, it's. And he didn't go into any detail. I didn't know what was happening. And so I said, okay, tell you what, I'll go with the possibility. I said.

SZTUK: [00:44:11] Yemen didn't sound?

BRYAN: [00:44:13] Yemen didn't sound good. It didn't sound good. And thank goodness I didn't choose Yemen, because one of my friends got posted in Yemen. And he was there maybe one, he was there less than a month. The North invaded the South and they pulled him out of there.

SZTUK: [00:44:38] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:44:38] Yeah. So there's a lot of problems in Yemen. So that's how I ended up in. He called. I got hold of the director and they said, oh, we have a leprosy hospital, but we don't have a program. Send him. So that's how we ended up in Fiji.

SZTUK: [00:44:57] All right. All right. So now you've got, uh, you've got two countries that you can compare experiences with.

BRYAN: [00:45:05] Mm hmm.

SZTUK: [00:45:06] So after, after two years in Korea, how did you, how did you like Fiji?

BRYAN: [00:45:15] Um.

SZTUK: [00:45:18] What was your first impression?

BRYAN: [00:45:20] It's difficult to compare them because the cultures are just so different. Korea was definitely more difficult because of the language, and a lot of Koreans don't speak English, or at least the English is broken. It's hard to decipher the English. And I think a lot of Koreans, I think, don't expect that Americans specifically would go through the trouble of learning Korean. They were pretty, um, many of them were just floored when I'd start speaking Korean. And they just, I remember there are times when I would speak Korean and they're just looking at me. They're just looking right through me, like I know you're speaking to me, but I don't know you're speaking to me. They're just shocked that you'd go through trouble learning Korean.

BRYAN: [00:46:19] And many people would even come to you and said, well, wow, you know, you're speaking Korean. Why? Why would you go through the trouble of speaking Korean? You know, and, and then, you know, then they'd tell you about English, how difficult English is. And I'd get a lot of offers to teach English. Even one of the universities I was in, Anyang, um, Gyeongsang University in Jinju, where I was stationed there, the professor came to me and said, we need, we need a teacher here to speak, to teach English. And I said, well, you don't need me because I'm not an English teacher. And so they, they just bugged me so much. And finally I said, look, I'll do this. I'm not going to teach you English. I'll teach you conversation. And that, that I can help you with. So I went to the university and helped them with their conversational.

SZTUK: [00:47:27] Right. To practice.

BRYAN: [00:47:28] Practice, yeah. And then when I went to Fiji, it was. It was, uh, just. I, I don't remember any difficulties. It was almost, it was coming right in. And a lot of this, I guess too, is not, uh, is, uh. Certainly I haven't described in here as being African American and being in Asia versus being in, in Fiji, where being in Fiji certainly I could pass for Fijian in the have. And many people were shocked that I was an American until I started speaking and, you know, and then their head goes back, like you aren't Fijian? No, I'm not Fijian.

BRYAN: [00:48:26] And as opposed to a culture in Korea where it's, it's a whole different context because there are a lot of, a lot of, the experiences are different. Because like for example I would, when the, the village I was near, occasionally I would, I would visit the base. There was a base called Chinhae [also spelled Jinhae] near there that I would go to because back then I used to eat red meat and hamburgers. I had this craving for hamburger and we could go on the base. And I noticed around the base, I would go into a store and the treatment was, was harsh. Even though I'd speak Korean, they wouldn't speak to me in Korean.

SZTUK: [00:49:15] In the community around the base?

BRYAN: [00:49:17] Right, yeah, around the bases. Yeah. And only in English. They would not speak to me in Korean. And it was almost like they were insulted that I was speaking Korean to them. And, um, and outside there in the college, in the, around the college campuses. And, um, and it's typical of any city where you have a different, in the, in the countryside. It was like there was the, uh, when I got to the village, the country people were just, I mean, just, just accepting. There was, there was no question, you're American, whether you were African American, didn't, didn't matter. They didn't care. It was like, you're here to help. You're here to, you're learning Korean. You're staying, living with us, you know, people who got leprosy. They didn't care. And you'd go and come and sit down and it never even came up in conversation.

SZTUK: [00:50:33] Oh.

BRYAN: [00:50:33] As you got into the city, it's different. It's a little different there, because either you're thought of as being CIA or, you know, the conversation would come up. And then, then there was an extension to that. I remember, I remember there were some college students and we used to, when I would go into the city, we used to, uh. In Korea, you have just like, um. All around the city, there are what's called *dabangs*, *dabangs* are tea shops or tea stores. That's where you go and have tea and coffee and that's where you go and socialize. And so I used to meet college students there, and I think they would meet me just to, just for English conversation. That was fine. You know, and they're friends.

BRYAN: [00:51:22] And so the conversation would take on a different context. They'd talk about politics and CIA. And then, then you'd hear some sidebar over here where you would have. Um. I remember back in, back at that time, in the early, in the, er. Around 1980 there was this song that came out and it was, in the context of the song, it was about monkeys. And I would hear this song whenever I would come around. And it was derogatory against African Americans. And, um, but that's, that was.

SZTUK: [00:52:13] So somebody would play this song?

BRYAN: [00:52:14] No, they would sing it.

SZTUK: [00:52:15] Oh, they would sing it?

BRYAN: [00:52:16] Yeah, it was kind of.

SZTUK: [00:52:17] Oh, okay, okay.

BRYAN: [00:52:18] Yeah. Sort of within your hearing. And so those kind of things would happen occasionally. And, um, and occasionally I would run into someone who. But it was mostly, it was in the city, never in the countryside. In the countryside, it was like you were, you're so, you were immersed in there and people didn't care. And you go into the city it was, it was different context. Students would, uh, and it was different. It was different. And often you, you know, and when I would experience that,

you'd try and relate why, why is that happening? What, why are they, why are they, you know, making that? And with the song, after I kind of figured that out, I asked the Koreans and they told me why. They told me exactly why. And they told me it was because of that.

SZTUK: [00:53:18] Well, in the city and especially around the base, they would have had more interaction with Americans.

BRYAN: [00:53:22] But this wasn't the base. You know, this wasn't a base.

SZTUK: [00:53:25] Oh, okay.

BRYAN: [00:53:25] This was, this was in Jinju. Jinju didn't have an American base. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:53:29] That's interesting.

BRYAN: [00:53:30] Yeah. So it was, uh. It was. And occasionally I would, I would run into, excuse me, run into just, it's probably mostly because I was American, I think. Small percentage because they might have thought I was military. Not assuming that I was military. Well, why is this guy?

SZTUK: [00:53:56] Why else would you be there?

BRYAN: [00:53:57] Right. Why is this guy so far from the base?

SZTUK: [00:54:01] Right.

BRYAN: [00:54:01] Why is he here? And until you start speaking Korean and then it's like, okay, he's not from the base and why are you here? What are you, CIA? And you had those, those folks. And you just kind of deal with it. And so, uh. And. But. And. So, you know, that perspective and I, uh, I think. You know, occasionally you run into other foreigners and not, it wasn't really an issue. I think the only issue I ever had with other, it wasn't really foreigners, actually it was with Americans that I had an issue, not an issue with, but I had experience with. I'll tell you the setting.

BRYAN: [00:54:53] The setting was a, I had some volunteers come to my site and there were about, I think there were three of them. They were just coming in the country and the Peace Corps. So the director said, hey, we need some sites. Ben, are you okay if we send some volunteers down to your site, come to stay a few days, just to experience what it's going to be like to stay in the country and the food? And I said, sure, sure, send them down. And they stayed a couple of days and, uh. They had a wonderful time down at the site. And we, and they were going to leave that day. And I remember us walking through town and we saw these two guys in the street immediately, these two guys in white shirts.

BRYAN: [00:55:48] They're Mormons, and I really haven't had any really interaction with Mormons. I heard they were there. I've seen them at a distance. And so it was just, it was just weird. And even today when I think about it. So this group is following me and these guys come up to approach us. They go around me and introduce themselves to the folks behind me and totally ignore me.

SZTUK: [00:56:18] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:56:19] And so I'm looking back like, oh, okay. And, and it was, it was just weird. It was, I'd, I'd never experienced anything like that. And so I said, oh, great to meet you. And they just toddled on off and I'm like, okay, that was interesting.

SZTUK: [00:56:42] Yeah. Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:56:43] But, yeah, but those are just some experiences that you run, you know, run into. But overall, just with the two countries it is just different. The language and cultural kinds of things and the dialect and.

SZTUK: [00:57:03] Did you have to go through any training again when you went to Fiji?

BRYAN: [00:57:06] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:57:07] They made you go through the language training?

BRYAN: [00:57:08] Yeah. Language and culture training.

SZTUK: [00:57:11] And did you do some home stays as part of that?

BRYAN: [00:57:15] Yes. Yeah. It was in Sawani. It was just, and the training was weird because I had gone through it before and, and being a volunteer and you kind of, even though it's a different country, you still, you know, there are things that, that, um. You know, you kind of have a feeling for or even though it's different. It was just weird. And here I was with new volunteers and they're all giddy with all of this and have all the questions and, and it was weird.

SZTUK: [00:57:55] By time you're a veteran.

BRYAN: [00:57:56] Right.

SZTUK: [00:57:57] You're living in a village.

BRYAN: [00:57:58] Right, right.

SZTUK: [00:57:59] And these guys are coming straight from college.

BRYAN: [00:58:00] Exactly. Exactly.

SZTUK: [00:58:02] Probably a little bit hard to relate to it.

BRYAN: [00:58:04] It was very hard. And it was, it was hard because, um. You know, you're sitting and I didn't know whether to be quiet or interject on stuff. And it was just, I didn't know what to do because I didn't want to seem like this guy that's just, you know, pompous and just knows it all, or this guy just sitting back. Don't you have anything to say? It was, it was, it was hard. And so I think they put me in training for, for that time. And then I was at the village. I remember, remember the couple that I stayed with in the village, Kenny and Mary, really nice. And I remember one night, one night I was in my room. All these people started coming in, in the, in the village. The homes are pretty small.

SZTUK: [00:58:59] Yeah.

BRYAN: [00:58:59] And when these people started coming in, mostly, mostly kids from the village. They're all sitting around and they started asking me questions about America. And it was, it was fun. It was, it was fun and funny. And the funniest part of the evening was, uh, was this one young lady. She was asking questions. She says, out of all of this, and I guess I guess we were there for a couple of hours, about an hour into it. And it was, it's funny now. At the time I kind of froze. But she said, she said, she said, Ben. And then everybody went quiet. Ben, are you a nigger? And everybody was silent.

BRYAN: [00:59:55] And I was first, my first thing was is, you know, it's like get, you know, snap, get angry. And then I thought, wait a second. She doesn't know what that means. And, you know, you're in another country. And I don't even know what she's saying, you know, I don't know what her. So I said.

SZTUK: [01:00:14] Didn't know how to respond.

BRYAN: [01:00:15] Yeah, I didn't know how to respond. So it took me, it took me about 15 or 20 seconds and everybody's just looking like, oh boy, is that good or bad, you know? And then I saw her reaction. She's like, oh, maybe I shouldn't have said that. And so I explained it. And, um, because of the British system and the American system, and I'm thinking, how does she know that to begin with? So we talked about it. And I explained to her, you know, literally what the word means. It doesn't reference any particular person. It's an angry, you know. And then I what the colloquial meaning of it is from an American standpoint. So I explained it out and they, and they understood it. They stood where it was coming from, from me, and what she had heard in a movie or something like that. And what, what the meaning was, what she was bringing to the question. So, um, but it was then we all laughed about it. But it was an interesting evening.

SZTUK: [01:01:19] Yeah, yeah, yeah. That is, it's puzzling.

BRYAN: [01:01:23] Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

SZTUK: [01:01:25] You wonder how I guess sometimes a bias does get exported.

BRYAN: [01:01:33] Well, yeah. And that's what my thought was, maybe it was a bias. But then again I, I think it was from a movie. I didn't ask her at the time, I think she got.

SZTUK: [01:01:43] It was a term she had heard.

BRYAN: [01:01:44] It's term she had heard.

SZTUK: [01:01:46] Wasn't sure whether.

BRYAN: [01:01:47] Right. Because so since then I even asked my wife, I said, you know, is this something that, that, you know, from the, you guys are calling in pretty much an educational system British based and, um. And so we've talked about it and I'm not sure we've come to a resolution as to, to that. And so it's still been an ongoing discussion as to that young lady's question, how that came about here in the village, Sawani village, middle of Fiji.

SZTUK: [01:02:24] Yeah.

BRYAN: [01:02:25] Yeah.

SZTUK: [01:02:26] So what was your, uh, your work and living situation in Fiji then was quite different than?

BRYAN: [01:02:36] Oh yeah.

SZTUK: [01:02:36] What it was in Korea. But you completed your training there?

BRYAN: [01:02:38] Yeah. Once I completed my training and I was in health again.

SZTUK: [01:02:44] Yeah.

BRYAN: [01:02:44] And they put me in a, um, there on McGregor, there's a, I mean, this is the heart of Suva.

SZTUK: [01:02:55] Hmm.

BRYAN: [01:02:55] It was a, it was a Fiji Nurses Association. They have a big building.

SZTUK: [01:03:01] Mm hmm.

BRYAN: [01:03:02] Then behind that building is what's called is the maid's chamber or the quarters, and it's just like a two room, two room building.

SZTUK: [01:03:12] Yeah.

BRYAN: [01:03:12] It's got a bed on one side and just open on the other side and it's very, pretty small. It's probably 20 by 20. And nothing in there but a bed, bed and shelves. And every morning I had to, or when I would take a shower I had to leave that little place, go into the building, which is about a 20 foot walk into the main building. There's a cold shower.

SZTUK: [01:03:43] So this was your quarters all the time that you were in Suva?

BRYAN: [01:03:45] Mm hmm. For the first year.

SZTUK: [01:03:46] For the first year?

BRYAN: [01:03:47] Yeah. First year. And, uh, let me back that up a little bit. The first, first, probably the first month I was in, I was in Tamavua. Yeah, there was a volunteer that had been there. He, I think it was him and he may have been there by himself, I can't remember. And he was, uh, this was in Tamavua and I was there for about a month. And he was from, he was from Central America originally and the Peace Corps. And I had to get out of there. This guy was an alcoholic. We had, we had a three, three bedroom flat. He had a room. I had a room. The other room was at least 20 cases of Fiji beer bottles, and he drank them all and kept coming in.

BRYAN: [01:04:48] And that was just part of it. The other part was I'd walk in the house and, you know, hookers in the house. And I remember coming in one evening and there was this Indian lady from down, from Suva, and I knew she was one of the hookers. And this lady is like six foot, probably 250. And she is there. And, uh, I'm like, I'm done. It's like, what are you doing?

SZTUK: [01:05:24] Yeah. Yeah, well, Suva's quite a bit different than a village in.

BRYAN: [01:05:28] Yeah.

SZTUK: [01:05:29] A village in Korea.

BRYAN: [01:05:30] So I was, I was up there. Nice house. They were renting it and. And I told, I told my program director, I said, I got to go. I can't, I can't handle. I come home every evening and I just want to sack out and just chill. I ain't got all these people in my house. Some of them are hookers, some of them I don't even know who they are. Half of 'em are. He's drinking beer for dinner, and we. I'm done. That's when they moved me to the maid's quarters. I was there for about a year.

SZTUK: [01:06:04] And that's pretty common for the houses in Fiji to have the bure.

BRYAN: [01:06:09] Yeah. Yeah. Right.

SZTUK: [01:06:12] Maid's quarters.

BRYAN: [01:06:13] Right, right. Yeah. And so I was there for about a year. And then I remember, um, cause I was pretty active in sports, basketball, and I played cricket and I did a lot of running. I remember one evening I was running. Did my typical run around the area and this guy pulls up beside me in a car. And I look. What is this guy? What? You know. And he pulled up. Hey, my name is Lawrence, Lawrence Benjamin. He said, I heard you were looking for a place. And then I went, uh, yeah, you know, because the place is pretty small and I'm taking a cold shower every day. Sometimes in order to take a warm shower, I became a member of the

defense club, the racket ball, and I'd go down and take a hot shower. And that was like five blocks down the way.

BRYAN: [01:07:14] So I got tired of that after a while. And I just mentioned to somebody, I don't even know who it was, and I think I need to move. I need somewhere that's renting a, you know, somewhere with a nice shower. And, you know, I can keep all my stuff. Cause I had been broken into too, had been broken in three times, stuff stolen out. And, uh, and so I was about done living there. So I told this guy, sure, yeah, I'm looking for a place. And so he said, look, on your way down. He pointed to the place. It's, I live right down the street about a quarter mile on the beach road. And this is the number. He said, if you want to check it out, fine. If you don't, fine. No big deal. Come check it out. If you want to stay, we can make a deal or something. I know you guys don't get a whole lot of money. I'm just looking for a roommate, that's all.

BRYAN: [01:08:15] So I ran down there and this is like right on the water, right on the beach, right on the water. This guy's got two, what do you call those sails? Parasails. And I'm looking at this place like you're crazy. Take this. He's got, you know, TV and video and the side room was small but that's all I needed. A little small room and kitchen, full kitchen, hot shower. So I said, look, this is how much I get a month. Hey, you guys want to stay? You're in. So I told my programmer, I said, I'm out of there. The place, the place also had, um, had these little mites. Um. I don't know what the heck they were.

SZTUK: [01:09:15] Mm hmm.

BRYAN: [01:09:15] I don't know what they were, but they were crawling all over me. I had to fumigate the place and it was filled, I mean, just roaches. Roaches all over the place. It was, it was a mess. I don't know how I stayed there a year. But, um, yes, so I ended up moving to Beach Road.

SZTUK: [01:09:31] Big improvement. That's at Suva Point?

BRYAN: [01:09:36] Yeah. Yeah. This guy was an accountant with Price Waterhouse and, uh. So it was nice. We still, occasionally we still remain in contact. New Zealander. He's living in Australia. Yeah.

SZTUK: [01:09:53] All right.

BRYAN: [01:09:54] Yeah.

SZTUK: [01:09:54] And you met your wife in Fiji?

BRYAN: [01:09:56] Yes. Yeah. Met at a Fiji party. Yeah. Yep. So, um, yeah, we went to a couple of Fiji parties. I think it was the second one. Met her there and started dating. And that was it.

SZTUK: [01:10:19] All right. Well, I've kept you talking for quite a while here, and I know you're probably getting tired. Any, uh, any memorable experiences there or things that you might consider like a big accomplishment or memorable experiences while you're in Fiji?

BRYAN: [01:10:50] Hmm. Well, I, um, I guess in Fiji, certainly. I went there as a health educator, and got some small accomplishments there because the program, there wasn't anything there and sort of had to develop something. And did some work with the professional staff in providing visual aids and trying to make them, um, locally oriented like with. Because a lot of these kind of visual aids, you see the typical handicap with a kind of weird wheelchair, trying to change that to make it more, more, um, relatable to the locals. Whether it be a Fijian sitting on a grog bowl and having a conversation about, about going to the clinic to check out your skin, this lesion that he got. Or having an Indian lady in a sari or in a, in a setting, because you had the two primary cultures there. And something just in that context.

BRYAN: [01:12:06] And so it was difficult because, like I said, the program didn't exist. You had to create. And you had trial and error. And you had a, one doctor there was pretty critical. She, uh, she, a lot of the. I would take some of my, some of the, write something out in English and I'd get it translated by. And I took it to, um, who was this guy from, um, the

University of the South Pacific? English. Had him translate it. She said, this is wrong. What? This guy's a professor in English, he's translated it, and she's going to tell me it's wrong. So it was, it was a battle. It was a battle trying to get this, get this stuff kind of formulated so that it was acceptable.

SZTUK: [01:12:58] Yeah.

BRYAN: [01:12:58] And it was, it was like couldn't get past this doctor's head. I don't know. We just, it just didn't work. I tried different things, did some things because I was into photography. And so what I did do I think was successful. But it was kind of hard to do was, was, um, a lot of these leprosy patients had lesions and things, and sometimes it was hard for them to track it because they put in notes and the notes would explain, but the visual always helped. So what I would do is take before and over a period of time, pictures as the lesion progressed because they were on some pretty heavy duty medicine, rifampicin, or they were in prednisone. Prednisone just eats the body up like crazy and this stops. And that's a medication that's really, really successful.

BRYAN: [01:13:58] And these patients, blow up, blow up like balloons because, because of the reactions. The antigens in the body is trying to fight the, with the medications, trying to fight the leprosy, and they'll blow up. And the prednisone kind of contains it, but it also destroys the liver and all the organs. So the pictures, I think, were helpful too, that they could open up a file and look in the pictures and see what the lesions were like some time ago and then take a later picture. So some of that was done, but it was hard to do because, um, you know, working with this doctor was part of it. But the other part was getting patients in there on a regular basis. So I did some of that. Some of the, some of the visual aids were successful.

BRYAN: [01:14:48] They use that, they use it in training. They, the World Health Organization is a big sponsor of that hospital. So they would, they would have training programs. And I would, I would, uh, some of the things they were teaching the paramedicals coming in, I'd put in a visual aid and it was helpful for them to use. And whether it be a chart or whether it be skin lesions describing leprosy. And what I, what I did was I went down to the

South Pacific Commission. They do, um, they teach South Pacific Islanders from all over the Micronesia and Melanesia how to do visual, how to do screen printing. So I went down there and I just sat and got some stuff from government printing and they allowed me to sit in and join to learn screen printing, how to develop it.

SZTUK: [01:15:44] Oh.

BRYAN: [01:15:44] And but it's all manual. You have to cut it.

SZTUK: [01:15:47] Yeah, very difficult.

BRYAN: [01:15:48] Yeah. And so, uh, so some of those things were. Another thing that was successful, I think too, was WHO donated a Land Cruiser, one of these big ones that had the open back where you had like six people, seven people could sit. I got my license to drive that. And because often they would have trouble. Patients would sit at the hospital for hours just waiting to be picked up. They'd go in for a visit. They'd wait for hours and hours on end, just sitting and waiting for somebody to come pick them up. They got this vehicle. The doctor would just say, hey, Ben, can you, so-and-so's been at the hospital. They're finished. Can you go pick up these people? Or can you take these people and drop them for a visit? And when they call, go get them.

BRYAN: [01:16:42] Or we'd do, we'd do mobile team, um, visits like to Namosi up in the mountains or the hills. And that would, it would take like 2 hours to get there when you take this van. And rather than the doctors drive, they could just sit back and I was pretty much a chauffeur. And the nurses would all be in the back and it took a lot of pressure off of them dealing with having to drive. They could just pack stuff in and just worry about organizing and doing the presentation while they were there. And I was basically the driver. So that took a lot of heat off a lot of people because they didn't have a driver at the hospital. And most of these places, embassies, the hospitals, they have designated drivers.

BRYAN: [01:17:39] Yeah, they didn't have one at the hospital, so I became part time driver. So whenever they needed something, they'd just call me and

I'd go get them, pick them up. And, and I think that was, that was very helpful. So. So there was, there was these little, little things and that kind of helped the program. And, and, uh, so.

SZTUK: [01:18:05] Yeah, so it sounds like you had quite a, quite a bit of impact.

BRYAN: [01:18:08] Yeah.

SZTUK: [01:18:09] So now here you are. It's almost, almost 40 years later.

BRYAN: [01:18:13] Mm hmm.

SZTUK: [01:18:14] And what do you think this volunteer experience is in these two different countries? Is that, has that had a big effect on the rest of your life?

BRYAN: [01:18:24] Oh, absolutely. Sure. Well, you know, married to a Fijian so. But no, for work wise, I spent 24 years with the Department of Education, Maryland State Department of Education, working with the individuals with disabilities and all types of disabilities and reviewing, uh, medical documentation to determine eligibility for services. So. And then segued just two and a half years ago to the federal government, pretty much doing the same thing. But on a different, different scale. This is, uh, similar in respects of working with individuals with disabilities. But it's a slight twist to it. That was public. This is specifically federal employees.

BRYAN: [01:19:18] So yeah, absolutely. It's, it did, I think it did certainly build a decent foundation for that, for experiencing the medical part of it and then taking off from there and doing these kinds of, kinds of what I'm doing now and enjoying it, actually. Yeah, very much.

SZTUK: [01:19:42] All right. And you're thinking about moving back?

BRYAN: [01:19:45] Uh, it's not thinking. Moving. According to my wife, we're, as soon as the house is sold, we're gone.

SZTUK: [01:19:52] All right.

BRYAN: [01:19:53] Yeah.

SZTUK: [01:19:56] Okay. Well, I appreciate your time.

BRYAN: [01:19:58] Sure.

SZTUK: [01:19:58] Is there anything else you want to get in?

BRYAN: [01:20:01] No, I'm sure there are lots more, but that, I think that was the essence of the whole thing.

SZTUK: [01:20:09] All right. Well, then, thank you very much. This concludes the interview.

BRYAN: [01:20:12] Super.

[END OF INTERVIEW]