Randolph Adams Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Randolph (Randy) Adams served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic from 1966 to 1969 on community development projects.

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Oral History Interview

with

Randolph Adams

October 15, 2018
Reston, Virginia

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:02] This is Evelyn Ganzglass. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968, and I'm interviewing Randolph (Randy) Adams, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic from 1966 to 1969 and then worked at headquarters in the ‘80s, as well as in the ‘90s, ending up in the 2000s, I guess, is the way to say it, as director of evaluation for Peace Corps. So, Randy, let's go back to the beginning. Why did you join the Peace Corps to start out with?

ADAMS: [00:00:50] Basically, I was escaping my education. I was currently at the time studying physics. I realized I didn't particularly like it. I spend more time at the Cleveland Public Library studying monogram monographs on Indian populations in South America. So I was interested in possibly switching careers, but I didn't know exactly what, whether I would be good at doing something else. And I like the idea of anthropology. So Peace Corps was a way to test whether I could be an anthropologist.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:38] In the field?

ADAMS: [00:01:39] In the field, right. And so they first offered me a teaching position in Chile, teaching physics at the university, which is what I definitely did not want. So I said, no, I'd prefer something else. And the second offered me a position to work in rural community development in the Dominican Republic. I had no idea what that meant, particularly in the Dominican Republic works, but I turned them down one, so I didn't want to be turned down a second time. So I said yes. So that's how I ended up in the Dominican Republic.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:21] Great. And what did your family think about your leaving physics and going off?

ADAMS: [00:02:28] I don't know. We never really talked about it. So they basically let me do what I wanted to do. So it was I mean, in retrospect, I really don't know what they thought about it. And it never came up. It was just something I told them I was going to do. And I went.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:46] Where did you grow up?

ADAMS: [00:02:49] In Cleveland, Ohio.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:51] So did other people in Cleveland, Ohio, join the Peace Corps? Any of your friends?

ADAMS: [00:02:56] No idea. I didn't discuss it with anyone else. Certainly my colleagues at the university were so focused on science. I was an outlier. I mean, I was engaged in the civil rights movement in Cleveland. It's sort of a tutorial center. I was working in what they called Freedom Schools, working in inner city Cleveland, talking about civil rights. So I was doing a lot of stuff off campus anyway.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:38] So you were accepted into the Peace Corps. Where did you go for training?

ADAMS: [00:03:44] We had what was called outward bound training. Peace Corps had evolved from doing university stateside training to a number of Outward Bound type of training centers. There was one in Mexico and this one was in Puerto Rico in the outside of Arecibo on the north central coast called those books. It was in embedded in the rainforest. And basically our training was got up at 6:00 in the morning, doing our calisthenics, a mile run, eight hours of intensive Spanish, got into cross-country training and technical training. And it was a very intense three months. We did get about two thirds of the way in. We actually were flown to the Dominican Republic for a week. Oh, just as a sampling of what we were going to go. And then we came back to Puerto Rico to finish our training.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:52] I guess it was close. So it was feasible.

ADAMS: [00:04:55] Exactly. And that training lasted till probably the mid ‘70s when Peace Corps went to the third stage of training where they did in country training centers. So I've seen because I've worked for Peace Corps for 20 years, I've seen how the way they've done training has evolved, as well as how they design programs and projects.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:22] We were in domestic university based training. So this was a big step forward. Did you have did you have homestays as well in Puerto Rico?

ADAMS: [00:05:33] Just for a week, we were given a map and told to go to the community on the map and see if someone would put us up for a week practice or Spanish. Learn more about Puerto Rico and then came back to the camps. So the family program didn't begin until 1969. Wasn't my idea. But after I finished my Peace Corps service, I actually went with. Noise in the kitchen, sorry.

ADAMS: [00:06:21] I was asked to implement the first family live-in training, 12 week training program. We actually gave the trainees three days of Spanish and a map of the section around town of Ponce, Puerto Rico, in the small communities, and told them to go out and find if they could

find a family that would be willing to put up with them for three months. They all did it. It was amazing. After the first cycle, we realized if we wanted families to be trainers, maybe we should select the families and give them some orientation and some support instead of just randomly sending people out looking for places to live. So, again, it was a learning process that the agency was going through.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:12] But so go back to yours. Do you think your training prepared you for your service at that time?

ADAMS: No.

GANZGLASS: Why not?

ADAMS: [00:07:20] It was too focused on the physical aspects of it. You didn't need to rappel off dams and do drown proofing and then take five day hikes through the rainforest to survive. Here it was preparing us for being special forces in the military, and we needed the language, certainly, and the cross culture, but we didn't really integrate much with the local Puerto Rican culture to make it very. You still book learning versus what eventually evolved into more of an experiential learning. So it just took some time for the agency to evolve.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:11] And what kind of preparation did you have for community development? Did you find out what community development meant?

ADAMS: [00:08:19] Yes, but not in training. I think, again, it was, you know, learned how to kill a chicken and dress a pig and talked about community organizing. But it was really in-service training where we learned more about it during our service. And I was assigned to an Office of Community Development, which was a new agency that was created after the revolution had just taken place in 1965. The Peace Corps stayed in the country from throughout the revolution. And after there was this agency set up to help in self-help and throughout the country in rural areas. And it was mostly AID funded, Agency for International Development. And I worked in a region with seven other extension agents that were we were all expected to be doing the same

type of work. The other six were Dominicans. And I was the one American in my area. And my group of 18 were dispersed with other Dominican.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:42] So each one country, one volunteer with?

ADAMS: Per region.

GANZGLASS: And what is it that you did?

ADAMS: [00:09:52] Well, when I first arrived in the community where I was dropped off, my project manager looked at me and says, go develop. I'll see you in six months. And so I tried to figure out basically from some of our training is just talk to people. I spent the first three months visiting as many families as I could through an eight kilometer road were about 500 families were dispersed throughout the area. And to find out who they were, what their interests were, what they thought of the community, what they might want to do as a community. And in that particular community where I started, they were desperate for a school because the youth population was exploding and they were in one small room with all grades and four teachers. So we eventually were able to actually help that community build a school. And with that, as my base, by the end of my first year, I ended up working in 10 different communities within the province I was in.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:03] What province where you in what's called?

ADAMS: [00:11:06] Santiago Rodriguez or Sabaneta. It changed its name at different points in its history. When I was there it was called Santiago Rodriguez. It was in the far northwest part of the Dominican Republic.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:21] And what was it called later? What was the second name of it?

ADAMS: Sabaneta.

GANZGLASS: So you ended up working in 10 different communities?

ADAMS: [00:11:36] The work varied depending on what the community was interested in. One wanted schools. One wanted a health clinic, and a number of them wanted help with agricultural production of peanuts. Started a youth club. Some credit union organization, farm to market roads. The agency that I worked with supplied engineers and heavy equipment communities had to do the manual labor, put up about 50 percent of the cost of whatever was being done. And so it was mostly labor. But sometimes they would make the cement blocks from the buildings and raise some of their own money to maybe by roofing material or things like that. So very much of a community organizing effort, printing sort of advisory committees, or because they really didn't have any community councils per se. So these committees were more of a steering committee to help move the communities along.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:48] And what was your role vis a vis the Dominicans who were community developers?

ADAMS: [00:12:55] We did the same thing in different areas.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:58] So you were just part of the team?

ADAMS: [00:13:00] Which is part of the team. And we would meet monthly as a group to talk about what we were all doing and how we're doing it. So we shared our experiences.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:09] But each one was in a different place.

ADAMS: [00:13:11] Each one was in a different you know, we didn't work together in the same place.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:16] So you were in this, what town were you in again?

ADAMS: [00:13:21] A small town or a small community, it was called El Guanal.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:27] Oh, El Guanal. And talk a little bit about what this town was like and what your living situation was.

ADAMS: [00:13:38] You'd call it a community, not a town, because it was literally just dispersed houses along the eight kilometer road throughout the hill. Most of the houses, the house I lived in was about 15 foot by 15 foot dirt for four and a thatched roof. We had an outhouse and then the back there was a lean-to where they had a clay stove for cooking. The owner of the house wanted five dollars a month rent, and he moved out of the house to live in a lean-to at the back of the house to get the five dollars.

GANZGLASS: Which was a considerable amount of money, I guess.

ADAMS: [00:14:22] Probably. Well, our salary was about a hundred dollars a month. So five percent of my salary went for the house and another 30 dollars for food. Had a family prepare my breakfast, lunch and dinner. That was thirty dollars. I paid another five dollars for laundry, which meant getting my clothes on a rock at the river and putting it in boiling water. So my elastic bands and my underwear sort of disappeared.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:54] But it was clean.

ADAMS: [00:14:55] It was clean and always prompt, folded, neat. I think those were my basic expenses.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:03] Did you who did you communicate with in the who were your friends? Did you did you have friends?

ADAMS: [00:15:12] Not particularly in the community. I mean, I met the families and I would work in the field sometimes just to get to know the men. And there weren't too many older children, mostly under 15, who were still in the community. And the. So certainly the family I ate with became close and there was a landowner in the area who was raising cattle. I did become very good friends with his son, who was a university student and which was very rare in that area. And we maintained a relationship over the last 50 years. He just died last year.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:06] Well, you said there weren’t many young people left over 15. Where had they gone?

ADAMS: [00:16:12] Good question. I didn't think of asking it at the time, but they weren't there. And in that community anyway.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:19] But it wasn't military.

ADAMS: [00:16:22] No, no. At the end of my second year, close to the end of my second year, I actually moved into the small provincial capital, which was about 3000 people there. The local high school youth approached me and asked me if I would sponsor them for a youth club. So there was an empty house right on the town square that was given free rent in the back room to sort of guard the place. And the rest of the house was used for the club. And these were young people who were looking for leadership. Developing their own leadership after a 30 year dictatorship. In the first year anniversary of the club in November, the young president of the club, who was a senior in the high school, made a statement that he says, the reason we're together learning is because we don't want to be like our parents. Which to me was shocking to hear him say it publicly, but it was because they were so submissive to the dictatorship. Did you think they saw themselves as a new generation that was going to change things?

GANZGLASS: [00:17:39] How did that how did you experience that in the first town you were in in community development? Did people seem passive?

ADAMS: [00:17:50] Oh, definitely. Oh, they were very used to I mean, I tried to keep having meetings at different times, and very few people would show up and find like one of my friends came and called the meeting for 11 o'clock on Sunday. Why not? Nothing else work and 11 on Sunday, everyone showed up and I was just amazed. So what's going on here? Well, for 30 years, the dictator called meetings at 11 o'clock Sunday. They respected the former dictator, I guess, in terms of following the patterns that they were used to, it really tried to help them understand what elections were all about. I remember when we tried to hold some decisions on votes and there were options. The first

option would get all the votes. So if you wanted to manipulate things, you put what you wanted to be the first option, because that would get votes. So we introduced secret ballots. To force them to think on their own without all everyone wanting to publicly show that they were unified. So it's interesting to see how they were understanding their responsibility within that small.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:09] And you were talking about men. Did women take part in this at all?

ADAMS: [00:19:14] Yes, it was both men and women that came into being the whole family would be there. So it wasn't to. The main local leader happened to be a man. He was an appointee from the government. But the committee was mixed.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:33] I mean, did you feel any of the politics?

ADAMS: [00:19:39] Oh, yeah. Post postwar politics. There were two incidents. One was it discovered that the governor of the province had been the governor under the dictator and also the governor under the leftist president. And I didn't understand that he had since retired. I literally walked to his house and knocked on his door and asked him, if you wouldn't mind talking with me and I explain this young American who is trying to understand your country and how things operate here, and I just don't understand how you could be elected under a dictator and a leftist president. And he told me, we all couldn't leave. And it was a little confusing until he says, oh, a number of people went into exile, but the rest of us had to stay behind. And basically, I tried to do the best I could under the circumstances. And the people rewarded me by reelecting me under the opposition. I treated them as best I could under the situation in both cases.

GANZGLASS: So he didn't he didn't actually care if it was right or left. He was for the people or did he?

ADAMS: He was a politician. He was trying to do play a leadership role, which he did. And he. I think that lesson always followed me when I

understood things like Iran and Iraq, Afghanistan. We were so dismissive of people who had been in the Republican Guard, for example, under Hussein, and that understanding that if you weren't a member of the party, that you couldn't be a principal of the school, you couldn't be a doctor or head of a clinic. There wasn't an option, you had to be a member. It doesn't mean you had the same particular values of the dictators. But you had to buy in, if you're in a communist country, if you're not a member of a party, you're not given any leadership positions. It doesn't mean you're particularly again. Adhere to all the values of those political systems. It's just a given. And I think that is something that's hard to understand coming from a country like our own. To understand those pressures, other people have to live under that. We don't.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:28] Did you see the evolution of people's attitudes that during the time you were there?

ADAMS: [00:22:35] Certainly among the youth. I mean, they did. You saw at the universities that the youths demanding more transparency and openness and at least in the Dominican Republic over the last 50 years, it's gone from left to right to left to right. I mean, they've managed to have relatively nonviolent transitions of government across parties. So something was able to be stabilized and evolve.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:09] And how did Peace Corps manage under both? I guess it was Peace Corps there under the dictator.

ADAMS: [00:23:21] The dictator, no. So only came in afterwards, came in after the dictator was assassinated in ‘61, I believe.

GANZGLASS: Who was the dictator?

ADAMS: Trujillo.

GANZGLASS: Trujillo. Yes.

ADAMS: [00:23:29] And during the revolution, the general the opposition came on national radio and said, leave Peace Corps alone. They're neutral. We were the only international organization alone allowed to cross into rebel territory. We had a contingent of nurses that were administering to the wounded on both sides. So we maintained a level of neutrality that was respected by both sides. So we were neutral. They saw us as a people to people as we see it ourselves versus a representative of our government.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:10] Not accused of being CIA spies or anything like that?

ADAMS: [00:24:14] We were all accused of that. You're different. I mean, I would joke with my youth kids who were sort of jokingly say, oh, you're not, you're CIA. I said, well, what is it here that the CIA would care to be interested in? You know, do you really have a military installation here? Anyway, I almost got them into trouble, though, because at one point we did an overnight up into the mountains and on the way down in back into town, I came up against the military who had been told that there were youth up in the mountains. And right after, you know, this was only a year or two after the revolution. So the military came up to see who these young men were up in the mountains. And luckily, I was coming down in front of them all. So when they saw me, the two of them had military guy in charge, just came up to me and said, next time you go up, make sure you inform me of growing up, because this could have turned into a disaster. It didn't cross my mind to inform you that we were just going like a Boy Scout camp out. But that definitely would give you a sense of the underlying sensitivity that things were still not normal, whatever that is.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:46] Peace Corps didn't actually train you or make you aware of the sensitivities?

ADAMS: [00:25:55] Not those type. So we certainly were told not to engage in politics, which we didn't do. At one point, the current governor invited me to some of his meetings with some of those small communities around the capitol. And I would go until I realized that he was sort of using me as an example of someone supporting him. Hmm. I wasn't

supporting him, per se, but I'm trying to learn about what he was saying, the communities, the issues the communities were interested in. But I realized that my presence looked like I was part of his retinue. And so I had to tactfully decline to continue going to the meetings with him.

GANZGLASS: Why did you move from the town you were in doing the community development to working with the youth group?

ADAMS: [00:26:52] I was still doing the development. Only the town was now more central to the ten communities I was working in.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:59] So you didn't switch jobs. So it was just activity?

ADAMS: [00:27:03] You know, this was just an added activity. And with the central location that it made it easier to get around to the other communities.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:14] So what did you do during the vacation time? I assume you had vacation. Did you travel around the country?

ADAMS: [00:27:21] I, um, I took one vacation that I can remember where we went back to Puerto Rico. And I just spent a couple of days in San Juan enjoying the, uh, enjoying Puerto Rico again. Um, I took a vacation between my second and third year because I stayed for a third year. So that was the only time I really took a vacation.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:52] Why did you stay for a third year?

ADAMS: [00:27:54] I had an opportunity to move to the capital to help set up an education unit within the Agrarian Reform Institute. The institute was created because the dictator had owned forty five percent of all the arable land in the country. So this was a natural opportunity to distribute a lot of his lands to unlimited peasants, farmers who had either been sharecroppers or laborers, given the opportunity to have their own land to do their own farming. But the institute recognized they needed an educational program to help organize these

communities. So I was asked to replace another volunteer who started it and had finished his third year and was leaving. So when I came in, it was the second year of the program and basically implementing what I had already been doing for the other agency within this new agency with three, three Dominican counterparts, and that we worked directly as a team together and setting up these ag reform, um, basically agricultural production co-ops. And we had a whole set of pamphlets on how to organize a cooperative and trained farmers on these various agrarian reform. We called him a sentimentalist, which basically settlements would be the translation. And so we had some agronomists join the team to provide presentations on agriculture techniques. My team did the organizational and type of activities and tried to make these literally brand new communities operate in an efficient and effective manner. So I did that for a year. That was my third year. And then I was invited to do training for the next group coming into the Dominican Republic. So I went back to Puerto Rico as a trainer, thinking I was going to be doing the outrebound training and ended up doing the family live in training. And I did that for three years, I guess.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:36] In based in Puerto Rico?

ADAMS: [00:30:38] And Puerto Rico. And then we began to as things started moving in-country, I did set up one training in Venezuela and began doing training for Peace Corps in Peru.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:55] So by that time, you were a Peace Corps staff, you moved from?

ADAMS: [00:30:59] I was a contractor because the training center was running the contract for Peace Corps. So I wasn't a Peace Corps employee directly.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:11] So I know when we talked, you mentioned that there was a bombing of the Peace Corps office.

ADAMS: [00:31:19] Oh, yeah.

GANZGLASS: When was that?

ADAMS: In the capital during my third year. I was on my way to the office to do some work that evening in the Peace Corps, Dr. drove by. He says we have three people looking for a fourth for bridge game. Would you be interested in joining us? And I said, well, I had some work to do, but I can always do it in the morning. So sure. Glad to join you and play some bridge. As we were playing, we heard a bomb go off, which was not exceptional in the capital. And this was in an area where the U.S. embassy and the AID building was. So we just said there's a bomb. OK. However, the doctor got a call saying, come to the Peace Corps office, it's just been bombed. And when we got there, we found, ironically, that my desk, the one I usually used in the office because I had an office in the Peace Corps office as well as in the ministry, was the one that had set a bomb under. And when it exploded, it blew the desk up in the air and turn it upside down and landed. And it's on its top. A good government desk, strong. And it turned out that the reason the office was attacked that evening was because there was a newspaper reporter for The Washington Post by the name of Drew Pearson, who had written an article claiming that the Peace Corps agency director had been a head of a not-for-profit that was a CIA front. And so the group of young men came to the office looking for an American killed to kill that evening.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:10] And it could have been you.

ADAMS: [00:33:14] Could have been me. The next day luckily, Drew Pearson wrote another article saying, oops, I made a mistake and retracted his first article saying he discovered there were two organizations with the same name. And luckily, the agency director was the head of the one that was a non CIA front. Also, luckily, the leftist newspapers in the Dominican Republic had banners that were even larger than the original thing. Oh, Peace Corps is not associated with the CIA. This was a mistake. So we went from being love to being hated to being loved in a 24 hour period.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:51] Did they ever find the person who did the bomb?

ADAMS: [00:33:54] No. And that evening, they also bombed two volunteer houses, who put bombs in the windowsills of the two homes. And in those days, we were given army cots this year to sleep in. And the two volunteers who were sleeping that night in their army cots that were lower than the windowsills. So when the bombs went off, the shrapnel shredded their mosquito netting, but luckily missed them. But again, it's that sensitivity of not understanding how something like that affects Americans worldwide that are that could be diplomats, military tourists, people working for the embassy or AID or Peace Corps.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:44] It's interesting that it made it to the DR that quickly from The Washington Post.

ADAMS: [00:34:50] Just took it in. Day for the first one and a day for the second one. So it was a very again, you know, Americans may not understand and may not understand this, but the world watches us. We have or have had I don't know about today, but we have a tremendous influence and impact, both positively and negatively worldwide. So anything we do has an effect or potential effect on other countries. Many times I felt that people may know more about us than they know about a neighboring country because a neighboring country may not have the same influence or at least maybe one country over. So it's not that they know so much about us and we know nothing about them as. You're influenced by who has power over you or who has some influence over you. So I don't think Americans are necessarily ignorant internationally. We do pay attention to countries that have influences over us. We know about Russia. We know about China. We know about other NATO countries. We may not know about other countries in the south.

ADAMS: [00:36:21] And I think that the same about the countries in the south, they know about the countries in the north and may not know their own neighbors in the south. So a lot of it just has to do what are the interrelations and what are the what are the power structures.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:36] Well, one of the goals of Peace Corps is to change the view of the United States. Right.

ADAMS: [00:36:43] I definitely think it works. When I was with the agency in the Cabinet, I think was the last decade we had the US embassy does surveys around the world of what people in those countries think about the United States. And I remember in particular, our country director in Bulgaria, when we happened to be there as the embassy, if they would, we do the same survey in those communities where Peace Corps had served in the general survey that was done by the embassy, showed that 65 percent of Bulgarians had a positive attitude toward the United States. And those communities were Peace Corps and served. It was 85 percent. And I'm certain that many of those volunteers had no idea of many of the people in those communities of how just being there was it was affecting them. So again. Everyone in a community knows what the volunteers doing. Where are the volunteers going through, the volunteers talking to? You may not be aware of it, but they're especially in those small rural communities, they know what you're doing. And so you're definitely a model for them. You represent America in that respect. OK, so how you act, how you interrelate. And luckily, it's usually very positive.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:23] So clearly, just our presence overseas in little towns makes a difference. How does it work the other way?

ADAMS: [00:38:34] It makes it real. This is a real live American, someone I can talk to who recognize your opinions with. It's not the propaganda that's either being sent out by their own government or by our government. So from that perspective, it gives them an alternative to what their image may be of whatever an American is.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:56] Well, I was going to ask the question going the other direction. How have Peace Corps volunteers experiences throughout the world influence their attitudes or I shouldn't generalize? How did your experience in the Dominican Republic and then and in Venezuela, Peru, other places change your attitude about people throughout the world?

ADAMS: [00:39:25] The same way. In the example I gave you of the governor to understand why things are going on the way they are. There's a story behind it. And if you don't understand the context, you can jump to conclusions based on your own experience in the US. Instead of interpreting it based on the. The context in which it's actually happening. So by being at the grassroots level, you're immersed in that context. So it adds a lot of the details. You wouldn't get a newspaper reporting or in the books. You actually live the reality to understand what the cause and effects are. The interpretation is from the local level.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:21] So I know you've been involved with the National Peace Corps Association and lots of other Peace Corps activities. Do you think volunteers are doing enough at this point to communicate this more sophisticated understanding of the world?

ADAMS: [00:40:37] I think in the last couple of years, the National Peace Corps Association, as the alumni of Peace Corps, has evolved tremendously, literally in the last three to five years. There are a lot of Peace Corps groups now. That are atypical since the PC was founded. I think it was 85 maybe I'm not exactly sure when, but it's been about 30 some years. It was mostly to bring people together who had served together. So you had country of service groups. I'm a member of the Friends of the Dominican Republic. We have a huge small project assistance program that people who have served in the Dominican Republic donate to this program within the Friends Group that provides small grants to communities throughout the Dominican Republic and has been doing that for the past 20 years. So we're sort of continuing our service long distance, if you will, and other groups are doing the same thing. You also have regional groups. We have a northern Virginia group, for example, here, this group, for example, does a bike path cleanup every quarter, and we actually have a site at both ends of the bike path that we work on that would say this path is being maintained by the Northern Virginia Peace Corps volunteer group. We participate in a multicultural fair where we have a booth to talk about, not only Peace Corps, but presents maps and ask people to say, where did

you or where did your family come from? Did you serve? Have you traveled overseas? So it engages people in story about their own international experiences. There's a program they have with the Rotary Club to have speakers talk about volunteers' experiences. So a lot of these friends of country groups and the regional groups have been doing what are known as the circle activities of engaging people.

ADAMS: [00:43:17] The new groups, which I find absolutely fascinating, are what might be called issue groups. The LBGT community. The Peace Corps volunteers for environmental action. The Peace Corps community in support of refugees as example. These are very mission driven groups of social issues today that are bringing. Peace Corps volunteers from across the spectrum, wherever they live in the U.S. or wherever they served overseas. Focusing on particular issues. Providing their voice based on their international perspective as to an alternative to two other perspectives on the Peace Corps community in support of refugees. Actually was invited to a forum at the United Nations who was putting together a compact for refugees and a compact for immigrants. These are United Nations documents that will be guidelines, international guidelines for how refugees and immigrants should be treated. These are two separate compacts. And the countries are in the final stages now, if you will, of coming to the conclusion of what those standards will be.

ADAMS: [00:44:50] Well, the Peace Corps community was able to submit their point of view. And so, again, I think that's the evolution of our volunteers have been able to organize and take that experience they've had and put it into social action. We've just submitted an application to get U.N. consultancy at the United Nations. We had had it 20 years ago, and for some reason it lapsed. I've helped to reengage that connection. Especially now that we have all these issue focus groups to give them a more formal voice within the U.N. as part of the United Nations Civil Society Network. United Nations is strictly for governmental interaction, but there are over 3,000 not for profits from around the world. Have this consultancy status that when there are four conferences looking for civil societies, perspectives on issues that the U.N. is debating. It gives these NGOs opportunities to present

their positions. And we're hoping that will establish in pieces chair at the table.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:17] So you're involved in the refugee work yourself?

ADAMS: [00:46:21] Yes, I was part of the group to help put the talking points together for the presentation at the U.N.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:26] Very good. So any other thoughts about, um, you've been director of evaluation. You worked at headquarters. You've had you've had so many roles in in Peace Corps, starting with volunteer. You've seen it from so many perspectives. Um, what's your takeaway on current and future directions?

ADAMS: [00:46:56] Oh, I don't know. I think. I don't know if this work can ever reach its potential, and I think it has a much greater potential than it is able to actually achieve that I've ever seen over the 50 years. I've worked for the agency for over 20 years and six different decades. So I've seen how it's changed. The one thing it doesn't seem to really grasp, well, some of the field staff did it. And to me, they're the real development specialists in the agency. The host country project managers are not limited to the five year rule. It usually takes you three to five years to understand your job. And yet with the Peace Corps five year rule, everyone has to leave after five years. The host country staff, many of them have been there for 20 and 30 years. And there they understand their country, they understand the culture, they speak the languages, they understand the sectors. They're trying to work with volunteers. And so for me, a very good staff project manager is one who sees the volunteers as the resources they use to get development done. Yes, volunteers are helping facilitate and promote development, but it's really those project managers who understand the sector and what the leverage points are in a sector to be able to put in a volunteer that in conjunction with their counterparts, would have some influence in changing behaviors or changing methods, not to the volunteers or particularly.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:57] Right.

ADAMS: [00:48:59] Many times they're very wrong in some of their advice, but simply working as a team, you're creating an thinking environment. And so interacting with the Peace Corps volunteer may trigger someone to think about something they wouldn't have without the volunteers presence. And so it's simply that interaction that has such a powerful drive for people to think about their own condition and what they want to do and maybe even figure out how to do it. Volunteer helps provide that environment, not that they have the answer, but they help engage in creating that environment. And so for me, the biggest flaw I see in the agency is lack of understanding system change. We're so focused on the individual volunteer, and most of them do quite well. But that's like a shotgun, hoping something is going to bloom from some interaction, instead of having a systems understanding and intervening in leverage points, that you can help an entire sector actually make a change.

ADAMS: [00:50:20] I'll give you an example in the Dominican Republic. There was an education manager who had worked in in the field of education in this country for 20, 30 years, and he was really studying his own education system in the country. This is to make you better than you. And he recognized that one of the biggest constraints to education, especially at the primary level with resources. I mean, there are no educational resources. You have a teacher, usually has a blackboard, writes a lesson, students copy it, students regurgitate it. But no learning, no thinking is happening. And there's no shortage of what today would be called ICT, instructional communication technology. So do you try to pilot? He would have a volunteer with two Dominican teachers, set up a resource center in a, you know, education district, and they would work with the business community to bring them recycling recyclable materials. And instead of taking them to a dump or trash, they use these recyclable materials to make things like maps, clocks, abacuses, educational materials that any teacher would want in a K through six, K through eight school. And then these teams would visit the schools in their district to show the local teachers how to do this. And I think he set up like 15 pilots around the country.

ADAMS: [00:52:12] Well, there was a change of government. And the story that I was told the country director took Domingo and a volunteer to meet with the new minister. And the new minister wasn't particularly interested in talking to Peace Corps. I mean, what can Peace Corps do for her? And then they started talking about this resource development center. And she looked at them in total surprise and said, Peace Corps is putting those together? And they said, well, yes, that was one of our pilots. And she leaned down and pulled up and one of her desk tours and pulled out a sheet for projects she wanted to write and said, would Peace Corps be willing to talk to me about trying to do some of these other things. I mean, this is impact at the national level in a system's impact, not just one community with one volunteer. So the structures there, I mean, the Peace Corps has try to think in terms of a project of being 30 volunteers for two years, repeated by maybe three or four successive inputs.

ADAMS: [00:53:28] So you're talking about 90 to 120 volunteers over a six year period, all focused on one particular intervention of working with people to make the change they want. And to me, that's where the really impactful to get into these systems thinking. And there are some brilliant host country staff people out there that have gotten there and have made incredible success at the work they've done.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:06] Why hasn't that?

ADAMS: [00:54:07] They're all not necessarily trained that way.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:11] I was going to ask, why is it that D.C. Peace Corps headquarters doesn't see that?

ADAMS: [00:54:17] Well, one, you get incredible turnover in headquarters. You have I think it's three political appointees who direct most of the officers in the agency. So they come in every time there's a change in administration, and it doesn't matter what party it is. And when they implement their ideas, instead of trying to figure out what's actually working and trusting what's working and supporting that instead of general reminds me of the volunteer who thinks they're the one that's

going to make the change instead of being simply a facilitator to help someone make the change they want to make. So it's the difference between the volunteer doing it to prove themselves versus facilitating someone else's vision. Staff people are the same way. I mean, they want to come in to show how good they are instead of accepting that maybe some of their predecessors actually knew what they were doing. And this is probably an organizational issue anywhere, but I think it's incredible. It's even more so when you have the turnover of staff. Where you don't have at least five to 10 years of experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:37] You have the turnover of volunteers, you have the turnover of staff. So decentralized.

ADAMS: [00:55:45] The only consistency is the host country staff. And unfortunately, they're so overburdened, any new idea is put on them to implement. So even those that can think or want to think systemically, they're so overburdened with trying to get everything else that that's put on their plate, that's just horrible. So, I mean, certainly don't blame them. But it's this whole. Oh, I don't know. I mean, I come from a development perspective. I mean, that's my education training, I went from being a physicist to being a Ph.D. in sociology and in culture change.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:32] So you did become an anthropologist?

ADAMS: [00:56:34] I did sort of.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:35] Yeah, well, that's pretty close. Sociology is much the same. Yeah. Gets pretty close.

ADAMS: [00:56:42] But it's as I say, you know, two years was certainly not enough. I had the opportunity to not only work for two years, three years as a volunteer, but then three years as a trainer where I also learned more about behavior change and. I've been doing. There was one period in the 90s, from '91 to '96, where I was the regional programing and training officer. So I got to visit every single country in the Latin American Pacific region, meeting with all the host country

staff, managing their projects. And I was I was more like the what is it, hummingbird going from flower to flower transmitting the pollen. Oh, people kept saying those are really great ideas. I said, well, they certainly are. But it came from Mosee, it came from Juanita, it came from. Our field staff is just so experienced of bringing together. We would bring all the managers together, education, health, business, and really get them to educate each other. I used to bring our business field staff to a National Business Association meeting here in the United States called BALAS, which is a terrible thing, means bullets in Spanish. But it was created by a group of academics who wanted to study Latin American business. So this Business Association of Latin American Studies, these were Latin American and U.S. business school professors. And somehow I got involved with them because I went to learn what they were doing for our business field staff. I ended up getting on their board of directors and becoming the treasurer, which was another story.

ADAMS: [00:59:02] But I took them to allow all of our host country field staff to come to the conference to give case studies on how business operates in their countries. And in many of these academics, they want to pay any attention to them. But a good portion of them thought that they were learning about the real reality on the ground for people who were practitioners actually trying to help business develop in Latin America. And so they were very welcoming of having our field staff present their case studies. And when volunteers were doing the best thing that I really appreciated was those academics that got to heap so much praise on our field staff for getting it right, but understanding how business operates, understanding how to help business. That it reinforced their enthusiasm for doing the work with volunteers. So being able to get them to see because they're out there alone, I mean, you know, that they have their own group of volunteers. They do what they think is right. But who do they talk to? So they have to talk to their peers, but even better, talk to people outside of our environment to find out that they're appreciated and they're out there on track for what they're doing.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:28] So how do you think Peace Corps complements U.S. aid, U.S. embassy?

ADAMS: [01:00:37] Oh, to some degree. There are certainly a lot of volunteers throughout both aid and embassies. Oh, I just saw RPCV appointed an ambassador to Libya, is it? I can't remember which in today's or yesterday's paper, an RPCV is an ambassador. I just hope they had more experience than their volunteer experience, because I don't think it's enough. The cultures like the State Department and AID are too strong to put up with the total renegade within them. If anything, you hopefully have the same tact you had as volunteer so you can work within those cultures and influence them indirectly, if you will. But you're not going to break into those cultures.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:41] But do you think in the field. Peace Corps volunteers are now involved in U.S. aid projects. Are they now involved in USAID projects?

ADAMS: [01:01:51] Not necessarily through AID, but through the contractors.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:55] Through their contractors, you know, but then to after their volunteers, but as volunteers. I mean, I know I've interviewed some people and they say, well, they were able to get some money through an AID grant for a project, for example.

ADAMS: [01:02:09] Yeah, it varies.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:10] That's not a regular thing?

ADAMS: [01:02:13] No, it isn't in all the countries. There used to be a small project assistance grant from AID to Peace Corps, and that was ended a while ago. I don't know when or why.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:29] Maybe it was under that program.

ADAMS: [01:02:32] Yeah. This program was an aid-funded program where they got a budget that had that was I was part of the team that helped put

that together in 1980 for well, I actually was against it in the ‘90s. I came back around again in 2002 to accept partially. Part of the problem with that program is only about 10 percent of volunteers had access to it. So you would get a community asking a volunteer roles. John and the other community got money for the community. Why can't you? So to me, one of the geniuses at Peace Corps is it doesn't have money, it doesn't saddle volunteers as bringing money. You know, the rich American is bringing money to the community. A negative case I saw was where a volunteer could work with the community to improve their production techniques for artisan goods. And she did a brilliant job. They were really marketing well, selling more than they ever had. But she got a small grant to build a kiosk as an outlet to sell these artisan goods. And she was very proud of that. Within three months of her leaving, the people she had worked with had taken the kiosk apart and used all the materials to repair their homes. What they didn't forget was the skill training she developed in them, and that was real to me the core of her success.

ADAMS: [01:04:12] But I think we have hang-ups as Americans. It's got to be physical. It's got to be sort of your little monument that you've been able to produce. And it's the capacity development. It really is being able to help them learn the skills and knowledge that they don't have. But we help foster the example of that is read a newspaper article where there was a reporter that claimed to volunteer at wasted two years of her time because she helped the community build a library. But the library, a bunch of farmers went on strike. They invaded the town and they burned down a number of things, including the library. And so in the article, the reporter says, did you waste your time? And she says, no, they understand how to do it. And when the time comes back, you'll be able to do it again. To me, that was the perfect answer or experience, an example. And yet they came up with this title of political volunteer ways two years ago. The reporter didn't get it. And I called him and called him on it.

ADAMS: [01:05:30] So, you know, if you listen to that volunteer, you'd understand what development is all about. It's not the building. It's their ability to know how to do it now and in the future. And that's why

I'm ambivalent about money. I certainly became appreciative of it again when I saw it building latrines in Muslim areas where if it weren't for that, women, girls wouldn't have been able to go to school. That was one case where it had a tremendous impact. So I can't be absolute about disagreeing with having resources. You always need resources. My issue is more where are they coming from? Ironically, I'm the chair of the Community Fund for the NPCA, which raises money within the Peace Corps community to provide grants to volunteers and RPCVs. But one of the key things I do in that community is, are you helping your community understand how to raise funds by themselves? That, you know, if you're the only conduit to money, that once you leave, they're just going to be stagnant again. But unless you have a component of helping them understand how to access resources, then you're just satisfying yourself. So back to that capacity to children. But every area has its own context. It's got its own leaders and it's got its own restrictions. You just have to figure out what that means.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:18] And it's not always a straight line from here to there.

ADAMS: [01:07:21] No, absolutely not. That's what's so fascinating about the field wherever you go. People are ingenious. They have always figured out a way how to do something. It may not be the quote best, but it's the best for them currently anyway. I mean, again, one of the ideas I've been promoting that I did not invent, but I definitely bought into from one of my former colleagues. She said, stop saying best practices. Best practice means because it worked here, it's going to work there. Say promising practice. This is something we've done. You might want to try it, but you probably don't want to do it exactly the way we did.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:07] That's true.

ADAMS: [01:08:08] And if you can understand that, then you don't try and just implement something because it worked here. You're not going to have the same leaders, you're not going to have the same resources, and your context is different. But the principles may be the same. But

if you could focus on that and then invent your own solution. Then that may work as promised.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:35] That's right. I will tell you offline, I will tell you a story about promising practices as well. So we're about out of time. Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share? After 40 years of Peace Corps experience?

ADAMS: [01:08:55] I remember we. I had 12 different positions, more or less, you know, in all of my Peace Corps stints, the last one was chief of evaluation in the Office of Program and Training Support, which supported the field staff. But I think the. It was always like you get two RPCVs in a room, you get three opinions. We all have experiences. We all have opinions. And some of the arguments we have among ourselves, very few people on the outside have any clue as to what the arguments about, because they're about nuances. I think we all pretty much had the same ideas about development. But it's those little intricacies that we've learned because of our own personal experiences that we fight over, that outsiders just are glazed over. No idea what those little differences mean or make it so. It's still an experiment. I guess wasn't there a book called The Bold Experiment or something?

GANZGLASS: [01:10:15] About Peace Corps?

ADAMS: [01:10:17] I don't know. I think that's what it's called. It's about Sargent Shriver in the beginning of the Peace Corps. The three goals are still relevant. I think anyone that. I know there were periods where people wanted us to be more like AID or State Department. And it's always amazed me because I think we got it right to start with. It's the others that are trying to catch up. So I don't think Peace Corps has anything to apologize for it. It got it right. It's a slow process. It's a grassroots process. But that's what makes change happen. It's not these big things that come in and overwhelm everybody and then wonder why nothing's working.

GANZGLASS: [01:11:03] And the budget has been minimal since the beginning.

ADAMS: [01:11:07] Since the beginning. And it's just it's much harder to get in there. I never would have been accepted. I was very lucky during the time period. I think one out of seven now get accepted.

GANZGLASS: Wow.

ADAMS: And the skill level, the experience level was usually much higher. But I think you need all levels. Because what we bring in is problem solving, that's the basic American value that we do with this problem solving. And that's done best in a group.

GANZGLASS: [01:11:44] Good. Let's end it with that. Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]