

**Marcus Van Hala Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Marcus Van Hala served as a Peace Corps volunteer in India from 1965 to 1968 on a poultry project.

**Access**

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Marcus Van Hala

November 17, 2001  
Moreno Valley, California

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:03] Today is November 17, 2001. This is Bob Klein, and I am introducing, and I am interviewing Marcus Van Hala, who was a volunteer in India, 1965 to '68. He lives in Moreno Valley, California. What we do is usually start take maybe six months before you joined the Peace Corps and tell me, talk about where you were at.

VAN HALA: [00:00:37] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:00:37] Go back and describe your.

VAN HALA: [00:00:39] Well, I think my decision to join the Peace Corps was taken in the middle of my senior year at Ohio Wesleyan University. That was in Delaware, Ohio. And I had just come to the point of filling out my application for graduate school, and I realized that I was completely at sea as far as really coming up with a goal for that particular phase of my life.

KLEIN: [00:01:08] What was your, what was your major?

VAN HALA: [00:01:11] Theology.

KLEIN: [00:01:11] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:01:12] I was going to, I was working on an application for the Ohio Theological Seminary. And the question that just stopped me in my tracks was, what are your goals for this, for this great adventure? And I, I realized that up until that point, I was hoping that the theological training of the seminary would kind of take my hand and show me what it was that I should be thinking about and that I wouldn't have to worry anymore, that everything would be all in place, and all I had to do was just follow those footsteps and there they are.

KLEIN: [00:02:01] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:02:02] And I quickly realized that I had some serious thinking to do.

KLEIN: [00:02:07] Where had you grown up?

VAN HALA: [00:02:09] In Detroit.

KLEIN: [00:02:10] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:02:12] Urban, uh, Royal Oak, Michigan, which is just north of Detroit.

KLEIN: [00:02:16] Went to high school there?

VAN HALA: [00:02:17] Yes, Clarence M. Kimball High School in Royal Oak. And our ties with Detroit were pretty solid. My, my parents had emigrated when they were quite young from the northern peninsula, upper peninsula of Michigan. And they came down to settle, I think during the pre-World War I era. They were both quite young when they came down, and they got married and grew up in Detroit. And all the years

that I lived in Michigan, I attended church in Detroit. So it was a very, uh, central part of my life.

KLEIN: [00:02:59] Right. When did you decide to go on to college? And what was your goal in going or why?

VAN HALA: [00:03:11] My, my earliest feeling about life goals was at Central Methodist Church in Detroit, and I came up with the goal of becoming a minister in the church. I really wanted to emulate our great preacher, who was a very gifted speaker and a great leader of Methodists in the city. And I thought that that was a worthwhile goal. And so when the opportunity came to select a college, I chose Ohio Wesleyan. They gave me a good scholarship package, and everything was going along swimmingly until that famous day in December of 1964, when I had to come up with a detailed roadmap for the rest of my life, and I found I couldn't do it.

KLEIN: [00:04:11] Now, the degree you received then was a bachelor's in theology?

VAN HALA: [00:04:16] I would have received the Bachelor of Arts in philosophy.

KLEIN: [00:04:23] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:04:24] With theology as the minor. But I eventually finished my studies at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan.

KLEIN: [00:04:38] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:04:39] Which, uh, and it had nothing to do with theology at that point. It was area studies in South Asia studies.

KLEIN: [00:04:46] That was after the Peace Corps?

VAN HALA: [00:04:47] After the Peace Corps. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:04:49] But had you going on to graduate school, the track then would have been to become a minister.

VAN HALA: [00:04:53] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:04:54] And, uh, up to that point, you're finishing college. Had you done any travel in the United States? Outside the United States?

VAN HALA: [00:05:06] The farthest that I had traveled was to California.

KLEIN: [00:05:10] Had you done any special projects during the summers or?

VAN HALA: [00:05:14] I did spend a summer at Union College in Schenectady, New York. That was in conjunction with a church program that I had grown up with. I think it started back in, uh, in the primary grades. It was instead of the traditional Sunday School curriculum, we had adopted something that Union College was promoting as the Character Research Project. And that summer, I believe it was '62. I spent, no, it was summer of '63, spent at Union College as a staff assistant helping to plan a national parents and families conference on family values and that sort of thing.

KLEIN: [00:06:15] Up to that point, September of '65.

VAN HALA: [00:06:20] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:06:21] What was your experience with chickens?

VAN HALA: [00:06:23] It was restricted to back in the 1940s my father was a pioneer of sorts, and I recall having a chicken dinner prepared from, you know, on the claw. Dad would go out and select a chicken, cut off the head, wait until the chicken stopped running around, and then we would prepare it, you know, scald it, pluck it. And that was, that was a chicken dinner. My dad was, uh, what you'd call an activist of sorts.

KLEIN: [00:07:08] Mm hmm.

VAN HALA: [00:07:09] He joined together with a group of his friends during World War II and tried to make a stand. They had pulled their resources and decided we need to do something to show people that there's a different way. A better way.

KLEIN: [00:07:30] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:07:32] So the first option that they investigated was buying land in Montana. And when they drove all the way out there and found out that the land that they had selected was right next to a missile range and said, well, this is not what we had in mind. So they finally selected a rather large parcel north of Detroit in what is now Madison Heights.

KLEIN: [00:07:55] Mm hmm.

VAN HALA: [00:07:55] And they helped each other build their homes. They had a big tractor. I remember the big John Deere tractor and farm, plowing and growing corn and wheat. It was great. And there was a huge barn where we kept pigs.

KLEIN: [00:08:19] This is during your childhood?

VAN HALA: [00:08:21] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And we had the chicken coop right up near our house. And we had a huge fence around it, and the chickens managed to fly way up there to the top. So I did have a little bit of, you know, early childhood memories associated with it. But all the training that I got for the job was from the Peace Corps itself.

KLEIN: [00:08:41] All right. Let's go jump ahead then. You, had you, did you consciously decide not to apply to graduate school?

VAN HALA: [00:08:50] Yes. My, my decision was, the only way I can really make a decision that makes sense to me is to get more experience.

KLEIN: [00:09:01] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:09:02] And that was what I thought was severely lacking in my outlook at that time.

KLEIN: [00:09:06] How'd you become aware of the Peace Corps?

VAN HALA: [00:09:09] I had wanted to be a part of it at some abstract future time, ever since Kennedy announced that that was what he intended to do.

KLEIN: [00:09:19] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:09:20] I mean, I wasn't too far away from Ann Arbor when he made that announcement.

KLEIN: [00:09:24] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:09:24] And, you know, the, uh, the news was quite thorough in that. And, and I think that was a big factor in his election.

KLEIN: [00:09:32] Mm hmm.

VAN HALA: [00:09:33] And I think he carried the state of Michigan largely because of that. But deciding to join the Peace Corps was something that I always wanted to do. And suddenly it seemed like the only logical thing to do at that point in my life. So I left school middle of my senior year and went home and told my parents, you're off the hook for tuition. And I got two jobs working in veterinary hospitals, one five days a week, one on weekends, and it was kind of like, buckle down time for me, saving my money and making things happen that were going to be. I remember I put myself on a diet of tiger milk, doing calisthenics, you know.

KLEIN: [00:10:27] Had you applied to the Peace Corps at this point?

VAN HALA: [00:10:29] Yes. I came home specifically to apply for Peace Corps. And I saw an announcement in the paper that said there's going to be a Peace Corps exam taken tomorrow morning at the federal building in downtown Detroit. So I showed up at the door and they said, well, have

you filled out your application yet? I said, what application? They said, well, everybody in here has already filled out their application, but if you're here, you want to take the test, go ahead, take the test. But you're going to have to have that application in the mail by 5:00 tomorrow.

KLEIN: [00:10:57] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:10:57] All right. So as it turned out, I took the test, filled out the application, and the only way I got it in the mail by 5:00 was I worked all night on that thing.

KLEIN: [00:11:07] It was long.

VAN HALA: [00:11:08] It was huge.

KLEIN: [00:11:09] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:11:10] It must have been, uh, oh, I mean I remember a huge packet.

KLEIN: [00:11:16] Yes.

VAN HALA: [00:11:17] 20 or 30 pages.

KLEIN: [00:11:18] Well, you had a, there were six recommendations.

VAN HALA: [00:11:23] Right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:11:25] Do you recall the kinds of things you put in the application?

VAN HALA: [00:11:29] I remember telling them about the Character Research Project.

KLEIN: [00:11:32] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:11:33] And working with, uh, well, the fact that we were, we were down in the city of Detroit. And one of the things we had to do was survey people's attitudes about these religious platitudes we all talk about, and finding out does it really make a difference in your life?

KLEIN: [00:11:54] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:11:56] So we did that survey and we worked hard on it for, you know, going out and interviewing people. I went out in Hamtramck, which is a Polish American section of Detroit.

KLEIN: [00:12:06] Yes. yes.

VAN HALA: [00:12:07] And the people were very cooperative and willing to talk, which I thought was quite an eye-opener for me.

KLEIN: [00:12:18] Yeah. Did you, in the application, did you include the agricultural background that you had?

VAN HALA: [00:12:27] You know, I think at that time I had no idea what kind of program I was looking for, so I wouldn't have mentioned that.

KLEIN: [00:12:35] And did you recall putting down a preference?

VAN HALA: [00:12:37] Yes, my number one preference was China.

KLEIN: [00:12:39] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:12:40] My number two preference was, uh, I may have had India in the top three.

KLEIN: [00:12:46] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:12:47] I'm not sure. And I was kind of disappointed when it wasn't China. At that point I really.

KLEIN: [00:12:54] Had you studied foreign language at all?

VAN HALA: [00:12:57] I had studied Spanish in high school, French in college.

KLEIN: [00:13:00] Did you have any kind of proficiency or just study?

VAN HALA: [00:13:04] I did fairly well. I didn't, I never considered it as a major subject, but I enjoyed it.

KLEIN: [00:13:13] Yeah. Okay. So you were, you took the exam, you applied. You were preparing yourself.

VAN HALA: [00:13:20] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:13:21] You had your own program of preparation?

VAN HALA: [00:13:23] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:13:25] Then the invitation came.

VAN HALA: [00:13:27] Yes, it came in about late May, about the 29th of May.

KLEIN: [00:13:31] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:13:31] And again, it was, we were to respond and be in Annapolis, Maryland, St. John's College, by June 29th.

KLEIN: [00:13:43] Okay. So what was your response, reaction, I mean?

VAN HALA: [00:13:47] It was great.

KLEIN: [00:13:48] No hesitation?

VAN HALA: [00:13:49] Not at all. This, this is going to happen. This is great. You know, and everybody just kind of went along and I said, all right, go for it, you know?

KLEIN: [00:13:57] How about your peers, your friends think? Had any joined or?

VAN HALA: [00:14:02] You know, I think a lot of them shook their heads and said, oh, he's gone off the deep end finally, you know, we all knew he would someday. And I think most disbelief that that I recall my friends mentioning to me was the fact that I was going to be completely out of touch for two years. Like in a hole somewhere.

KLEIN: [00:14:25] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:14:26] And they, they couldn't understand why anybody would do that.

KLEIN: [00:14:31] So that was the impression you had. I mean, you were really going pretty far out.

VAN HALA: [00:14:36] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:14:38] Do you remember your own personal reaction to Kennedy's assassination? Because that had happened the year before.

VAN HALA: [00:14:43] It did. Yeah. It was huge. It was, it was one of those things that, you know, my, my feeling was here's a man in the prime of his life cut down. And he, uh, he left a legacy that could possibly make a huge difference in the lives of billions of people. And now he can't do it anymore.

KLEIN: [00:15:16] Yeah. Yeah. Reported to St. John's?

VAN HALA: [00:15:21] Yes. Still remember the plane flight landing at Washington National Airport in a prop driven airplane and a very kind of a cloudy day and thinking, well, this is where, where it starts. St. John's College is quite a historic place. It's one of the oldest colleges in the United States. And Francis Scott Key was one of their graduates.

KLEIN: [00:15:50] And it's where, one of the places that developed the Great Books.

VAN HALA: [00:15:54] Absolutely. Yes. And they still use it as their core curriculum.

KLEIN: [00:15:58] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:15:59] And that, that was fascinating to me. As it turned out, our training program was designed around their, their kind of colloquial seminar structure of class instruction. There was never to be a lecturer as such. We were to come prepared to debate the material, not just absorb it. And I remember making quite a number of evaluative type comments during those discussions and coming to the conclusion that, hey, you know, this is, this really, this really is great.

KLEIN: [00:16:43] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:16:44] You know, we had 100 people that started out in that program.

KLEIN: [00:16:47] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:16:48] And I think only seven did not make it. And those seven were basically self deselected.

KLEIN: [00:16:57] Uh huh. Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:16:57] They decided for themselves that this was something.

KLEIN: [00:17:01] What was your impression of the others in the program? I mean, you must have made some comparison or measure.

VAN HALA: [00:17:08] We had a terrific assortment of people. They are all, let's see. We had one pair of grandmother, grandfather, grandmother from Indiana.

KLEIN: [00:17:20] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:17:22] They were Harry and Eleanor Cheek. They just reveled in the energy of the place. And they, they. A lot of us thought, well, gee, you know, they're probably going to wash out. But they made it, they made it all the way through. They stuck it out. And it turned out that they continued the role of elder statesman for the rest of our group during the time of their service.

KLEIN: [00:17:53] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:17:54] They were in a good central location, so.

KLEIN: [00:17:57] So how old were you when you went in?

VAN HALA: [00:18:00] Let's see. I would have been 21.

KLEIN: [00:18:03] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:18:03] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:18:04] Yeah. What were the components of training?

VAN HALA: [00:18:08] Well, obviously, the seminar method, the seminar system. Every morning we started out, you know, with calisthenics. We had stretching and aerobics done in the gym, followed by a mile around the track. For those of us who are in the elite group, you know, we could, we could do the mile. And yeah, there are a lot, there was a lot of grousing about all this attention to calisthenics. And I really admired some of the more intellectual types.

KLEIN: [00:18:44] Uh huh.

VAN HALA: [00:18:45] They put up a protest and successfully lobbied for a change halfway through the program so that they could spend their time with their yoga instructor instead of all of this other crap, you know. Let me tell you, there was something about that training program though, that I loved and made a big difference to me. I remember the first day going

down to the gym and walking up to the parallel bars. And I had never really messed around with parallel bars at all ever in my life. But I thought, there's something that you're supposed to be able to do if you reach, if you sit down here on the ground and you reach up here, you're supposed to be able to chin yourself and pull your feet up over the top.

KLEIN: [00:19:32] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:19:32] And I thought, this is impossible. I tried it. I could not do it, you know? And I thought I was a pretty good shape. And I had been an athlete in college, played football, screwed up my knee.

KLEIN: [00:19:44] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:19:45] I played basketball on the junior varsity. I could not do that. But on the last day of the program, I could. It was, it was like a piece of cake. It was like, yeah, there it goes. Now with that, on the final, on the final day of the calisthenics, I remember doing 75 pushups, 150 sit ups. I think, you know, hey, I'm ready. Send me in, coach. So it was, it was just. There's something very poetic about that kind of discipline that paid off.

KLEIN: [00:20:27] But in a sense, it was an individual struggle. I mean, it wasn't like you had to do it to keep up with the group, but it was.

VAN HALA: [00:20:33] No, it was really self-imposed. Yeah. And that that came through the training.

KLEIN: [00:20:38] Yeah. How about language training?

VAN HALA: [00:20:40] Language was great. You know, we had a group of Indian nationals who came from India for our training program.

KLEIN: [00:20:49] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:20:50] And after the training program, they were part of the VISTA program, which was brand new that year.

KLEIN: [00:20:56] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:20:57] And so they worked for a year following our training program in the United States.

KLEIN: [00:21:02] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:21:04] And I remember there was a Mr. Gupta who was a great, I guess a quite a powerful civil servant in India before he agreed to do this. And, uh, there was a, I think he was also the guy who did the yoga instruction for a group. It turned out to be a group of about eight or ten guys and a couple of ladies, too, that did that. But for the most part, the rest of us, uh, stuck to the regimen.

KLEIN: [00:21:42] Was there any indication that you had to learn Hindi in order to qualify to?

VAN HALA: [00:21:47] Yeah, there was a very public expectation that we would all show significant progress in learning the language, because after all, this was the whole idea of the thing was to relate to people on the, on their own level, and they didn't want anybody going in there with the attitude that you are going to impose your values or your system on anybody. And the best indicator that you weren't going to do that was if you really had good language skills.

KLEIN: [00:22:20] Was it expected that you would be functioning in the work that you were doing in Hindi or Indian?

VAN HALA: [00:22:25] Yeah, we all had, we all had that, that idea that if we wanted to be effective people, we would have to do this.

KLEIN: [00:22:33] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:22:34] We'd have to have that ability. And as it turned out, you know, that was largely correct.

KLEIN: [00:22:38] Were you tested on language?

VAN HALA: [00:22:40] Yes. Yeah. We got a Foreign Service exam given in all the, for the ambassadorial people, you know. What do they call that, the diplomatic corps?

KLEIN: [00:22:52] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:22:53] Standard language test. And I think at the end of the program, most of us passed with flying colors, you know, but I got a two minus.

KLEIN: [00:23:03] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:23:04] Highest is four.

KLEIN: [00:23:05] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:23:06] And I was very proud of the fact by the end of the six month period in country, I got a two plus. So I felt that I was making real progress in that area.

KLEIN: [00:23:20] So there was the language, there was the phys ed.

VAN HALA: [00:23:24] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:23:24] There were.

VAN HALA: [00:23:25] The seminars.

KLEIN: [00:23:25] American studies?

VAN HALA: [00:23:26] American studies, yes.

KLEIN: [00:23:28] And the seminars, did they include studies about India and culture?

VAN HALA: [00:23:31] Yes. Quite a bit.

KLEIN: [00:23:33] And that was still done.

VAN HALA: [00:23:34] Indian history.

KLEIN: [00:23:35] In the colloquial setting? In the colloquium?

VAN HALA: [00:23:38] Right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:23:40] And then chicken farming or?

VAN HALA: [00:23:44] Great, a great emphasis on that. We had a guy that was in charge of that particular training that came down from Vermont. He was a very successful poultry farmer. And the first thing we did in that thing was to build a group of four chicken houses out of plywood, you know, and also the fifth one. [to pet] Come on now, get over here. The fifth one was made entirely out of native materials, you know, thatch.

KLEIN: [00:24:13] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:24:14] And we all took a lot of pride in that.

KLEIN: [00:24:17] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:24:17] Great story connected with these chicken houses. We had four chicken houses. We had four seminar groups. We had a kind of a group thing going, right? In our, and we stocked the, the four main houses with hens that were scheduled to be, to become frying chickens, you know. We rescued them from that and, you know, put them back into production. They had been going through a molt. We brought them out of the molt and basically they entered their second year of production while they were with us. And these were at the end of the football field for St. John's College. Right next door to the

campus is a helicopter pad. And I think the Coast Guard runs it. They use these helicopters and would go on daily patrol just to do their business.

VAN HALA: [00:25:11] I still remember this great story. I walked down to collect the eggs in the afternoon just before dinner, and we got about 67 percent production that day, which is, you know, better than it kind of justified. It was about the average. Everybody was getting around 67 to 72 percent. And so there was 67 percent. And so I gathered the eggs and was just writing out the report and I put everything, oh, let's get this. [tape break]

KLEIN: [00:25:51] Uh, the chicken and the eggs.

VAN HALA: [00:25:52] So with the, with that report in my hand, I walked across the football field ready to kind of basically hang my head saying, you know, we've been trying like crazy to raise the production, when the helicopter flew right over my head, back toward the helicopter pad and must have cleared the poultry houses by about 20 feet. I thought, my God, what? What are those idiots, what are they doing? I ran back. There were eight eggs on the floor. I said, wow, there it is, 85 percent!

KLEIN: [00:26:32] Funny. That's great. Were you aware, what was the selection process as you were going through the training?

VAN HALA: [00:26:44] Basically, we were told that it was the object of the training staff to pass us all, if at all possible. They wanted all of us to go.

KLEIN: [00:26:57] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:26:57] And realizing that probably not everybody would go. But they told us stories about training programs where people would find out by having a note slipped under their door in the middle of the night and they'd wake up and find out that they'd just been deselected and ordered off the campus. They said, don't worry, that's not going to happen here. If you decide you're not going to go, let us know. And that's okay.

KLEIN: [00:27:31] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:27:32] But I think we all, and of the 93 people that went to India, I think we only lost one or two for strange reasons, well, who didn't finish out their tour of duty.

KLEIN: [00:27:45] Do you recall going before a panel to be interviewed?

VAN HALA: [00:27:51] I remember our, one of my, one of my senior, my seminar instructors pulling me aside, saying, you know, she said, let me tell you that we just got back a detrimental report from your college and we want to ask you about it.

KLEIN: [00:28:08] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:28:10] I said, okay, what does it say? And it was, it was from the chaplain saying, this guy isn't very religious.

KLEIN: [00:28:20] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:28:23] So, I told him as honestly as I could that the whole idea for me leaving in the middle of my senior year was about this experience thing. And I said, if somebody had come to me with this kind of a self revelation and asked my advice about what they should do, I would have told that person that the best thing you could do is do something like joining the Peace Corps. Do the best job you can, and then take stock at the end of the, of the tour.

KLEIN: [00:29:08] So what was the effect of training on you? I mean, did it build confidence? Did it make you uncertain or how did it fit with your?

VAN HALA: [00:29:15] Well, I think, I think our training program was ideally suited to producing very dedicated and concerned and committed volunteers. We had the idea that we were not necessarily going to go save the world, but we were going to make a difference. And they said, now when you're talking about poultry, you're talking about a science that

has been developed here in the United States that can make a huge economic impact in the lives of anybody that follows your instructions. This is almost a turnkey operation. You do what you're supposed to do and you'll make money. And you, you will be providing a source of nutrition to people that can't get it any other way.

KLEIN: [00:30:03] Yeah, yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:30:05] All right, well, that was a package deal, you know.

KLEIN: [00:30:07] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:30:08] So we said, all right, we'll do our part.

KLEIN: [00:30:12] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:30:13] And we knew that the Peace Corps was going to be looking over our shoulder and wanting to know what was going on. So how could they help and that sort of thing.

KLEIN: [00:30:25] Up to the point that you were going, had there been any other chicken projects in India or was yours the first of that sort?

VAN HALA: [00:30:33] Actually, we were, we had been picking up the initiative that had been created, I think, by volunteers in India VIII.

KLEIN: [00:30:44] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:30:45] Either VI or VIII [six or eight], one of those. And they, they had, in the middle of their tour of duty, I guess they had been basically agriculture people.

KLEIN: [00:30:54] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:30:54] But they all maybe came to a seminar or something like that and said, you know what? We're missing the boat here because poultry is a good thing. They all need it. They all want it.

KLEIN: [00:31:05] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:31:06] Nobody is opposed to it. Let's do it. So they got it going and then we were there to follow through so.

KLEIN: [00:31:12] Do you recall any Washington visitors?

VAN HALA: [00:31:15] Yes. Yes. Oh, let me see. Um. David Schimmel. David Schimmel.

KLEIN: [00:31:23] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:31:25] He was one, great guy. I think he was.

KLEIN: [00:31:31] Do you know why he was there or did he talk to the. [tape break]

VAN HALA: [00:31:39] Coming over to Israel to meet with us, too. He followed us halfway around the world. And that's a fascinating story.

KLEIN: [00:31:50] We'll get to that in a minute.

VAN HALA: [00:31:53] Okay. Phil Kanteneski was our training program director.

KLEIN: [00:31:58] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:31:59] And he was a great guy.

KLEIN: [00:32:01] Did anyone from the field, Peace Corps field staff come?

VAN HALA: [00:32:04] He came with us to Israel.

KLEIN: [00:32:06] Oh, he did?

VAN HALA: [00:32:06] Yeah. Stayed with us the whole time.

KLEIN: [00:32:08] And did he follow to India?

VAN HALA: [00:32:10] I think he followed as far as Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:32:13] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:32:14] When we got our assignments and then he, he came home after that.

KLEIN: [00:32:17] Were, other than the language instructors, were there any Indians in any other roles in the training?

VAN HALA: [00:32:27] Uh, I think that was pretty much it. It was a group of 8 to 10 language instructors.

KLEIN: [00:32:35] Did people encourage you to, in training staff, encourage you also to begin to tune in on Indian English because that's a change as well as trying to learn Hindi?

VAN HALA: [00:32:47] Yes, yeah. Yeah. We had a chance to really look at the cultural aspects of the Anglo Indians that were living in India. And also our language instructor, Randy. What was his name? Randy something. He said we're not going to teach you the Devanagari script. We're going to teach you just the Romanized English, uh, the Romanized Hindi vocabulary. You'll, if you're going to work with the Devanagari script, you're going to have to do it on your own when you get there.

KLEIN: [00:33:23] Yeah. Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:33:24] And you know, a lot of us complained about that. And it's absolutely true. I mean, if you want to get a real laugh out of an Indian, especially a student, somebody who's got some brains going, just show them Hindi script, Hindi vocabulary written in this Romanized script. Oh, they'd just crack up.

KLEIN: [00:33:53] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:33:56] But, uh, it made it. Randy said the, uh, the time, you know, three months in training is just not enough time to, for you to get anything out of going that route. They wanted us to have a good working vocabulary, a conversational familiarity with our subjects. And so that's, that's what we did. And those who never saw our notes were very impressed with how well we spoke Hindi.

KLEIN: [00:34:33] Training's over.

VAN HALA: [00:34:34] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:34:35] You went home for a couple of days, I think, on leave.

VAN HALA: [00:34:38] Just before the training was over. Major international incident. There was trouble brewing on India's northern border between India and China. And I made a phone call from the airport on my way home. I called my congressman's office and I said, Mr. Broomfield, do you know anything about this situation that's happening right now? And he said, yes, as a matter of fact, maybe I, he may have switched me over to his assistant at that point. And I was told that, you know, State Department just did a briefing that morning on the situation. Congress was told that the situation was serious. They were looking at how it was developing, but it looked like everything was going to be fine. Everything was stable. All parties believed that it was something that was going to be an isolated incident.

VAN HALA: [00:35:43] So, okay, I thought about that. When I got home, I decided to do something with some of the money that I had just been bankrolling for the last four or five months. So I called the Great Books program and asked to see a demonstration of their product. They sent the salesman over and he sold me on the deal. Of course, I said, I'm going to buy this thing as soon as he walked in. And he said, oh, by the way, why are you buying this? And I said, well, I'm just going to the Peace Corps right now. And my, uh, my goal here is to read through this entire set in the next two years. And at the end of the two years, I'm going to donate the set to one of the schools there that could use it.

He said, well, that's very nice. I said, yeah, I think it makes sense. So then I thought, I wonder if I can really do this. So I called Pan Am to ask what the freight charges would be for, what is it? About 500 pounds of books.

KLEIN: [00:36:48] Yes. Yes.

VAN HALA: [00:36:50] In hardcover.

KLEIN: [00:36:50] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:36:55] The lady from Pan Am said, I have something to tell you about that, but it's a secret. I said, what do you mean it's a secret? She says, well, I'll tell you, but you have to promise me that you won't tell anybody else. So I hesitated and I said, I'm living at home here with my parents. Can I tell them? She said, please don't. I said, okay, okay, what's the secret? She said, the secret is you're not going to India. I said, I just talked to my congressman. She says, forget your congressman. We just got a letter today from Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and he says that this is not a good time to be sending two planeloads of volunteers into India in the face of an ultimatum that was delivered to India by China very easily. And we consider that a provocative act.

VAN HALA: [00:37:58] So have the volunteers come to New York. But, you know, we're not going to send them to India at this time. We'll think of something else. So she said, uh, if I were you, I would leave those books at home. I said, oh, okay. So I showed up in New York on schedule, and sure enough, they called us all together. In this case now we had India 16 plus 17, 18, and 19.

KLEIN: [00:38:29] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:38:29] A total of about 200 people.

KLEIN: [00:38:31] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:38:32] All in the hotel lobby or conference room right there at Central Park. And whoever this was from Washington said, all right, folks, the bad news is you're not going to India. Oh, no! But you do get to stay here in New York for the next few days until we decide what to do with you, okay? And every day that you're here, you'll get a per diem walk around money. So, you know, time shouldn't be wasted. So that's when Ruth and I started going to movies together and things like that.

KLEIN: [00:39:08] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:39:12] We had had one date during the training program and it was basically just a kind of a here I am kind of situation. So this was an extra week that we got to really decide what was going to happen next.

KLEIN: [00:39:36] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:39:38] We were finally told that half the group would be going to Guam and nobody wanted to go. And half the group would go to Israel. And everyone said, oh, we want to go to Israel. Well, India 16 got to go. I don't know how or why. But the group that went to Guam told us later, oh, that was miserable. You don't know how lucky you are you didn't have to go. But Israel was just great. We loved it. It turned out we stayed for 40 days.

KLEIN: [00:40:14] Uh huh.

VAN HALA: [00:40:15] But every day, every time we got together, maybe every other day, they would always start the meeting by saying, now remember, be flexible.

KLEIN: [00:40:26] You, the entire group wasn't assigned out in Israel in the same place, were you?

VAN HALA: [00:40:32] No, in fact, we, it took us another week touring the country to decide where they were going to go. And they shipped us to four different kibbutzim.

KLEIN: [00:40:43] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:40:45] And then Ruth was supposed to go to Gesher HaZiv, but then we pulled a few strings and said she can come down to Rosh Hashanah with me, right? Okay. Yeah, she came.

KLEIN: [00:40:57] And that's, you spent about, what, four weeks? Five weeks at the kibbutz?

VAN HALA: [00:41:03] It was, we hit all the high holy days in Israel.

KLEIN: [00:41:09] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:41:11] Rosh Hashanah was just incredible.

KLEIN: [00:41:14] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:41:15] And I've got to tell you, there was a swimming pool at this kibbutz, Rosh Hashanah.

KLEIN: [00:41:23] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:41:24] And they said, be sure and come down to the swimming pool tonight because we're going to have a program down there. And I had, how could they? What's it going to be, water polo or something? Well, they covered the swimming pool and turned it into a stage. And they had an orchestra. They had lighting. They had sound amplification. They had dancers. Like I said, dancers on The Ed Sullivan Show are not as good as these people. This is a professional troupe.

KLEIN: [00:42:00] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:42:01] I said this is the most fantastic group of people you have here.

KLEIN: [00:42:06] Yeah. Wow. And you worked on the kibbutz?

VAN HALA: [00:42:10] Yes. Every day. You got to. We started the routine at 5:30 in the morning. Wake up and go down and have tea and toast at the dining room and then get on the tractor and head out to the fields and work in the fields till about 8:00 in the morning. And then have breakfast, which consisted of hard-boiled eggs and fresh vegetables and laban. Which, you know, when I, when I arrived in Israel, I weighed 170 pounds and I was very trim, athletic build.

KLEIN: [00:42:56] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:42:58] And the day that we left Israel, on this diet, I weighed over 190 pounds. 40 days later. Laban has got everything you need.

KLEIN: [00:43:12] It's like yogurt?

VAN HALA: [00:43:13] Yeah, yeah. But you had, you can't. I couldn't drink it or eat it straight. I had to add sugar.

KLEIN: [00:43:19] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:43:20] It's very sour stuff, but, you know.

KLEIN: [00:43:23] Then finally got to India?

VAN HALA: [00:43:26] Cheering all the way. Yeah. And, uh, we arrived in New Delhi to get our assignments. When they handed out these, they split us all up into states, okay? So Ruth went to the southern state area. You know, all the kids that were going, they would be in the Bombay district. So they, they got their own room and they talked about what their assignments were going to be. And then they had kids in the U.P., Uttar Pradesh, and then there was some kids in the central area and then they had Rajasthan. Well, when they got us alone, they said, you guys don't know how lucky you are. I said, really?

VAN HALA: [00:44:17] So Harry and Eleanor were the first ones. They said, we're going to put you in Jaipur. That's the state capital. And they started going on about how beautiful Jaipur was and how great, you know, the people were, great history and all, you know, and all the resources they're going to have. Wow, this is a great site, you know? So they said, okay, Kay and Lynn Wydra, you guys are going to Ajmer. Oh, let me tell you about Ajmer. So come on, you get in here, you guys, you know, you know about it. And they started raving about how great Ajmer was. Oh! So then Jodhpur. Oh, wow. Look at how great. It was like everything and I. [to pets] All right, you guys. Uh, every city was better than the one before. [to pets] All right, time to settle down, right? Thank you. All right, that's enough.

VAN HALA: [00:45:16] So Udaipur was last.

KLEIN: [00:45:19] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:45:20] And I, and George Fisher and I sat there and said, well, it looks like we got stuck with the dregs, right? So they said, Udaipur. What can we say about Udaipur? The most fabulous city. What? This city is unlike anything you've ever heard of or seen before. When you get there, you'll just be amazed. The people are just so resilient. This is the only place in northern India that was not conquered by Akbar the Great, because these guys held out. And they, you know, they were the macho guys. They, and they built themselves a princely kingdom there, unlike any. In fact, in honor of that period, the official title of the Rajput who ruled Udaipur is not Maharajah. No, he's elevated one step above Maharaja. He is the Maharana, all right?

KLEIN: [00:46:26] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:46:26] And he is recognized by all the, all the Rajputs. So it was just fantastic. We, we knew. And they said, don't worry about resources. Things are going great there.

KLEIN: [00:46:42] This was all in New Delhi?

VAN HALA: [00:46:44] In New Delhi, yes.

KLEIN: [00:46:46] And then was it just you and George then took off from New Delhi or did you go in groups?

VAN HALA: [00:46:50] Yeah, I think, no, we had a train lot. We all, everybody in Rajasthan left New Delhi on the same train and the Cheeks got off in Jaipur.

KLEIN: [00:46:59] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:47:00] And they were the first ones off.

KLEIN: [00:47:01] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:47:01] And we said tata, and basically the order that we got our assignments, that's, that's the way we got off the train.

KLEIN: [00:47:10] Was it, was your first introduction to moving about in India where you, did you have first class carriages or third class?

VAN HALA: [00:47:19] Third class. Third class all the way. That's, that was laid down by Gandhi.

KLEIN: [00:47:23] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:47:23] He said, why should I travel first class when there are so many that can't.

KLEIN: [00:47:28] Did you have a chance to begin using your Hindi?

VAN HALA: [00:47:31] Oh yeah. Yeah, all the way.

KLEIN: [00:47:33] Right from the beginning.

VAN HALA: [00:47:33] Right there. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:47:35] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:47:36] Going out in the bazaars, buying stuff. It was a lot of fun. It was great. A great adventure.

KLEIN: [00:47:42] Then you got up to your assignment?

VAN HALA: [00:47:43] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:47:45] What was your setting and for whom did you work and how was the job defined?

VAN HALA: [00:47:50] See, we were, we got to the railway station and I think in very short order we met somebody from the Animal Husbandry Department who came down to greet us and brought us in a rickshaw, horse-drawn rickshaw, and brought us up to the animal hospital. And I don't think we even took our bags. We didn't unpack for a while. We spent the first day there at the animal hospital and that night they took us to the doc bungalow, which is the government quarters, and we just basically stretched out on cots in a hotel room, basically, and just stayed there for a few days before we found some private quarters that we could rent.

KLEIN: [00:48:39] And did you find them or were they arranged?

VAN HALA: [00:48:42] Yeah, I think, I think it was the doctor at the hospital that told us. Oh. They were the same quarters that the, that the guys from India VIII had.

KLEIN: [00:48:53] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:48:54] Yeah. So we moved in there.

KLEIN: [00:48:57] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:48:58] Bob Woolsey and Jim Nelson, whom I'd never met but had a profound influence on my life.

KLEIN: [00:49:05] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:49:06] Because everybody thought that they were heroes, and they just thought Bob and Jim were the greatest. After all, hey, they had motorcycles.

KLEIN: [00:49:16] Uh huh.

VAN HALA: [00:49:17] And by the way, where is your motorcycle? I said, well, you know, we're writing now, and I'm sure they'll be sending it, you know. Well, we never got motorcycles.

KLEIN: [00:49:29] But did you expect that you would have them to do your assignment?

VAN HALA: [00:49:31] Well, yeah, we were kind of put out. Hey, come on, the other guys had motorcycles. Why can't we? And the official word came down that, you know, insurance.

KLEIN: [00:49:42] They were facing a mandate?

VAN HALA: [00:49:43] We've got to do something. It's prohibitive to, you know, somehow those guys in the early projects got under a wire somehow, but we can't do that anymore. And so now you guys are going to have to make do with just bicycles. And we thought, well.

KLEIN: [00:50:02] How close to you were the other the nearest volunteers?

VAN HALA: [00:50:07] We had a guy from India 19 who was right close by, very close by, maybe two miles.

KLEIN: [00:50:16] And how far were you from the nearest Peace Corps office?

VAN HALA: [00:50:20] The Peace Corps office was in New Delhi. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:50:24] Which was a day's travel?

VAN HALA: [00:50:26] Easy, easy a day, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:50:29] What was the living arrangement, your meals and just the general day-to-day?

VAN HALA: [00:50:33] Well, we, we had no problem with, with the food. We, uh, we ate in restaurants the first few days, you know, everything was great. And we looked around for a cook and we found Bob and Jim's old cook still there in town, you know?

KLEIN: [00:50:52] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:50:55] I still think of Faisal a lot. Faisal Ali was a real character. He spoke in very, very broken English.

KLEIN: [00:51:02] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:51:03] And he always wore his old, dirty, white turban. And he had a white, fuzzy beard a lot like, a lot like that guy. Yeah, that's I thought of. That was, that was a gift to, to Ruth and I from our, from her brother and his wife.

KLEIN: [00:51:26] Did you take your meals at home? Did Faisal?

VAN HALA: [00:51:29] Yeah. Faisal did the cooking and he went out and we had a problem first because he moved so slow it would take him all day to do the shopping and they didn't have any time to do anything else.

KLEIN: [00:51:42] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:51:42] So we had to hire another guy to do the shopping for Faisal, and he stayed with us a good long time. He was a sweeper.

KLEIN: [00:51:50] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:51:51] And he did a lot of cleanup. It's just incredible how low the wages were that these guys worked for. But there were standard wages. And so.

KLEIN: [00:52:01] Was that common for unmarried men, Indians? Would they have the same kind of arrangement?

VAN HALA: [00:52:08] Yeah, I think so. Very similar. We met a lot of the students in the college and those that didn't actually live on campus. Uh, let's see, we met some kids that were high school age and they were living at home. I think, I can't remember their names. Cucu, Cucu was one, and he had a similar arrangement to what we had.

KLEIN: [00:52:35] What was the typical workday like?

VAN HALA: [00:52:38] Well, we head down to the poultry office right after breakfast and discuss when the next training program is going to be. Let me tell you about the very first day. Interesting day.

KLEIN: [00:52:51] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:52:52] We arrived at the office and our poultry project officer was there and he said, well, we have a problem and your first assignment is going to be travel to Jaipur as soon as you can. They've just sent us a directive saying that we have only six farmers in our poultry cooperative society, and therefore we do not qualify to have a poultry project office here. And you must tell them that they are changing the rules. When we incorporated this co-operative, six was the minimum and that's what we got. And that's what we're going to have, you know.

KLEIN: [00:53:30] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:53:31] So I said, I will do exactly as you say and I will do so on Thursday of this week. In between now and then. Uh, let me see. I understand that there are some other people who may be interested in also becoming members of the cooperative society. By Thursday, we had eight more signed up. So we had 15, you know, 14 or 15.

KLEIN: [00:53:58] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:53:59] Hey, no trip to Jaipur was necessary. You know, forget that. We were just going gangbusters right from the very beginning.

KLEIN: [00:54:07] Was it the work, building on the work that the India VIII guys had done?

VAN HALA: [00:54:12] Yeah, they had, they had done a fabulous job.

KLEIN: [00:54:14] And you were convincing people who had never raised chickens and had never eaten eggs.

VAN HALA: [00:54:19] That's right, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:54:20] That they should do so.

VAN HALA: [00:54:21] Yeah. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:54:22] And when it went that quickly?

VAN HALA: [00:54:24] It was just like wildfire from the very beginning. It's like everybody anticipated what we were going to do. I think Bob and Jim just did a whirlwind thing.

KLEIN: [00:54:37] Let's just jump to the end of the first year.

VAN HALA: [00:54:40] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:54:42] At that point, how many people were actually raising chickens?

VAN HALA: [00:54:46] Oh. The end of the first year, around 50.

KLEIN: [00:54:50] That many?

VAN HALA: [00:54:50] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:54:51] So it just built.

VAN HALA: [00:54:52] And these were guys who had poultry houses. Minimum 100 birds in each house. And by the end of the first year, they were all making money. That was the key.

KLEIN: [00:55:06] How did they market them initially, when you're, as they were developing?

VAN HALA: [00:55:11] Yeah. That's what. My understanding was that was the biggest need of the poultry cooperative society. From the very beginning I said, we are going to have a huge problem marketing these eggs. I said, right now the only outlet that we have is the Dosti Egg Store in Bombay. We're going to have to find some other place because, you know, the prices down there are very flexible.

KLEIN: [00:55:33] How far away was Bombay?

VAN HALA: [00:55:34] Another overnight. You know, we're halfway between Delhi and Bombay, so it's a full day's journey. So we just, we could sell the eggs. I said, we've got no problem. All we've got to do is pack them in these clay pots, fill it with rice husk, put it on a train and put a label on it saying Dosti Eggs, Bombay, and they'll get there. But the price, you know, they, they sometimes it was like half what we were expecting, but at least it was half, you know. That was the beginning. Then we started, we said, all right, let's get our own egg store right here in town. That'll be good. Hey, they were very reluctant. They thought that'll never work. Who's going to, who's going to buy eggs here? Nobody.

KLEIN: [00:56:20] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:56:21] But we put it up. We had a big grand opening. Very pretty sky blue painting, you know, and it was clean and people could come in and get their eggs and buy one egg at a time.

KLEIN: [00:56:37] Now, what was the name of the town?

VAN HALA: [00:56:39] Udaipur.

KLEIN: [00:56:40] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:56:40] Made famous in the James Bond movie, uh, Octopussy.

KLEIN: [00:56:48] And what approximately, what was the population at the time?

VAN HALA: [00:56:52] 100,000 easy.

KLEIN: [00:56:54] Okay. So potentially lots of. Now, did how did people integrate eggs into their diet when they never had them before?

VAN HALA: [00:57:03] That was fascinating.

KLEIN: [00:57:05] Was there anyone else working on that?

VAN HALA: [00:57:09] Uh, there were, there were, there was an AID program at the University of Udaipur, no, the state of Rajasthan, what, uh? I think that, well, I guess the University of Udaipur. And there was also a State of Rajasthan College, but the AID people were teaching their kids nutrition. We had a lady from Ohio State University named Fanchon Warfield, and she was teaching nutrition to their, to her kids and teaching cooking. And they had a poultry farm out there that was just coming into production when we got there.

KLEIN: [00:57:48] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:57:49] What a coincidence, I mean.

KLEIN: [00:57:50] During the first three, six months, you must have run up, run into some culture shock, some disappointment, some.

VAN HALA: [00:57:59] Oh, huge.

KLEIN: [00:58:00] And what, I mean, how did that play out?

VAN HALA: [00:58:04] I think the worst culture shock I had to deal with was when Ruth came up.

KLEIN: [00:58:13] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:58:14] She, you know, I thought, you know, here, here's a lady. She's going to become my wife. We're going to get married, you know? So everything was pretty well understood, you know, this is great.

KLEIN: [00:58:28] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:58:29] I remember the two of us coming back from a bicycle trip out to the hinterlands, you know, and we were both going to go home and just have dinner. And I said, you know, I'm supposed to talk to one of the officers in our poultry cooperative society, and maybe this would be a good time. I'm going to just, uh, I'll see you at home. All right. So you go ahead and I'll, I'll just turn off here. It's only a quarter of a mile. So she went ahead. I turned off. And right after I turned off, I heard a group of eight or ten young kids on bicycle whooping it up. Suddenly started to chase Ruth. I thought, what the hell is going on here?

KLEIN: [00:59:24] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:59:24] So I turned around and here they were ready to knock her off of her bicycle.

KLEIN: [00:59:32] Huh. Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:59:35] And I had to chase them off.

KLEIN: [00:59:36] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:59:37] And I think I was successful. You know, she didn't get injured or anything. But what kind of a world is this, you know?

KLEIN: [00:59:45] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:59:47] And I did finally go back and raise that same question to the guy that I was going to talk to. I said, how can, how can there be people who are so animal-like, you know? And he was a teacher himself. He said, well, you know, you have to understand that there are differences. You know, we have a lot of kids who just don't understand. They just, they listen to old stories and wives' tales and, you know, they, they don't bother to get experience. They don't get the learning that they need to. The boys that you chased away were from the village, they're not from, they're not from around here. So, you know, you have to keep that in mind.

KLEIN: [01:00:35] Was there a, I mean, were they disapproving of the, or was it alright for you to be there but somehow not for Ruth to be?

VAN HALA: [01:00:45] For, in their mind, yeah. They, they thought sending, for American men to come over is one thing. But when you start sending American ladies.

KLEIN: [01:00:54] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:00:55] What are you doing? You know, you're really changing things and we're not, we're not prepared for that.

KLEIN: [01:01:01] Did people you work with have access to American films? I know Indian films were a big thing.

VAN HALA: [01:01:05] Yes. Yeah. Oh, yeah. First, the first week we were there, we went to see John Wayne in Hatari, and George got his pocket picked in the lobby.

KLEIN: [01:01:18] And were they dubbed into Hindi?

VAN HALA: [01:01:20] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:01:21] So the, some impressions of American culture then were coming via the movies.

VAN HALA: [01:01:28] Yes. In order for us to watch the movies, we'd have to read the English subtitles.

KLEIN: [01:01:33] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:01:34] And I saw *The Birds* that way. Alfred Hitchcock.

KLEIN: [01:01:37] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:01:37] And yeah, it was every Sunday morning they, they showed English movies at the cinema. So Sunday mornings were a good time to go get a, get a refresher on what was happening.

KLEIN: [01:01:53] Health generally during your first year?

VAN HALA: [01:01:58] Yeah, we had a serious health problem. I had amoebiasis [or amebiasis] to deal with. I lost a lot of weight due to that. The biggest problem I had to deal with was headaches. And I realized at one point I'm taking an awful lot of aspirin, you know, just to function. I thought, how am I going to take? Here's what happened. I said, I've got to take this aspirin, but I can't take it with water and I won't have any good water here. So I said, fine, well, give me, give me some tea so I can take this aspirin. And okay, here. I said, wait a minute. How many cups of tea have I had so far today? It's like 2:00 in the afternoon and I start counting all the cups of tea that I had had that day. And I got to over 16 and I wasn't, you know, and I still had more places to visit.

VAN HALA: [01:02:51] I thought, oh, this is, uh, I'm going to have to make some changes. So we had to refine the, the, I went cold turkey on tea for a while and that straightened it out. But whew.

KLEIN: [01:03:06] Did you have to go into the Peace Corps office for medical treatment?

VAN HALA: [01:03:08] No. [tape break]

KLEIN: [01:03:14] We're talking about?

VAN HALA: [01:03:18] Yeah, we were talking about Dr. Dutt. He had offices in the local hospital, which was quite a proper British hospital that had been in service for probably 40 or 50 years.

KLEIN: [01:03:32] Indian?

VAN HALA: [01:03:33] Yeah. Indian hospital.

KLEIN: [01:03:34] Yeah. Was he Indian?

VAN HALA: [01:03:35] He was. He was trained in India and was a Brahmin, I believe.

KLEIN: [01:03:40] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:03:42] And he was very experienced, very kind. I thought of him as a very experienced uncle.

KLEIN: [01:03:50] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:03:51] And took care of a number of medical problems.

KLEIN: [01:03:58] He had access to drugs like?

VAN HALA: [01:04:02] Sure. Whatever. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:04:03] And Peace Corps, according to, was all right for you to be treated by him and to take the prescriptions that he suggested?

VAN HALA: [01:04:12] Yeah. We got several visits, though, from nurses that came up from the New Delhi office in the, in the Wagoneer.

KLEIN: [01:04:21] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:04:22] And they were primarily concerned about making sure we were getting the, the health treatment that we needed.

KLEIN: [01:04:28] Yeah. So you. All right, let me jump back. You ended up using bicycles to get around.

VAN HALA: [01:04:34] Mm hmm. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:04:34] How big an area were you covering?

VAN HALA: [01:04:38] Huge area. You could drive on a bike. Let's see. To the north of a Udaipur into several villages, probably 15 miles in one direction and 15 miles in the other direction so.

KLEIN: [01:04:57] Did you and George tend to go out together?

VAN HALA: [01:05:00] No, no. We tried to split it up as much as possible so you get more done.

KLEIN: [01:05:05] Okay.

VAN HALA: [01:05:06] And, yeah, there wasn't much point in duplicating each other. And so we, uh, we were pretty good. George tended to work a lot more with Dave Wilson. He was the Indian 19 guy in agriculture out at the Rural Institute.

KLEIN: [01:05:23] Mm hmm.

VAN HALA: [01:05:25] And. I guess Dave is, Dave Wilson was a guy from Montana that always wore his cowboy hat and boots and had a real rapport with people. I mean, he just, he was laid back and just had a great time wherever he was doing whatever he was doing. You could just tell that the man was satisfied.

KLEIN: [01:05:52] Yeah. Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:05:57] My style was completely different. I was, I was high energy. I wanted to get done, you know. So I made it a point of, of saying, Dave, you go your way, you do your stuff. I've got to do something else, all right? But George didn't mind that. George, George was also a, uh. George and I made an interesting mix. He was also interested in the ministry in the Congregational Church. He was from New Haven, Connecticut. And his style was to work with people, you know, get things. Get consensus, build consensus. I was out there basically to find results.

KLEIN: [01:06:44] Well, at any point, let's sort of stick within the first year time frame. Did you feel that you were pushing faster than the people you're working with could accept? I mean, that your need to achieve X was far greater than theirs and you build in that disparity.

VAN HALA: [01:07:05] I think, I think that if anything, the expectations of the people we were working with were higher.

KLEIN: [01:07:13] Ah, okay.

VAN HALA: [01:07:15] They, they had heard that the business that we were talking about was going to help everybody. This is a win, a win-win for everybody.

KLEIN: [01:07:25] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:07:25] So what was, what we were waiting for? You know, where is this big miracle you guys are talking about? And I was anxious to respond as much as possible. And George, George's response to that was, you know, you've basically been misinformed, you know. What we're trying to do here is not to. And it's a good approach. We're not trying to change your life, okay? We want to help you from where you are, which is a good, good, solid approach. We want to help you from where you are. And if things get better, great. If not, we're going to solve a problem.

KLEIN: [01:08:00] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:08:01] To the best of our ability. My attitude was a bit more, you know, you want it done? Fine, let's do it. Let's get it done, you know?

KLEIN: [01:08:12] Well, did people, Indians, ever get annoyed with you because you wanted to see it done within the next three days? And their timeframe was significantly different?

VAN HALA: [01:08:24] Let me tell you what really changed my approach.

KLEIN: [01:08:26] Yeah, okay.

VAN HALA: [01:08:27] After about three or four months, I recall going to the home of Dr. Mehta. Dr. Mehta is an attorney and I believe he was also a member of the Indian Communist Party, CPI, Communist Party of India. His son and I had a conversation in which I recall asking, well, what do you, what do you think about George and I as volunteers? And he looked at me for a long time. This kid was about 13 years old. And he said, we think you're a couple of jokers. I said, really, why? He says, well, you know, you're always, you always have something really funny to say. And, you know, that set me back. I said, well, thank you very much.

VAN HALA: [01:09:35] We had another conversation about a year later in which he, he told me that he thought we were doing a good job. We're different from Bob and Jim. But he said, you know, there are so many people now who believe that this is a good thing, they said. We thank you. We all thank you. That was great.

KLEIN: [01:10:04] Did you, were you called in for conferences with Peace Corps and was the discussion of what your role was?

VAN HALA: [01:10:11] Our three month seminar was there in [inaudible], and then we had a six month seminar down in Goa and a one year seminar later on. I'm not sure where that was.

KLEIN: [01:10:23] What came out of that in your own mind?

VAN HALA: [01:10:27] We had a great opportunity to get all everybody in the program together again and kind of share war stories and get remotivated a lot and find out where everybody was in terms of our original expectations. I think George and I were in the upper half for sure. We really felt that we were making progress. There were, frankly, a lot of kids who were out there thinking, when is this ever going to happen? You know, this is, this is no fun, you know, I can hardly wait for our two years to be up.

KLEIN: [01:11:02] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:11:03] And we even had one guy that went completely native. I think he's still living over there. Uh, and one guy that went home on a, uh, on a insanity thing.

KLEIN: [01:11:20] Uh huh.

VAN HALA: [01:11:21] Yeah, he was, he was taken home.

KLEIN: [01:11:22] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:11:23] He was taken out of his situation.

KLEIN: [01:11:25] Yeah. Uh, but for the most part, we were a remarkable group.

KLEIN: [01:11:34] Was Peace Corps giving you the tools with which to evaluate your own progress, or would they sort of suggesting, well, you're doing well, you're not doing well. You should be looking to this area.

VAN HALA: [01:11:47] I think they were. Every time we got together, the attitude of the staff was, tell us what you're doing, because we need to keep in touch. We need to use, we'd like to use as much information as you can give us to help decide what's going to happen next. And that really, that came through loud and clear. At the end of the, into our second

year, we actually had the opportunity to work with the, with the training for India 34 and 35.

KLEIN: [01:12:18] Oh.

VAN HALA: [01:12:19] Who were getting their training in country. These guys were coming fresh from home. And wow, I don't think I would have wished that, myself. You know.

KLEIN: [01:12:33] I think the idea was to get more mileage of the two year tour, I mean.

VAN HALA: [01:12:37] Yeah. So I think that they had a slightly higher attrition rate, higher than necessary too. I know of a young married couple that went through India 34 and I, uh, I really had hoped that their situation could have been much more developed, but they were out in really primitive, primitive conditions, living in mud huts. We, I mean, our hearts went out to them.

KLEIN: [01:13:08] Yeah. A couple of things about living conditions. Did you, did you seek out and find fellow Methodists?

VAN HALA: [01:13:19] No, no. I didn't do that. But I did have quite a lot of contact with the local United Church of North India.

KLEIN: [01:13:28] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [01:13:29] Because that's where Ruth and I were married. We, we did our wedding there.

KLEIN: [01:13:33] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:13:34] And went through all the red tape of finding a missionary who was licensed to marry foreigners. Not, not easy to come by.

KLEIN: [01:13:44] Do you recall your first Christmas, was that?

VAN HALA: [01:13:46] I honestly do not. I'm sure it would have been something that we tried to celebrate, probably by writing letters home, that sort of thing. But it was really no big deal for us. We were surprised that so many Indians in India celebrated our holidays. And I wondered how, how sincere is this, really? But no, Christmas was, was a big deal, bigger probably for them than it was for us.

KLEIN: [01:14:19] Was there, within the town, the city that you were in, was there a significant Christian population?

VAN HALA: [01:14:28] Uh, there probably was. There probably was. But I, uh, did not come in contact with them as such.

KLEIN: [01:14:35] Missionaries had been active up there.

VAN HALA: [01:14:36] Sure, they had.

KLEIN: [01:14:37] For a long time. Yeah. All right. Coming toward the end of the first year, by then had you and Ruth decided to get married?

VAN HALA: [01:14:46] Yes. We had actually decided that after the three month conference.

KLEIN: [01:14:52] And how did Peace Corps take to all this?

VAN HALA: [01:14:56] You know, I remember Felix Connaught writing me a letter after my first request was denied. You know, my first request was to visit Ruth in her site down in Satara. And he said, you know, we don't normally encourage fraternization between volunteers when they're supposed to be in their sites doing their jobs. And I wrote back to him saying, Mr. Connaught, please, sir, you don't understand. You know, this thing with Ruth and I is not some kind of a, you know, temporary thing. You know, we're, we really are going to get married. And so that's why this is necessary. And I said, we'll, we'll be doing the best we can, you know, to maintain everything.

KLEIN: [01:15:42] You did have vacation time, though, didn't you, coming after?

VAN HALA: [01:15:46] Yeah, we did. George found a lot more vacation time than I did. I don't know how. He traveled all over the country. He, he got. He went to Calcutta.

KLEIN: [01:15:59] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:15:59] And I think he went to, um, where was it, with the, or the Princess Hope.

KLEIN: [01:16:10] Nepal?

VAN HALA: [01:16:11] Sikkim.

KLEIN: [01:16:12] Sikkim, okay.

VAN HALA: [01:16:13] He went to Sikkim, of all places. And Nepal. And I never got to those places. The farthest east I ever got was Benaras.

KLEIN: [01:16:23] Yeah. But you were, you were also then concentrating on seeing routes and working out the details.

VAN HALA: [01:16:29] Yeah. And we also had our honeymoon that we used our vacation time for, so I think we were saving up for that. So, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:16:36] You didn't stay in your village for the honeymoon?

VAN HALA: [01:16:40] No, no.

KLEIN: [01:16:41] Did you travel outside of India?

VAN HALA: [01:16:43] No. Well, if you can call Kashmir outside India. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:16:50] Were you specifically forbidden to travel outside the country? Do you recall?

VAN HALA: [01:16:56] Uh.

KLEIN: [01:16:57] It was an issue in some places.

VAN HALA: [01:17:00] Hmm. I think we probably were.

KLEIN: [01:17:02] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:17:05] Except for, you know, they said unless you're actually traveling home, we didn't, we don't think you're going to be interested in doing any of that. But they did want us to travel as much as possible within the country so that we could become more aware of all the conditions.

KLEIN: [01:17:21] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:17:22] You know. But that was all, in my mind that was all, you know, when they said as much as possible, that was, you know, keeping in mind that your first priority is getting the work done.

KLEIN: [01:17:34] Coming to the end of the first year, you're about to get married. Did you look back over the year? What was your sense of, you know, you joined the Peace Corps way back then and was it happening? You know, where were you with that?

VAN HALA: [01:17:51] Everything seemed to be moving very quickly. I had been the person, somehow I got designated the official report writer. After each month we had to send a report, or I was sending monthly reports into Delhi and letting them know what our results were in terms of helping the cooperative, what our requirements were.

KLEIN: [01:18:19] Did you have a form that you used?

VAN HALA: [01:18:21] No, no.

KLEIN: [01:18:21] It was just an open ended.

VAN HALA: [01:18:23] Just an open ended thing. I think the reason I got designated was I was the only one with a typewriter, so.

KLEIN: [01:18:30] And every month you had a report.

VAN HALA: [01:18:32] I, I don't know if I had to, but I did.

KLEIN: [01:18:35] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:18:36] And I got usually quite prompt replies from the office.

KLEIN: [01:18:42] And they all went to?

VAN HALA: [01:18:44] The north regional office in New Delhi.

KLEIN: [01:18:47] Who in turn?

VAN HALA: [01:18:48] They, they, uh, there was a central office for India also.

KLEIN: [01:18:54] Was there ever concern that they were sharing that with the CIA or that?

VAN HALA: [01:18:58] No, none at all, because it was made quite clear that there would be no, uh, no ties with the CIA at all during the time we were there. And they said, in case you're thinking of joining the CIA after you leave the Peace Corps, forget it. You have to wait at least two years, you know, in which case none of your information would be that valuable. So don't worry about that.

KLEIN: [01:19:21] And your reporting essentially was, was job oriented.

VAN HALA: [01:19:24] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:19:25] I mean, it wasn't like the local Communist Party has been staging rallies on this issue.

VAN HALA: [01:19:31] You know, I, I don't think I ever even mentioned Mr. Mehta's, or Dr. Mehta's, affiliation officially in writing.

KLEIN: [01:19:42] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:19:43] But I just, I knew that some other people recognized him as a member of the CPI.

KLEIN: [01:19:50] So end of the first year, you were ready to, did you set any new goals for yourself?

VAN HALA: [01:19:55] Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:19:55] Being a married man.

VAN HALA: [01:19:57] Yeah, well, we, we made a conscious decision somewhere around there to introduce broilers.

KLEIN: [01:20:05] Oh.

VAN HALA: [01:20:06] And make a concerted effort to market poultry, meat products. And the reason for that was made abundantly clear when one of our most successful poultry farmers got into big trouble with the local authorities when he, he evicted all the young males from his poultry flock and let them run wild. He said, I'm not feeding you anymore.

KLEIN: [01:20:36] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:20:37] So, yeah, they were, it was quite a circus.

KLEIN: [01:20:41] Now, culturally were, culturally were most people vegetarian? Or they just, there was very little protein in the diet?

VAN HALA: [01:20:48] The, the Muslims were not vegetarian at all.

KLEIN: [01:20:51] Right.

VAN HALA: [01:20:52] And the, there were some, the Brahmans of course were vegetarian and there were some religious sects like the Jains who were pure vegetarian. They wouldn't even touch milk. I mean, the Brahmins would drink milk. But, you know, the funny thing was all of them would eat vegetarian eggs if you told them they were vegetarian eggs.

KLEIN: [01:21:16] Okay.

VAN HALA: [01:21:17] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:21:17] But then they wouldn't then take the next step of eating chicken.

VAN HALA: [01:21:21] Oh, no. Well, anyone who would eat meat would eat chicken. A lot of, a lot of people had prohibitions against certain kinds of meat, but meat was the one, chicken was the one meat that was common to all meat eaters.

KLEIN: [01:21:33] Okay. Oh, yeah. All right. But then within the contemporary culture, people did not know how to cook chicken? I mean, they gave him a chicken.

VAN HALA: [01:21:44] Right, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:21:45] So that, how did?

VAN HALA: [01:21:46] You might see some chickens hanging in the local bazaar by their feet, you know?

KLEIN: [01:21:50] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:21:51] And you assume that people would take them home and cook them somehow.

KLEIN: [01:21:55] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:21:56] Generally what people would do would be to make curry.

KLEIN: [01:21:59] Okay. Chop it up and throw it in.

VAN HALA: [01:21:59] And quite, yeah, no problem. Great, great dish.

KLEIN: [01:22:05] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:22:06] But we introduced the barbecue to people, and the way we did it was we had a, a poultry house on the roof of our government quarters. We called it G quarters, and it was a nice flat roof. So we'd have parties up there and invite people and all of the, all the. We'd have maybe 12 people at a time coming through and we'd serve the dinner on the roof right next to the poultry house, you know. And we'd also have a barbecue going right there.

KLEIN: [01:22:47] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:22:48] And cooking it and then showing people how to eat with your fingers. And that's really a great learning experience, great times for everybody. But people couldn't understand how you could have a dirty poultry house that smelled so clean. I said, because it is clean. Look at it. We stir this every day and that good deep litter system. And, you know, when you, when you maintain it properly, the, the hen house is a very hygienic place. And these eggs that we get every day, we don't even have to wash them. They, look, they're clean.

KLEIN: [01:23:29] Yeah. Yeah.

VAN HALA: [01:23:30] And we even had names for our hens. You know, they're all, they're all from the Arbor Acres, uh, brown franchise.

KLEIN: [01:23:41] Let's.

[END OF INTERVIEW]