

Pamela Lopes Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Pamela Lopes served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from August 1964 to August 1966 at an urban community development and social services foundation.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Pamela Lopes

October 13, 2001
Tucson, Arizona

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:01] I'm going to need this. Today is October 13, 2001. And this is Bob Klein. I am interviewing Pam Lopes, who was a PCV in Brazil, August 1964 to August 1966. The project was urban community development. We usually start by asking people to go back to the time before they joined the Peace Corps. It would have been 1963 and kind of give an idea of where you were at then. You may want to go back a little into your childhood early. Up to that point, that's up to you.

LOPES: [00:00:52] But well, I was a senior in college at Occidental College in Southern California, and President Kennedy had been assassinated. And Peace Corps was a brand-new thing right then. And so I started thinking about it my last semester of college and applied.

KLEIN: [00:01:23] What did you study and what was your major?

LOPES: [00:01:27] My major ended up being psychology. I started out as a math major, changed to undecided. Then I changed to physical education and then I changed to pre-med. I wasn't going to go to med school. I was going to go to be a physical therapist. But then I took all kinds of other interesting classes and didn't quite have enough in any one area to graduate. And so the psychology department allowed me to count some of the sideline classes towards their degree, so I ended up with a psychology degree.

KLEIN: [00:02:20] Up to college head or up to the time you graduated, had you done any traveling outside the United States?

LOPES: [00:02:29] No.

KLEIN: [00:02:30] And had had you studied any languages?

LOPES: [00:02:35] I studied Spanish in high school and I studied one year of French in college. That was it.

KLEIN: [00:02:41] But you never been in a work or living situation where you use Spanish.

LOPES: Nope.

KLEIN: Ok, so it was strictly an academic subject up to that point. During '63, as you were moving toward finally figuring out what degree you were going to get, what career plans did you have at that point, if any?

LOPES: [00:03:04] Um, well, I had applied to go to physical therapy school and so I had gotten into two different schools and I was visiting the schools to make up my mind if I wanted to do that or not. And but in the meantime, I had this idea of applying to the Peace Corps, and so the Peace Corps won out.

KLEIN: [00:03:26] Do you have any idea what it was that motivated you to join?

LOPES: [00:03:32] Well, I think it was the summer before my senior year. I read the book *The Ugly American*, and then I listened to President Kennedy talk, and I think I'd probably read some other things in there. I can't remember anything specific, but decided that, well, I also had this idea that I wanted to see more of the world, but I had no money, so I couldn't be a tourist. Plus, I didn't really want to be a tourist. I wanted to actually learn about some other cultures. So I thought, Peace Corps pays your living expenses and you obviously learn another language and learn another culture. So yeah, it sounded good to me.

KLEIN: [00:04:30] That was a big motivator. One of the motivations for a lot of people, just the sense of adventure, you know, the wanting to go and do it. Were any of your friends considering Peace Corps at the same time?

LOPES: [00:04:44] Uh, actually my boyfriend at the time also applied. And he went also into the Peace Corps, but to a different country. He went before I did, actually.

KLEIN: [00:04:56] And how did your family react to your talking about joining?

LOPES: [00:05:03] Um, my father wasn't very happy about it. He was worried, you know about me going off into the boonies by myself, but he didn't really voice an objection. Yeah, he wanted to be sure that I was going to be OK. You know, so after I gave him all the information that the Peace Corps provides for parents and stuff, and he was OK.

KLEIN: [00:05:32] Yeah. Do you recall the application process? I think you filled out a questionnaire.

LOPES: [00:05:38] Filled out a questionnaire and mailed it in.

KLEIN: [00:05:43] Did you have to take an exam? Were they still giving the exam then?

LOPES: [00:05:47] I don't recall any exam. I might have.

KLEIN: [00:05:51] Do you remember? Did you give an indication of preference for the kind of work or the area where you'd like to go?

LOPES: [00:05:59] I don't recall doing that. I might have said health. I probably did actually.

KLEIN: [00:06:07] And then graduated in June. Had you heard from the Peace Corps at that point?

LOPES: [00:06:12] Yeah, actually, the Peace Corps had invited me to become a trainee, but I would have had to start in May and I wasn't graduating until June. And so I said, no, I can't do that yet. And so then, um.

KLEIN: [00:06:29] You don't know what project it was.

LOPES: [00:06:31] Yes, it was actually, um, I think it was to go to Brazil. I remember that we would have had training at the King Ranch in Texas, is that where that was? Which I thought sounded really interesting, but too bad. And then I couldn't do that. And then they invited me for another project almost immediately to start right after I graduated. But it was in Turkey, and I didn't know very much about Turkey. But I'm I was fairly independent minded and outspoken, and I couldn't see myself walking behind men or wearing a shawl or keeping my mouth shut at appropriate times. And so I said I didn't think I could survive in that culture. You know, I would probably get in trouble. And so I declined that also. So then they said, OK, how about Brazil?

KLEIN: [00:07:37] Yeah. Although you must have encountered something like that in traditional society in Brazil.

LOPES: [00:07:43] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:07:43] Yeah, right. We'll get there a little while. So you and the Peace Corps finally settled and it was Brazil. Was it to a specific project?

LOPES: [00:07:56] Yeah. I was going into a health care to work in rural health clinics in Mato Grosso, probably, which is a large state in Brazil.

KLEIN: [00:08:04] And so going into training, it was that specific.

LOPES: Yes.

KLEIN: Where did you train?

LOPES: [00:08:13] At Arizona State University. In Tempe.

KLEIN: [00:08:18] Yeah. Was that your first time in Arizona?

LOPES: [00:08:23] Other than camping at the Grand Canyon and stuff like that with my parents.

KLEIN: [00:08:27] Where were you from originally?

LOPES: [00:08:28] Southern California. Santa Monica.

KLEIN: [00:08:34] Do you remember approximately how many people went into training at the same time? Was it like 20?

LOPES: [00:08:44] Oh no, it was more like one hundred and something.

KLEIN: [00:08:47] Were they all, was everyone in the training program going to go into this rural health?

LOPES: [00:08:57] No. There were a few people who were like civil engineers and, uh, a couple of civil engineers and they were going to be working with city governments or something like that. I think most of the rest of us were in the health field as I recall.

KLEIN: [00:09:30] How did you feel when you got the notice that you were going in? I mean, any hesitations, I mean, it was really there was really a lot of unknown.

LOPES: [00:09:37] Oh no, I was all excited. I thought it was just great.

KLEIN: [00:09:42] There had already been projects in Brazil. Am I correct or were you?

LOPES: [00:09:45] Yes, we were number 14.

KLEIN: Oh, OK.

LOPES: There was a big build up in Brazil, right about at that point. They were, well, there had been a project that had started in May, the training that I was first invited to and I didn't go on that one. And then so there weren't very many people in Brazil, but there are a whole bunch were going real soon.

KLEIN: [00:10:12] So you went to training was at Arizona State University, relatively urban setting. Any feeling about the other trainees, any sense of, you know, they're not like me, I'm like them. Any reaction to the group as you moved into it?

LOPES: [00:10:31] Most of us were recent graduates from college. There were seven, eight, 10 married couples. Another couple that were engaged during training and they got married between training and going overseas.

KLEIN: [00:10:58] The men, male female split was?

LOPES: [00:11:06] Approximately even. There were a few people in their thirties and forties and the group, but not very many, and there were a few people without a bachelor's degree, but almost everybody had a bachelor's degree.

KLEIN: [00:11:23] Did you stay at a dorm and was it an isolated setting or?

LOPES: [00:11:28] We actually stayed in the Sigma Nu fraternity house on fraternity row because they had been kicked off campus for misdeeds. So they rented their house to us and we ate in the university dining room. We had to walk across campus, right and eat there. And we exercised in there at their field. So we walked or rode bikes around campus, but we didn't mix very much with students, we were too busy.

KLEIN: [00:12:05] Can you describe the training syllabus?

LOPES: [00:12:09] We had some agricultural training. Oh, sorry. We had some agricultural training, we went out to the university farm area and planted using methods that they use in Brazil. We had some of our trainers were returned Peace Corps volunteers and so they as well as some missionaries who had spent time in Brazil. So they knew some agricultural methods that they use in Brazil. And so they taught those to us and we planted vegetables and things on the farm and had to go out every other day or so and work on the farm.

KLEIN: [00:12:57] Is that physical environment that you plant farming in, is it anything like the physical environment that you'd encounter in Brazil? I mean, it's clearly not rainforest outside.

LOPES: [00:13:12] Oh no, we weren't in any rainforest area in Brazil. The Mato Grosso is a rangeland. Not as hot as Tempe. So it was similar, but I never, I didn't end up going to the agricultural area like that.

KLEIN: [00:13:34] But it was August in Tempe, right? Did many people drop out simply because of the heat?

LOPES: [00:13:41] No, not that I know of. I don't think anyone did.

KLEIN: [00:13:44] As a group, the people tend generally they were pretty well, pretty motivated.

LOPES: [00:13:48] Oh yeah. But we had so we had agricultural. We also had a lot of health type training and visited health clinics, including out on some Indian reservations. And of course, we had language like five or six hours a day. We raised rabbits in our patio area.

KLEIN: [00:14:16] Was the language training, was it made clear that the language was a requirement for selection? In other words, a certain level of proficiency?

LOPES: No.

KLEIN: You were learning Portuguese, right?

LOPES: [00:14:30] Right. I don't remember that we had to have a certain level to pass.

KLEIN: [00:14:35] Do you remember the selection process at all?

LOPES: [00:14:37] Oh yeah. Um, we had a, they were doing deselection at that point and midway through training, we had a deselection point where a lot of people were told to go home. That they were not going to be Peace Corps volunteers. And then and at the very end, the same thing.

KLEIN: [00:15:02] At the midpoint deselection, what was the reaction of the group you recall? I mean, were there protests?

LOPES: [00:15:17] There were a few people who were deselected, so to speak, who were surprises, you know, the rest of the trainees were somewhat surprised. Most of the people were not really surprises. You know, the rest of us sort of could tell that for one reason or another, it didn't seem like they would be good Peace Corps volunteers.

KLEIN: [00:15:42] But really, depending on personal characteristics, then right? More than technical skill. Yeah, it's just the kind of person wasn't going to wouldn't fit, right?

LOPES: Right, yeah.

KLEIN: Did you have psychological testing?

LOPES: [00:15:58] We had psychological testing? We had sessions with psychiatrists.

KLEIN: [00:16:03] Individual? What was your reaction?

LOPES: [00:16:07] Yep. We had full background investigations.

KLEIN: [00:16:11] They were still doing it. Yeah. How did you react to encountering a psychiatrist?

LOPES: [00:16:18] I didn't care! I didn't think there was anything to worry about, so I didn't care.

KLEIN: [00:16:23] Your sense for yourself pretty much was that there was no way you were going to be selected, right?

LOPES: [00:16:29] Yeah, I was upset at the end because at the end there were people who were selected that I disagreed with that, you know, a few people. But at the same time, you know, when there were a number of us who objected to a couple of people and we were told, well, you know, you don't really know the whole story, you don't really know their whole background and you don't really know a lot of stuff that we know. And so we're making the decision based on more information. And so it was.

KLEIN: [00:17:06] Was there any sense of political decisions being made so this person might be too radical? Or was it more a?

LOPES: [00:17:15] Well, possibly, but I'm not sure. But there was one guy who was um, had was deselected at the very end. And I thought it was political because he had visited Niger, I think. And they wanted to know everything he did over there and why did he go? And he said he just, you know, he just wanted to go. He was interested. And I think he taught English or something for a while and while he was there, but not much, you know, he just more or less traveled around and they weren't satisfied. They were suspicious. And so, yeah, I thought that was political.

KLEIN: [00:17:56] Did you talk much about whether there was someone in the group with CIA? Was that?

LOPES: No.

KLEIN: Ok. It may have been from the earlier days that it was kind of a game almost.

LOPES: [00:18:09] We did have an instructor. I guess he taught us Brazilian culture and history or something. And he was German and he was a former Nazi. And when we found that out, we objected and then we got him taken off the project. We didn't want a Nazi.

KLEIN: [00:18:39] So there was enough group cohesiveness that you are not 100 percent, but that you could do such a thing. Did you play a leadership role in that?

LOPES: No.

KLEIN: But you are clearly agreed with what happened?

LOPES: [00:18:54] Yeah, I was kind of like, how could you, that kind of thing?

KLEIN: [00:19:00] Was there also American studies and world communism studies as part of training? Were you puzzled by any of it, why this?

LOPES: [00:19:14] No, I guess not. I can't remember.

KLEIN: [00:19:17] Did you have any sense that someone was trying to define for you what you should do as a Peace Corps volunteer?

LOPES: [00:19:27] No. On the contrary, it was more like, you get over there, you've got to get to know people and you've got to figure out what it is they want to do and then help them do it right. And you've got to make your own job, you know? Well, at the point at the time where we thought we were going to health clinics right then there was somewhat of a structured job that we thought we were going to, you know, and so that gives you some basis. But then what we understood was that you do a lot of things other than your structured job. And so those are the kinds of things where you just got to figure it, figure it out for yourself.

KLEIN: [00:20:06] Did you have informal sessions with the returned volunteers? You mentioned that they worked with you on agricultural skills.

LOPES: [00:20:12] Yeah. Yeah, because they lived with us too. They lived right there.

KLEIN: [00:20:15] Oh, for the whole for the most of the training. Did you have any Washington visitors or Peace Corps staff visitors from the field?

LOPES: [00:20:30] Um, Washington visitors. I don't remember if we had any Washington visitors, but we did have a program director from Peace Corps from Brazil come up and visit who was met with us. That was Phil as a matter of fact. He was going to be the program director for the Mato Grosso group.

KLEIN: [00:20:53] Oh, OK. Selection, you're chosen to go. Did you have any leave time before you had to depart?

LOPES: [00:21:06] There was two weeks or so, 10 days, 10 days, two weeks, something like that.

KLEIN: [00:21:11] And then where did you report?

LOPES: [00:21:13] And then we went to New York and flew out of Kennedy Airport.

KLEIN: As a charter group. So it was a full plane of people.

LOPES: Yeah, just us.

KLEIN: [00:21:26] Just the Brazil group. And where? Well, let me go. One other thing about training. How did you do with language in training or what was your sense of your own skills as well?

LOPES: [00:21:42] I was in the upper group because Portuguese is very similar to Spanish. I've had Spanish in high school. So I hadn't had it for four or five, four years or so, but I'd had one year of French, which is also similar grammatically and also has kind of a nasal sounds, you know, the Portuguese has. So that helped, too. And so I was in the top group of the language, but I certainly wasn't the best.

KLEIN: [00:22:12] And the language training emphasized spoken Portuguese. I mean, you didn't study the literature?

LOPES: [00:22:21] We did a little bit of writing things towards the end, but really not much.

KLEIN: [00:22:30] We'll talk about language later. Flew in, where?

LOPES: [00:22:33] Rio, Rio de Janeiro.

KLEIN: [00:22:37] The president was there waiting to greet you.

LOPES: Uh no.

KLEIN: Was anyone there?

LOPES: [00:22:44] Yeah, there was the head of the, um, who was there? Hmm. I don't even remember, but probably the agency heads where we were going to go to work.

KLEIN: [00:23:00] So there was some ceremony at the airport.

LOPES: [00:23:03] No, there wasn't anything at the airport that I recall.

KLEIN: [00:23:06] OK, where did you first go to then when you arrived?

LOPES: [00:23:12] They loaded us onto buses and they took us to a hotel that was used. The name of the hotel was, uh, it was on Flamingo Beach. Hmm. Anyway, all the Peace Corps volunteers always stayed in that hotel. It was a pretty big one.

KLEIN: [00:23:38] And what happened during your time there?

LOPES: [00:23:43] We were only there for about maybe a week, maybe not even that long, four or five days. And what we did there was, um, they told us what our specific assignments were, where we were going to go. We got the plane tickets or whatever you know, to get out to our various sites and

people. Some people went to Mato Grosso, some people went to the Northeast. It was, we basically were spread out all around Brazil. And then that's where I was told that I wasn't going to go to the health posts out in Mato Grosso. They had a chance to start up this urban community development project outside of Brasilia, and they, the Social Services Foundation, wanted, I think there were 14 volunteers or something. And so there were 14 of us that were picked. Most of us were from my training] group, but then there were a few people that were picked out of some other training groups that had arrived at the same time.

KLEIN: [00:24:48] The Social Services Foundation is a Brazilian government agency?

LOPES: [00:24:52] Yes. And so then they talk to us to see if we would be willing to switch, you know, and go over to this other project that wasn't actually very well defined. So at first I didn't really want to, but I did.

KLEIN: [00:25:12] But when you initially arrived, you expected you'd be in Mato Grosso in a health clinic. But you made the adjustment and did someone try to convince you or?

LOPES: [00:25:32] Well, yes. What they what they did was they called us each in to talk to us, to a room.

KLEIN: Who's they?

LOPES: [00:25:43] Probably the country director. And then Phil was the program director.

KLEIN: [00:25:53] For the area, including Brasilia?

LOPES: [00:25:54] Yeah, and then there was also the man that was the program director, project director out in Mato Grosso. And then, you know, they told us about this potential project and asked if we if I wanted to switch. And at first I was not too interested. But then I found out that Phil was going to be my project director, so I decided I was interested. And I went, yeah, so that was slightly, uh, different motivation there.

KLEIN: [00:26:27] Well, it all adds up. So the 14 of you travel together to Brasilia?

LOPES: Yes.

KLEIN: And unlike other places you might have gone, were you the first group of volunteers to go to Brasilia?

LOPES: Yes.

KLEIN: So that must have lent some element of excitement or confusion or a little of both?

LOPES: [00:26:51] Both.

KLEIN: [00:26:53] To whom were you, did the 14 of you work supposedly within the same agency or function?

LOPES: [00:27:01] We all worked, well almost all of us. We worked for the social services foundation for the federal district, and we did not work in Brasilia. We worked in what they called satellite cities right outside of Brasilia, but still in the federal district. And they were pretty much bedroom communities of civil servant type people who worked for the federal government or the state.

KLEIN: [00:27:33] This was '64. Had Brasilia officially begun to function as the capital or was it is still?

LOPES: [00:27:43] It was still in transition. It was the capital. But most of the foreign embassies were still in Rio and had like consulate offices up in Brasilia. They had a hard time convincing all the foreign governments to actually do business in Brasilia. But at that time, a lot of people actually were doing business in Brasilia, but they would fly out on weekends.

KLEIN: [00:28:12] I was going to say, it was, was it a commuter government where people really headed back for Rio?

LOPES: [00:28:18] But the people we were working with lived in Brasilia.

KLEIN: [00:28:22] Ok, and in a satellite city, who would be the people who were living there?

LOPES: [00:28:27] Um, all the functionaries they called that, you know, worked, worked in, well they were either, you know, they were civil servant types worked in all these different federal agencies.

KLEIN: [00:28:45] So they had come there in order to work for the government. They weren't originally from there.

LOPES: [00:28:51] Right, but almost nobody. All of these villages well, with the exception of two. And I think there were more, more like eight or nine villages. They're not really villages, cities. They were originally created by all the construction workers who came to Brasilia. But then they were living in shacks up against the equivalent of the White House, you know, or Congress building, and so the federal government came in, knocked everything down, loaded it on trucks, carted them out of town and dumped them out there. Said, OK, set your shacks up out there. So they got all these people outside of the capital itself and put them out in different groups. And so then a lot of those people were still uneducated construction worker types who didn't have work to do anymore because construction had stopped. But then a lot of those people took jobs as the functionaries so-called and a lot of them worked. In fact, many, many, many, if not all, worked like half time so that everybody could have a job, you know?

KLEIN: [00:30:15] Was that an official government policy?

LOPES: [00:30:18] I don't know, but they certainly did it that way. You know somebody, they would work four hours. And first, I'm like, why do people only work half time? Why don't you have an eight-hour job? And because he needs a job too. So I work four and he works four and we both have a little job, you know?

KLEIN: [00:30:34] Well, we'll get to that later. Can you describe your own journey from Rio to that place where you ultimately lived and worked?

LOPES: [00:30:44] Well, let's see. I'm sure we flew. And we landed at the Brasilia airport. And then there we were met by the director of the Social Services Foundation and just had a little meeting with them and met a lot of the social workers that we were going to meet with counterparts. And then they took us out to a hotel where we were. And it was. Brasilia is built in kind of a wing shape, and the hotel was out on the North Wing, where almost nothing was yet. South Wing was developed and North Wing wasn't. But we were out in this hotel and it was actually it was just a two-story wooden building. And we had we had the whole thing. We filled it up, the 14 of us. But then we ate there, too. They had they provided meals for us. You know, it's just you eat what gets put on the table.

KLEIN: [00:31:55] The government agency did.

LOPES: [00:31:57] Yeah. And then the interesting thing was that night men would be standing outside, yelling, wanting to come in, and we figured out what happened was, this had been a warehouse. And the woman who owned it and her husband decided, you know, well, they could make a lot more money if they rented the whole thing out to all this, this group of Americans, for whatever it was, two month period or something, because they were going to be there for a while. And uh, so the men outdoors were really angry. They wanted in and sometimes they would get in and then they'd be pounding on the doors, wanting into the rooms, you know, and we wouldn't let them in.

LOPES: [00:32:43] But that didn't last for too long at all. It was only like three or four nights before they figured out we weren't doing business as usual. But the other interesting thing about that hotel was, um gosh, I wish I could remember her name, the woman who owned it. Anyway, we had two volunteers who were not trained in the health field. Both of them had worked, one was a social worker and the other one had law enforcement experience. And so they both were placed to work in the prison systems. The one who was a social worker was placed working in the women's prison, and the other guy was placed working in the men's prison in

Brasilia. And it turned out that, Jenny, that was her name. Jenny's hotel. Jenny murdered her husband. We did notice that he wasn't around, you know, after a little while. Well, it turns out that she actually paid somebody and had him murdered. And so she was arrested and put in prison where this guy was working as a social worker. So that was kind of interesting.

KLEIN: [00:33:55] Yeah, up to this point in the story, had you had any opportunity to use your Portuguese? I mean, how was that?

LOPES: [00:34:04] Well, we had to speak Portuguese at the hotel. And then at that point, what we had was orientation meetings with our counterparts and at the Social Services Foundation. And we, it was like training for a two-week period I believe. We went in and listened to them explain how the how their foundation worked and how the community neighborhood centers would work, which was where we were all going to be working

KLEIN: At that point had you been assigned to a particular neighborhood center?

LOPES: [00:34:42] Well, very soon thereafter, actually what we did was we went, they took us and visited all the different satellite cities. And then, uh, I'm not sure if they gave us a choice. They assigned us to the cities that we would work in.

KLEIN: [00:35:00] At this point, was it clear you were working directly under the leadership of Brazilians, the Brazilian ministry and your coworkers? What would be the background of the typical coworker as compared to your background?

LOPES: [00:35:19] They were most of them, I think, were social workers who had just graduated, so it would be like the equivalent of a bachelor's degree.

KLEIN: [00:35:34] So they were university trained.

LOPES: [00:35:36] Yeah. Or close to it. And some of them were not. And some of them were social worker students. And so they were like placed at these community centers for experience,

KLEIN: Internships.

LOPES: Yeah, that's basically what it was. A couple of them were social workers and had been there for a number of years. Those were, the lucky volunteers got to work with those people because they knew what they were doing and they wanted to be where they were. Most of the students really didn't want to be there and weren't going to be there for very long.

KLEIN: [00:36:12] I was wondering, I mean, would anyone choose to go to Brasilia to work?

LOPES: [00:36:20] Most of them didn't like being there, but there were a few who, you know, lived there and liked it.

KLEIN: [00:36:25] Were the people, the Brazilians with whom you were working. Were they from all over Brazil or did they tend to come from some specific areas?

LOPES: [00:36:41] Hmm. I think they mostly came from either Rio or Sao Paulo.

KLEIN: [00:36:47] Yeah. Okay. Both down on the coast. How far is it from Rio to Brasilia, approximately?

LOPES: [00:36:53] Twenty-four-hour bus ride. No, wait a minute. I think it was a three-day bus ride to Rio, and Sao Paulo was further. It was a long way.

KLEIN: [00:37:10] And the flight was like one hour?

LOPES: [00:37:15] Uh, probably two hours.

KLEIN: [00:37:16] Yeah. Ok. Which is a comment on the system of roads, I assume. So you still in a training capacity, you're working. How did the counterparts of those experienced social workers or those who were possibly just doing internships? How did they perceive you either as both as an individual and then as the group you were part of?

LOPES: [00:37:48] The ones who were social workers there already and had been for a while, they had a better grip on what to do with us, you know, made suggestions, made some assignments of things to do and the others. And in those cases, I think the volunteers were able to get started doing something, you know, whether or not they can speak Portuguese or not. But where I was in the beginning, we didn't even have a social worker. There was none. And then we finally got somebody assigned who was an intern. But she only came like twice a week because she was doing things in Brasilia the twice a week. And then on Friday, she'd go back to wherever she lived in Rio or something, you know, so that she'd come out twice a week. And she had no clue what to do with us. She had no clue what to even do with herself.

KLEIN: [00:38:53] So where did you end up?

LOPES: [00:38:56] Well, I ended up in a town called Taugachinga, which was about 100,000 people outside of Brasilia, at a community center. There were two community centers in that town, one on the north end and one in the south end. And so two of us were placed in the north end and two others were placed in the south and.

KLEIN: [00:39:23] You find that you've left the hotel and you were assigned to?

LOPES: [00:39:27] Taugachinga. Right, and then what we had to do was we had to find housing there too. And in the beginning, we stayed in the center of town. Oh, that's right. I was saying another volunteer and I were placed up in the north end and then another two people were placed in the south. And the guy I was assigned to work with, he had not been in my training group, so I didn't know him at all. I just met him. But the four of us stayed in the center of town in a pension boarding house, right thing where they provided the meals and stuff. Very, very basic place.

KLEIN: [00:40:11] Indoor plumbing?

LOPES: [00:40:14] Hmm, no, it was out back.

KLEIN: [00:40:16] Electricity?

LOPES: [00:40:20] Part of the time there was electricity. And there was a shower also out back that had cold water. And there was a light, there was a light bulb in there, but most of the time, actually the shower may have had one of those, uh, electrical things attached to the showerhead that heats the water. But of course, that only works when you have electricity. And the lights also only work when you have electricity. So there were any number of times we'd be out there, you know, head full of shampoo and then the lights go off and then no water comes out, either. Not only is there are no warm water, there's no water, period, because the pump doesn't work. So then we'd have to yell for someone to go get us a bucket of water and just to rinse off with, you know.

KLEIN: [00:41:11] Was the water considered safe to drink?

LOPES: No.

KLEIN: How do you handle that at the boarding house?

LOPES: [00:41:18] We bought bottled water. And then we were only we only stayed there a short while till we found other places to live closer to where we were working. So I found a family that I moved in with, lived in a room in their house right near where I was working.

KLEIN: [00:41:38] Did you take meals with them?

LOPES: [00:41:44] Yes. Actually, both my partner and I lived with this family because there was another young man that lived with them in a room out behind their house. And so my partner moved in with him. And then I had a room in the house with the man and wife and their young little girl. And then, yeah, we ate with them, but we didn't end up staying there for very long.

KLEIN: [00:42:11] Why not?

LOPES: [00:42:13] I got in trouble and they kicked me out. Uh, what happened was outside of Brasilia, maybe 50 miles or so, somebody had discovered some

big crystals and this hysteria of a type of a gold rush mentality started happening and people were quitting their jobs and driving out there and filing claims and digging. And it was very interesting, you know? And they were digging huge holes in the ground and other people were discovering gold nuggets and other big crystals. And so it was this hysterical thing. So anyway, the other young men that lived out back of the house.

KLEIN: Was he Peace Corps or not?

LOPES: [00:43:05] No, no, no. Brazilian guy. He had a motorcycle, so he asked me if I wanted to go see krystalina, you know, see what was going on. Well, that was very exciting. For one thing, the husband of the house had gone. He left his job and went to krystalina, you know, and his wife had no clue when he was hanging back or what was going on. And so this guy said, let's go see what's going on. So I jumped in the back of the motorcycle and we rode down there and spent the day looking around, you know, and came back. Well when I came back, the wife decided that I was not a nice young lady because I had gone unaccompanied. You know this man, I mean, he was 25 or something, big deal, but so I couldn't live in her house anymore.

KLEIN: [00:43:57] And did that come as a surprise to you, or did you have a sense of?

LOPES: [00:44:01] No. It actually was kind of a surprise. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:44:06] Was it your misreading of how traditional people were?

LOPES: [00:44:10] Yeah, but I don't think that was all of it. I think that she agreed to have us live in the house because this guy had been living out and back, you know, for, I think, a couple of years with the family and that was a good arrangement and gave them some income. Well, having me in the house was different.

LOPES: [00:44:35] And I would, my partner and I would like sit in the living room at night, sometimes trying to figure things out because, you know, he couldn't sit in my room and I couldn't sit in his room. And so we would sit in the

living room and talk about work and stuff. She found that disruptive. And so at first she told us we couldn't sit in the living room anymore. So we thought, well, all right. So then what we did was we would leave and go down to the corner café and sit there where there was light, you know, and sit and talk. Well, she didn't think that was nice either. And so because we would sit there until nine o'clock at night or something, you know, to single people in this cafe, we were broad daylight in public. So I think she decided that it wasn't worth the rent that she was being paid, that she would rather have her privacy.

KLEIN: [00:45:29] How were you paid while you were there?

LOPES: [00:45:34] They, um, let's see.

KLEIN: [00:45:38] Were you being paid by Peace Corps?

LOPES: [00:45:40] We were being paid by Peace Corps, but initially it came into a bank in Brasilia. And we only got paid every other month. And so it was interesting because by the end of two months, you didn't have any money, you know. And you couldn't, there was no such thing as writing a check or anything, right? The only way to get money was to physically go into Brasilia. Go to the bank. Hope you hit it sometime when the bank is open and get some money out. But of course, you couldn't take out all the money because it was not safe to be walking around with a bunch of money. So you had to do that periodically.

KLEIN: [00:46:22] And how would you get from where you were to the bank, transport?

LOPES: [00:46:25] Bus or walk.

KLEIN: [00:46:29] It was close enough.

LOPES: [00:46:30] Yeah, yeah. Well, when you got into Brasilia, everything was along one street, long street. But basically everything was along that street, except for a few things.

KLEIN: [00:46:42] How did you move around in the community where you were working?

LOPES: [00:46:47] Either walk or by bus.

KLEIN: [00:46:48] You weren't using a bicycle?

LOPES: [00:46:51] No. One volunteer way out in the boonies had a bicycle that I think he bought for himself. It wasn't very useful because they didn't have such things as mountain bikes back then.

KLEIN: [00:47:08] So what would your days be like, I mean, you said that the intern or the social worker you were working with wasn't there that much?

LOPES: [00:47:20] Right. But there were two or three other women who worked in the community center that were not social workers. One of them, um, had a little bit of money that she could give to help people for medical, for medicines or food money. And there was another lady that taught a sewing class and another lady that did, I don't know what she did, cooking and cooking classes I think. None of it was very well organized. But I would just I would get up in the morning and I would go into the center. And initially what I did was started a little girls' group and a little boys' group. Well, right off the bat, what we did was play volleyball. There was a team, a group of teenagers who would meet there and play volleyball. And so we would play volleyball with them and get to know them some. And, you know, working on our language skills and stuff. And then we had dances on Saturdays or Sunday afternoons or something like that with that group also. Not all of them were teenagers. Some of them were older men.

KLEIN: Were there still traditional constraints on male-female behavior? I mean, you cite the example with the house. But going to a dance, I mean, it was there a sense you should be chaperoned or were you exempt from that?

LOPES: For example, this group of teenagers. It was led by a man that was like 45, single. Well, as far as anyone knew, who knows. Yes, I never trusted him. It was like, you know, but his thing was that he was the chaperone while it

was kind of to me like, well, who's chaperoning him? But yeah, I guess other people trusted him because he was the chaperone, basically.

KLEIN: [00:49:42] Well, was the volleyball group coed?

LOPES: Oh yeah. Oh, it was.

KLEIN: Oh, okay. And then of course, the dances would be.

LOPES: [00:49:49] Yeah. And we had them, you know, they had to check their weapons at the door and kind of.

KLEIN: [00:49:58] Oh really? Was security a problem or personal safety?

LOPES: [00:50:01] Well, we were too naive to know that it was. It was a very violent area, though.

KLEIN: [00:50:14] Well, it's a community without roots.

LOPES: [00:50:18] Right. And we used to, the four of us who were in that town, would sometimes would go take a bus and go into Brasilia and go to a movie or something like that and then come back out, go to dinner or something. By the time we came back out, of course, there was no electricity. Everything's dark. But the buses would run until maybe 1:00 AM or something. But what we did was, the bus would come in from Brasilia. It would do a loop around the south end of town. So my partner and I would stay on the bus, um, do a loop around the south end and the other two would get off near their houses and the guy would walk the girl home to her house and then he'd go back to his house. Then Jack and I would have to get off downtown and we'd have to catch another bus that would take us out to our area. And that took a long time to get home. But he would drop me off and take me to my house, and then he would walk back to his house. Sometimes if we got there and there were no buses anymore to the two different parts of town, then all four of us would like walk down to the south side and drop those two off. And then the other two of us walked back. One night we were walking along and we were surprised by the man that was in the street. Well, it turned out he was the

local priest and we knew him, you know? But he was surprised to see us, and he said, what are you doing? We're walking out here and going home. And he said, no, no, no, way too dangerous. And he opened up his cassock, you know, he had a gun, a big old gun. He said he wouldn't walk around there unless he carried his gun with him. And so he told us, don't ever do that. Of course, we still did.

KLEIN: [00:52:15] What was the Peace Corps policy about this? Or was there one?

LOPES: [00:52:19] There wasn't one that I knew of.

KLEIN: [00:52:21] Well, let me, OK, let's go back to the neighborhood center. Over the first couple of months or over five six months, how did your role there evolved? You and Jack were there, right?

LOPES: Right.

KLEIN: Did you tend to work on the same thing?

LOPES: [00:52:44] We did to begin with because Jack's Portuguese was horrible. He could hardly say anything. Nobody could understand them at all. So we work together. But what we did was we kind of, uh, I started a little girls' group and I modeled it after Girl Scouts or Brownies or whatever. I mean, trying to think of things to do. And then, of course, we started a little boys' group too. Initially, I was running it, but all they wanted to do was play soccer. So that was fine, you know? But and then I passed that off to Jack and so he would take care of the little boys, play soccer with them and stuff.

KLEIN: [00:53:25] How did you recruit the kids to come?

LOPES: [00:53:26] Oh, they'd just show up at the neighborhood center. Well, we bought a soccer ball for one. All you have to do is stand there with a soccer ball.

KLEIN: [00:53:35] Did they come because the word was out that you and Jack were there, or because there were other things going on?

LOPES: [00:53:42] We put out word with the women that came into the center, we put out the word in the neighborhood that we were there.

KLEIN: [00:53:50] You have any sense how people viewed you?

LOPES: [00:53:55] They didn't know what we were doing, you know, why we were there and stuff.

KLEIN: [00:53:59] I mean, if you said, would you identify yourself as a Peace Corps volunteer? Or Kennedy's Peace Corps?

LOPES: [00:54:07] Yeah. Oh, they knew Kennedy.

KLEIN: [00:54:09] They did.

LOPES: Oh yeah.

KLEIN: Were there pictures of him around?

LOPES: [00:54:13] Yeah, yeah, there were.

KLEIN: [00:54:16] But they didn't know what a Peace Corps volunteer was.

LOPES: [00:54:18] No, not really.

KLEIN: [00:54:20] And you weren't about to teach them.

LOPES: [00:54:22] Well, you know, we tried to explain to them that we were. We were wanted to help them make improvements in their lives, but we weren't going to tell them what to do. You know, they had to figure out what we did. What we started talking about immediately was getting together like a neighborhood council of adults at the neighborhood center. And I think at this point, we got a different social worker come in who had been studying urban community development. And so she was all into this

and she was excited about doing this and wanted us to help her and stuff. And she, a lot of her ideas were exactly the same as our ideas in terms of getting some kind of a council together and some kind of a small project going that they wanted to do and write and then build on that.

KLEIN: [00:55:19] What was the governmental structure of the community?

LOPES: [00:55:22] They had a mayor.

KLEIN: Elected?

LOPES: Uh, yes. I don't know that there was any council, though. But there was a mayor.

KLEIN: [00:55:33] Was there police, schools?

LOPES: [00:55:34] Yep. Yep. And street cleaners.

KLEIN: [00:55:41] OK. So it was a recognizable town in and of itself.

LOPES: [00:55:47] Yes. And we did work with the mayor and some of his assistants on some things.

KLEIN: [00:55:57] Did they welcome you or did they tolerate you at that level? Or is that the wrong dichotomy?

LOPES: [00:56:04] Well. They, the mayor welcomed us. One of his chief assistants didn't seem to like us, but they were always very polite, you know.

KLEIN: [00:56:22] Did you ever get a sense that the people were making political judgments that, you know, they didn't want Americans coming here to help or to do whatever you're supposed to be doing?

LOPES: [00:56:35] Very little. It was mostly quite friendly.

KLEIN: [00:56:38] Anyone ever accused you of being a CIA spy?

LOPES: [00:56:40] Yeah, we were, or at least we were questioned about it because one of the things, um.

KLEINL By whom?

LOPES: [00:56:52] Somebody in the neighborhood, I think, because what happened when we got this new social worker who was interested in community development and she said, well, OK, one of the first things we got to do here is find out what's in the community. And so she said, I want you to do a land use map. So we got a map of the town that was, you know, had all the little lots marked on it. And we blew it up really big. And then Jack and I walked every single street in town and marked down what was on every lot, whether it was a house or a store or what. Well, that definitely raised suspicion. Why were we doing this? And people wanted to know if the CIA was, if we were part of the CIA or if they were going to send spies in now to see what they were doing? And we thought that was the funniest thing we'd ever heard. We thought, now let's see. Why would the CIA be interested in whether or not you have a brick house or a mud house or scrap lumber house? Hmm.

KLEIN: [00:58:07] But did it come as a surprise to you when people began to raise the question?

LOPES: [00:58:13] Well, it was a little bit of a surprise, but I mean, to us, it was such a ridiculous idea that we just, you know, we really kind of blew it off and then they sort of said, well, I guess it is kind of silly, you know. They didn't, it didn't seem like anybody really worried about it much.

KLEIN: [00:58:32] So now in the new social worker came and did the job took on a little bit more shape?

LOPES: [00:58:44] Right. Well, and then right about then, we did get a council going that met once a week and met a couple of very capable community people, you know, who were interested and in doing something for themselves. Initially, what they wanted to do was petition the government to put in, you know, electricity, sewers and running water. And we had to say, no, no, we've got to look smaller scale, smaller scale. Think of

something to do that we can organize ourselves, that we don't have to ask for the government because they don't have any resources to give this to us. And so it's not going to do us any good to ask them. So I had to talk that up some to get that going. And then, um, in another one of the satellite cities, a couple that was over there had started a library at the suggestion of their social worker, and that sounded like a great idea. So we did that too. In our community center, we got a library started and we went and asked for books from publishing houses all over this country and got quite a few books.

KLEIN: [01:00:12] Did you try to draw in resources back in the U.S.?

LOPES: No.

KLEIN: Not at all. So just within Brazil, you were able to.

LOPES: [01:00:22] Yeah. And in fact, I took a week vacation of my vacation days and went to Rio and just and I had like a list of publishing houses and I just went from one to the other to the other with a letter introducing myself and saying, you know, we're starting this library and we want books. And got lots of books.

KLEIN: [01:00:43] How did they get out there?

LOPES: [01:00:44] They shipped them.

KLEIN: [01:00:45] Physically describe the library, how it got set up.

LOPES: [01:00:53] It was just, we got one little room in the community center that was no bigger than this, probably, you know.

KLEIN: Six by ten.

LOPES: Yeah, and we put shelves on the walls and put the books up and we saw them by category. You know, we set up a little index file of what we had and we made up little cards for people, for library cards and let them. At first, the Brazilians in the community center said, no, no, you can't let

anybody take books out because they'll never come back. And so we went along with that and people could read the books, but they had just sit in there and read the books, you know? And that seemed to work OK, but then we wanted to let people take them out, too. And so we did a little of that. I guess the Brazilians kind of decided which books where they were allowed to take and which they were not, because if they took the pretty colored pages and stuff, then frequently people would rip that page out. Hang on the wall or something. So they stopped allowing them to do that.

KLEIN: [01:02:09] Did you train librarians or that wasn't called for?

LOPES: [01:02:11] No, not at the time. We had librarians, though, in Brasilia, the University of Brasilia was in Brasilia, and we had some Peace Corps volunteers who were librarians at the at the library there.

KLEIN: [01:02:25] We were talking about the library. And after that, you had success. What did you move on to other things?

LOPES: [01:02:34] Somewhat. What we did was we had a CINVA-Ram machine available to us. I don't know if you had any experience with those, but you basically make a brick. One brick at a time by compression. And so we got a group started, and this was together with the priest in the neighborhood.

KLEIN: [01:03:05] And he was Brazilian.

LOPES: [01:03:07] Oh yeah. And my partner and I went and talked with him. It ended up that he didn't want to deal with me. He wanted to deal with a man, you know. So basically, my partner did that project, but they got together and they set up, I think, two groups of whole of people who wanted houses and they drew up the rules of how they were going to operate this and the and the priest was very helpful there and he helped get I think they got bylaws and everything set up, and they had this housing cooperative started and we got at that point. Then we got the CINVA-Ram machine from the Peace Corps and we also got some manufacturing companies to donate windows and toilets and sinks. But this was right when we were leaving, when this was getting started. In fact,

I don't think any of the windows of toilets or sinks were had arrived at all yet.

KLEIN: [01:04:18] Did Jack then tend to put more time into that?

LOPES: Oh yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: Since he was more acceptable?

LOPES: [01:04:24] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:04:25] And what and what did you do?

LOPES: [01:04:27] Well, in the meantime, I had been spending some time at an orphanage that was run by our same social services foundation, but it was at a different site down in town, and I spent some time down there playing with the kids and talking to the staff. Nobody, it was.

KLEIN: [01:04:47] Was that just out of personal interest?

LOPES: [01:04:51] Yeah. And trying to find something additional to do. And then I think that was about halfway through my, you know, like after about one year and they had some other volunteers that were coming into Brasilia and they wanted us to give them ideas on where they could place these new volunteers. And so they asked me whether I thought the orphanage could use a volunteer full time. And so I said, yes, they could. And so they did put one volunteer there. And so then I didn't want to, you know, infringe on his job. So I went back to my own job but it turned out.

KLEIN: [01:05:38] You didn't ask to suggest that you'd be the one to shift over to the orphanage?

LOPES: [01:05:45] No, I probably should have. I don't know why I didn't.

KLEIN: [01:05:50] Sense of loyalty.

LOPES: [01:05:51] Yeah, probably.

KLEIN: [01:05:56] As you came to the end of the first year, do you recall, you know, either looking back or looking forward and saying, well, you know, I've come this far. I really want to go this far the rest of the time. Or was there a Peace Corps conference or did you ever get called in and have a chance to evaluate what you were doing?

LOPES: [01:06:23] There probably was a Peace Corps conference. I don't remember it.

KLEIN: [01:06:28] Used to be it used to be called mid-year conference, but that's yeah, it's OK. Did any of the Peace Corps staff come out to visit you on location?

LOPES: [01:06:39] Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, our project manager, Phil, came out and visited us. He was only there the first year, and then his.

KLEIN: [01:06:49] Phil's official title was regional director?

LOPES: [01:06:53] I think so.

KLEIN: [01:06:54] So he covered more than just Brasilia, right?

LOPES: [01:06:57] He covered Mato Grosso, too.

KLEIN: [01:06:59] But below Phil or working with Phil would have been another Peace Corps staff member.

LOPES: [01:07:05] I don't think so.

KLEIN: [01:07:06] Oh, OK. So there was no Brasilia Peace Corps office.

LOPES: [01:07:13] Well, no. Phil had an office or stayed most time out in Mato Grosso and when he would come to visit us in Brasilia. There was a Peace Corps office there. But the only person who was there was the secretary. But there were books. There were some resources.

KLEIN: [01:07:35] Was it a Brazilian secretary?

LOPES: [01:07:37] Uh, no. A Peace Corps volunteer. And it was in the offices of our Social Services Foundation who was just a little office in there. And then when Phil was in town, he would work there. Or if anyone else was in town and um, the country director came and visited once in a while. And Phil would come periodically to and visit everybody. And then sometimes he would stay for a while and he would just live in the embassy. And we could meet with him in the office and Peace Corps office. Then when he left another, another regional director came, married guy. And he lived in Brasilia. He lived full time in Brasilia and worked full time out of that office.

KLEIN: [01:08:30] Did they did they give guidance and direction and useful feedback to?

LOPES: [01:08:36] They did. Yep.

KLEIN: [01:08:37] In what terms? I mean that you were satisfying your needs to be a Peace Corps volunteer or that you were building a program?

LOPES: [01:08:48] Well, I'm trying to remember, uh, I remember Phil saying, do something! I can't remember any specifics of how we were helped. But he probably like, got us together with different people. I know he met with the social service workers and their bosses and discussed what were we doing and what could we do. And it was a major problem with not having social workers.

KLEIN: [01:09:24] But as you say, somewhere after around the end of the first year, did you look ahead to when you'd be leaving or did you look ahead to the time you had left and try to define some goals?

LOPES: [01:09:46] Not much.

KLEIN: [01:09:47] OK. But I mean, did you feel that your days were being reasonably productive and you didn't have lots of days when there was absolutely nothing to do? Or is that not a fair?

LOPES: [01:09:59] I didn't feel all that productive. You know, I mean, I was really happy when we got that housing cooperative going. And but mostly what I was doing was this Girl Scouting like stuff with the girls. And what I did there was I found a troop of real Girl Scouts in Brasilia, and I got them to volunteer to come out and work with the girls out in my town. And they did that, but they didn't do anything significant, I guess, you know. They come out and play with them or talk to them. We took them on field trips to different places. I think it was more of an educational thing for the girls from Brasilia because they were from well-off families. And they didn't have any experience with these kids that ran around and couldn't afford shoes. I mean, the girls that I was working with, they were lucky to have a little pair of panties and a dress. Most of them didn't have shoes, or if they did, they were little plastic sandals. And so there was no question of buying uniforms or all the rigmarole to be an official scout. There was no money for anything like that.

KLEIN: [01:11:30] When you went on an excursion with them, did you sense that they felt a little ashamed or a little shy about their appearance?

LOPES: [01:11:37] No, we went to fun places like we go to the zoo. I don't think they were ashamed or anything like we went to the zoo. We took them out to a river that had like a swimming hole. You know, we did picnics.

KLEIN: [01:11:52] And was it you and the girls or were there other adults?

LOPES: [01:11:54] Oh, other women Brazilian women would go to, from the people who worked at the center.

KLEIN: Would you recruit them to join you for the excursion?

LOPES: Oh, yeah, there's no way they were going to be left behind. They wanted to go too. In fact, years later, we were back in Brasilia and I got together with some of the people I had worked with. And one of those ladies said that one thing she learned from me was to travel in her own country. Because she saw us and we were just as almost as penniless as they were. Or actually, she was a little more well-off than we were. And we traveled around Brazil and brought back, you know, little statues or

whatever from different places and all these stories and stuff. Well, she had never done that in her own country, so she started doing that too. Plus, when we took the little kids out just in the surrounding area, no one had ever done that before. And so they thought that was pretty interesting to just expanded their horizons just a little bit, you know?

KLEIN: [01:13:11] Was there a single primary school associated with the community you were working in or more than one?

LOPES: [01:13:18] Oh, there were lots. A lot primary like elementary school. There were lots and lots. It was a big city.

KLEIN: [01:13:26] Did you ever think to or did you try to get involved at all in the schools?

LOPES: [01:13:34] No, we didn't.

KLEIN: [01:13:36] So I assume no one was suggesting it or and you weren't coming to it on your own.

LOPES: [01:13:42] No, not really.

KLEIN: [01:13:46] How did your language skills change, Portuguese skills change through the year?

LOPES: [01:13:53] Oh, got a lot better! Of course, um, we were living with mostly uneducated people. And so a lot of our Portuguese was, it turned out, we didn't know this, of course, at first, but, you know, not very good grammar and every once in a while and a lot of slang. And it was slang from the Northeast, because that's where most of those people had come from. And we got along just fine, though, there. But then years later, when I was back there and I was living in Brasilia and we had a maid and I told her to put something on the table. And she says, No, senora, no senora, you can't use that verb. That means that, she says, that's like a hen laying an egg, you know, putting an egg on it. She says you can't use that verb. You use this other verb, you know? She taught me how to speak correctly, she

says. That's how they talk out in the boondocks. You know, you can't be talking that way.

KLEIN: [01:15:12] But you had good functional Portuguese, obviously, on your day to day. Your living situation, when your family kicked you out, you ended up living.

LOPES: [01:15:23] Well, I ended up living down in town with a family down in the center part of the town with the family that we had met when we very first got there and we lived at the boarding house. And of course, the word went out. There's some Americans in town, and somehow or other, I don't know how, but this guy came over who was Italian. He couldn't speak any English, but he liked Americans, and he had a girlfriend who was trying to learn English. So they came over to the boarding house and met us, and they took us over and met this other family that had two daughters, two daughters and two sons. The two daughters were about our age. And one of them was very interested in learning English. And actually, she spoke pretty good English.

LOPES: [01:16:10] Well, those Brazilians all were really good friends, and so we kind of went around with them a lot and got to know this family. So then when I didn't know where to go, I just went down to their house and said, I need I need some help to find a place to live. So they just had me live with them, and I lived there for about six or eight weeks before I could find another family to live without at my end of town.

KLEIN: [01:16:39] Gotcha. But you did, eventually you moved back.

LOPES: Yeah.

KLIEN: Some people during the volunteer service tend to get a friend or almost a person we might call an informant, someone you're more comfortable with and sort of helps bridge the gaps between the one culture and the other culture. And was there anyone, any Brazilian, that you became particularly friends with?

LOPES: [01:17:09] I guess one of the daughters in that family. We became pretty close. But then I lost some contact when I went back out and I stopped living with them and went back out.

KLEIN: [01:17:23] But were the Brazilians with whom you could make jokes and where you weren't worried about being embarrassed?

LOPES: [01:17:29] Oh yeah. No, there were a couple of the women that worked at the center that we were comfortable with.

KLEIN: [01:17:36] And your exchanges with them were in Portuguese?

LOPES: Yes.

KLEIN: Did any of them come to you and ask if you would help them learn English?

LOPES: [01:17:44] Yes, actually, they did. One lady, actually, which was very I liked her a lot. She was studying to be a social worker. And so she was going to classes in Brasilia and then she would come to our center some part of the time. But she asked me to come in and teach them English. And so I did that for a while, maybe a semester or something. It didn't last very long. She was interested in learning English, and she had recruited this class. But they weren't all that really all that interested. And so, yeah, it was kind of hard to do.

KLEIN: [01:18:27] What did you know about teaching English?

LOPES: [01:18:28] Nothing.

KLEIN: [01:18:30] You spoke it, I mean.

LOPES: [01:18:31] What I did was I took the book that we had used in language training to learn Portuguese, and I kind of reversed it to teach them English orally. And years later, some of those women were still spouting off those same sentences.

KLEIN: [01:18:49] That was it. That's as far as they went.

LOPES: [01:18:52] Right. But they could say those sentences really well.

KLEIN: [01:18:55] It's an accomplishment. You mention a Peace Corps office in Brasilia? Was that kind of the launching pad for the weekend parties?

LOPES: [01:19:08] Not, while Phil was there because there was no there wasn't really any place to party, but then after the other guy came and he had his own house and his wife was there and we went over to his house a lot, too much. And then also there's a new group of Brazilian social workers came into town and were dispersed out to the centers. And we got to be friends with most of them and went to their parties. They didn't know that many people in Brasilia either, because they'd come from elsewhere. And we went to their parties. But that wasn't. They didn't seem to trust us or know what to do as us, quite, you know, so that didn't work really well, either.

KLEIN: [01:20:03] So there are a fair number of Peace Corps only social gathering. Yeah.

LOPES: [01:20:07] Yeah, or other Americans or other foreigners.

KLEIN: [01:20:10] Yes. What about what happened holiday times? You were there for at least one Christmas, I think.

LOPES: [01:20:19] Or maybe we were there two Christmases.

KLEIN: [01:20:20] Yeah. Which is a big holiday.

LOPES: [01:20:26] I think we spent Christmases out in our towns. The first Christmas, we had just gotten there and we were still staying in the hotel, yeah, and we had, oh, I know what happened. We went we all went to the various different social workers' homes for Christmas dinner.

KLEIN: [01:20:47] Were you homesick?

LOPES: [01:20:51] No, not yet. Not at that point.

KLEIN: [01:20:54] At what point did you become homesick?

LOPES: [01:20:56] Oh after about a year.

KLEIN: [01:20:59] What was it, just the inconveniences of life or the fact that you weren't sure what you were doing there?

LOPES: [01:21:07] Mostly it was I wasn't sure I was doing anything that was worthwhile, you know?

KLEIN: [01:21:13] Well, how did you work your way out of that?

LOPES: [01:21:17] Just kept working.

KLEIN: [01:21:18] I'm guessing you had a sense that you weren't going to leave early.

LOPES: [01:21:23] Oh no, I never. I never thought about leaving early.

KLEIN: [01:21:27] Did other people? Just take the 14. As far as you know, the 14 completed?

LOPES: [01:21:33] No, nobody left early. Some people extended. At least I don't think any them left early. There was well, there were there were two guys who flipped out there. But I don't think anyone else. Oh, one woman quit within two weeks of being there and went back and married somebody.

KLEIN: [01:22:07] Yeah, that was a relatively common experience. The conflict of, you know, the boyfriend staying home and the girlfriend going off to the Peace Corps and sometimes it didn't work.

LOPES: [01:22:20] And this was a guy who was in our training program and he was deselected at the end, which was very odd.

KLEIN: [01:22:31] And she chose to keep going.

LOPES: [01:22:33] Well, she went down. But you know, she was just going so she could see Brazil for a couple of weeks, and then she went back.

KLEIN: [01:22:37] All right. Let's see, now coming to the end of the service, there was a termination conference, probably. Was that in Rio or in Brasilia?

LOPES: [01:22:56] In Rio.

KLEIN: [01:22:58] OK, so the set that came originally as Brazil 14 got back together.

LOPES: [01:23:07] And there were many people there because like I was saying, they had brought in a whole lot of volunteers right about the same time. So there were a whole lot going out to many of whom we didn't know, you know,

KLEIN: But they broke you out into small groups for the discussions. What kind of, what do you, what was your remember or sense of?

LOPES: I don't remember a thing about it. I don't remember anything.

KLEIN: [01:23:33] I didn't either until I read the report.

LOPES: [01:23:35] Actually, you know, I do remember one meeting. Well, I mean, I remember being impressed with this woman who was leading the group because she was a former nun and she was the head of a college back east somewhere. I don't remember her name. She was the college president. She was a former nun, and she seemed to know a lot. You know, I mean, I remember being real impressed with her in whatever meeting it was we had. But that's about all I remember.

KLEIN: [01:24:12] As you came to the near the end of your service in Brasilia, in the community, I'm sorry. What was your evaluation of what you had done, was there any desire to stay longer?

LOPES: [01:24:27] I had no desire to stay longer. I didn't feel like I had really accomplished much. It was more like I survived. And uh, you know, I had done a few things and had tried a lot.

KLEIN: [01:24:50] Did you have any sense of personal satisfaction? I mean, the fact that you made it through the two years?

LOPES: [01:24:57] Yeah, that, plus I learned a lot personally. I gained a lot out of it. I wasn't sure that the Brazilians had gained much other than they knew, could say they knew an American.

KLEIN: [01:25:11] So you had a sense of your own personal growth?

LOPES: [01:25:14] Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [01:25:16] Leaving you felt you were a somewhat different person than you are coming in. And where did that lead you?

LOPES: [01:25:29] Well, when I came back, the first job I got was as a social worker and in Los Angeles. And I think that I was, you know, even though here I was, a twenty four year old white girl, you know, who had grown up in Santa Monica, California. I had no problem whatsoever walking into filthy hovels, you know, to talk to families. Wasn't anything different than what I've been doing for a couple of years, you know.

KLEIN: 1966 is when you came back. And what was going on in the U.S. was very different, perhaps, than when you left.

LOPES: Oh yeah, they'd had the race riots in Watts, and that's where I was working, in that area. And so there was a lot of, uh, racial tension and a lot of anger still.

KLEIN: [01:26:27] And how did your family evaluate your experience? And when you came back, what?

LOPES: [01:26:33] I think they were just glad that I came home alive.

KLEIN: [01:26:36] Did they keep trying to put you in the level of a saint?

LOPES: [01:26:39] Oh no. No, I don't think so.

KLEIN: [01:26:43] Yeah. Some did.

LOPES: [01:26:47] And well, and then I when I left, I wasn't in L.A. for very long. We went to Milwaukee because within about a year, Phil and I got married and he was going to go to grad school in Milwaukee. So we moved to Milwaukee. And there I started working in a program for the chronically unemployed people. I worked for the state employment service, a special program for chronically unemployed, trying to teach them how to hold jobs. You know how to get the job.

KLEIN: [01:27:26] I probably did work in a program like that myself. War on Poverty.

LOPES: [01:27:34] Yeah. And that went well. You know, I enjoyed myself a lot there, and I think I was well accepted. Even though I was, I was the token white. Most everybody else was either black or well, we had Hispanics, a mixture of Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans.

KLEIN: [01:27:54] Had your experience in Brazil somehow prepared you or enabled you or gave you the skills or understanding to?

LOPES: [01:28:02] I think so, oh yeah.

KLEIN: [01:28:03] I mean, it was there was there was clearly a relationship.

LOPES: [01:28:07] Yeah, because prior to that, I mean, I grew up in Santa Monica. I went well, it was my neighborhood was all Anglo, but my high school was mixed, but people kind of kept to themselves. I went to a private college that was almost all white. Not quite, but almost. And I didn't have much experience with anything except the WASP culture until I went to the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [01:28:42] When you were in working in inner-city Milwaukee and you said, well, I was in Brazil with the Peace Corps for two years. Did it evoke a response?

LOPES: [01:28:53] No. I don't even know if I even said that because they didn't know what that was. No.

KLEIN: [01:29:04] And through the years, have you continued any kind of involvement with the country you served in?

LOPES: [01:29:11] Yeah, we went back as co-directors. See, I left there in 1966 and went back as co-director in 1978.

KLEIN: [01:29:22] Of the entire project?

LOPES: [01:29:23] Of the country. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:29:25] Country director, co-director with Phil.

LOPES: Yes.

KLEIN: Was that a first for the Peace Corps?

LOPES: [01:29:32] We were one of the first, one of the very first.

KLEIN: [01:29:35] Where both husband and wife were considered.

LOPES: [01:29:38] Right.

KLEIN: [01:29:40] And the marriages stayed together.

LOPES: [01:29:42] Yeah, he had gone back. We went and he was the country director in Ecuador. But while he was in training in Washington, D.C., to be the country director of Ecuador, they brought the spouses in also for a few days and I remember them asking me, how did I feel about, you know, tagging along overseas. I said, well, actually. I was a little bit miffed because they were telling us we couldn't work right. We couldn't work,

period. And there was a man in the group. Everybody else were wives, but there was one spouse who was a man because his wife was going as the country director, and he was extremely angry that he couldn't work and that he actually, he was required to go. She couldn't have the job if her husband wasn't going to go with her. And it was the same for the men, you know, the wives were not allowed to stay home. So we talked about it and I told them that I thought that they should make people co-directors. You know, that they should start a new program and do that because otherwise they're losing out on having skilled people sit there and do nothing for a couple of years. So they actually took the suggestion seriously. And a year later, year and a half later, they transferred us from Ecuador over to Brazil as co-directors.

KLEIN: [01:31:19] What did Phil know Portuguese?

LOPES: [01:31:21] Yes.

LOPES: [01:31:23] His grandparents and parents are of Portuguese.

KLEIN: [01:31:30] Of course. I mean, what a high-powered combination. You both speak Portuguese, you both have this incredible Peace Corps experience and knowledge of the country. Yeah, I mean, so you turn the whole country around and all its problems were solved.

LOPES: [01:31:47] Well, actually, we closed out the Peace Corps in Brazil.

KLEIN: [01:31:50] Oh, did you? Whose choice was that?

LOPES: [01:31:55] Brazil decided they were not a third world country anymore and didn't need Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [01:32:01] Who was Latin American director in Washington when you went out?

LOPES: [01:32:04] Steve Smith, I think. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:32:10] OK, so you closed down Peace Corps in Brazil. This was about '68, '69.

LOPES: [01:32:19] No, no, that was in 1980.

KLEIN: [01:32:22] Oh, OK. During at that time, did you visit back out to where you would work?

LOPES: [01:32:28] Yeah. Oh, sure. And found some of the people we'd work with. In fact, we had a couple of mini reunions, you know, where we invited them all over to our house for dinner. We found some of the social workers we're still around. The good ones, you know, were still doing it.

KLEIN: [01:32:51] Where'd you live? In what city do you live in when you were co-directors?

LOPES: [01:32:53] In Brasilia.

KLEIN: [01:32:55] Ah, OK. Which is great.

LOPES: [01:32:57] Yeah. It's very different. We found the family that I had lived with, um, and some of the other women that had worked in the center. And in fact, one day I was grocery shopping at a little tiny grocery store that I never went to before. I can't remember why I was there. Someone had told me that there was this grocery store, you know, so I was there and I was looking around, and all of a sudden here was this woman that I had just loved that, you know, I had worked with. And I just went, oh, Dona Vonda! And she turned around and looked at me. Anyway, so I met up with Dona Vonda and it turned out she was living, we were like two blocks from the main street right there, and she was two blocks on the other side of the street, right within walking distance of where we were. So we got together with her and her family, too.

KLEIN: [01:34:03] Through the years where you did you sponsor any of the Brazilians you knew over to the U.S. for study or travel?

LOPES: No.

KLEIN: Was that a conscious choice or it just played out that way?

LOPES: [01:34:20] Just kind of played out that way, we didn't think of it.

KLEIN: [01:34:21] And you finished as co-directors.

LOPES: [01:34:30] And that's totally separate from the volunteer part.

KLEIN: [01:34:34] Yes. Yeah. Well, but it's part of your life in relation to Peace Corps in Brazil. And since the '80s, have you returned to Brazil?

LOPES: [01:34:45] No. Well, other than stopped in the airport. We spent a couple of hours in the airport on our way down to visit our son, who was a volunteer in Paraguay.

KLEIN: [01:34:59] And as of 2001, any continuing personal connections?

LOPES: [01:35:10] No. One of the, the other girl that was in the same town I was as a volunteer, but she was down at the other end. She lives in Washington, D.C. We haven't had contact with her for a couple of years, but she has maintained more contact with the family that she lived with and with the social worker that she worked with over the years. I don't know if she still has contact with them, but she worked for, um, a sister city program, one of those. I can't remember which one it was, but for a number of years she made frequent trips to Brazil. And so she had chances to visit with people and keep in contact with them. And so she would give us reports every once in a while and what was going on.

KLEIN: [01:36:05] Through the years, how would you characterize the influence that your Peace Corps service has had on your career choices and other life activities?

LOPES: [01:36:24] Well, career choices, I suppose I was inclined to do social services kinds of things after I got back and um, after being a social worker for a short time and then I worked for the employment service and that special project for short time. And then we moved to Tucson and I

worked in another social services role as a War on Poverty planner for the city, with HUD funds, model cities, HUD funds. And so I guess in a sense, the Peace Corps experience led me in that direction. But then, uh, when the Republicans became in control and all that money disappeared, there were no jobs doing anything like that at all. And so then I kind of reconsidered. OK, now what am I going to do? So then I went back to school to study management information systems, which goes back towards my math interests that I had way early on and stuff. So I've gotten into that. But I think what it's helped me do is be able to relate to people from other countries, other languages, other ways of doing things or other ways of thinking, other ethics even.

KLEIN: [01:37:53] Something we need a lot of right now. You may have done this. If you were to speak to a young person today who was considering Peace Corps, what would you say that as a recruiter or as a non-recruiter?

LOPES: [01:38:18] Um, well, I'd probably ask them, you know, the age-old question, why do you want to be a Peace Corps volunteer? But I would tell them that, you know, personally, I thought I, as well as other volunteers, gain a lot from it. If you think you're going to go down and make world or country changing difference, you're probably mistaken. That rarely happens. And what mostly happens is you might make a few differences in a few people's lives, but you're going to learn a lot and they may learn more than you think they learn just by the way you do things. Or it can help them figure out how to do things. But like, I talked to one man on the phone, on the plane. I fly a lot, so I talk to people on the plane all the time. And he said, oh, I'm thinking of going into the Peace Corps. Well, he was 24 years old. He was a consultant making over a hundred thousand dollars a year. He had just bought a sixty thousand dollar SUV of some sort. He'd been going with his girlfriend for four years, but they weren't ready to get married yet. She was making over a hundred thousand dollars a year, but they couldn't, they weren't getting married yet because they couldn't afford a house. And I'm like, all right, combined income of over two hundred thousand, you've both got these incredibly expensive vehicles and you think you want to be a Peace Corps volunteer. Why? He said, well, I want to make a difference in the world, and I'm like. He says, but can you take your own car? And I said, don't apply for the Peace

Corps right now. Go do what you're doing now. You're not ready for the Peace Corps right now. I was like, oh yeah.

KLEIN: [01:40:21] Do you think there's a continuing need for the Peace Corps, not just from the point of view, I think we need it. I don't think it's any question that there's an ongoing need for better understanding of, you know, the other nine tenths of the world.

LOPES: [01:40:33] But I think there is, sure. No question.

KLEIN: [01:40:42] And do you have anything else you would like to say to conclude the tape?

LOPES: [01:40:48] Um, well, one other interesting thing that happened was when I lived with this family, I had a bedroom in their house and I got a wardrobe, a typical wardrobe that you buy out in the boonies. You know, this little wooden thing that had a drawer at the bottom, a door on one side with a mirror, and the other door opened and there were shelves in there. When we went to visit our son in Paraguay in the year 2000, I guess it was. He was a Peace Corps volunteer in a different country. We walk into his bedroom and he has got the exact wardrobe in his room. And it was like, oh my God, they're still exactly the same, 30 years later or whatever, you know? Yeah, it was amazing.

[END OF INTERVIEW]