

**Steve Swigart Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Steve Swigart  
**Interviewer:** Paul Kinsley  
**Date of Interview:** May 31, 2011  
**Location of Interview:** Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
**Length:** 27 pages

**Biographical Note**

Steve Swigart served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from July 1966 to July 1968 in a school lunch program.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed September 9, 2011, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Technical Note**

This transcript was created by Sonix software from the MP3 audio recording of the interview. The resulting text file was lightly edited and reformatted according to a standard template.

**Suggested Citation**

Steve Swigart, recorded interview by Paul Kinsley, May 31, 2011, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

## DISCLAIMER

This transcript was generated automatically by Sonix software from the audio recording. The accuracy of the transcript cannot be guaranteed. Only the original audio recording constitutes the official record of this interview and should be used along with the transcript. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy or would like to recommend corrections, they are encouraged to contact the library reference staff.

Oral History Interview

with

Steve Swigart

May 31, 2011  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

By Paul Kinsley

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

KINSLEY: [00:00:02] Today is May 31st, 2011. This is Paul Kinsley, and I'm interviewing Steve Swigart, who is a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from July 1966 to July 1968, and his project was a school lunch program. Ok, you can begin just telling about your present circumstances.

SWIGART: [00:00:36] Okay, well, I'm retired from a career at a 32-year career in a nonprofit agency working in the area of corrections and criminal justice reform. I am a widower for four years. I have two grown children. And right now, I'm active, a series of four different community nonprofit boards, as well as being active in my church, as head of the mission committee.

KINSLEY: [00:01:21] That's OK. Now kind of think back to the year before you joined the Peace Corps and talk about life then and you can include your childhood education, another thing as well, you know, relevant to you becoming a Peace Corps volunteer.

SWIGART: [00:01:41] I became a Peace Corps volunteer, as many people did, right out of college. I had an opportunity to go to Hunter School of Social Work in New York, and I chose to go into the Peace Corps instead in 1966. I went to a small Midwestern college, MacMurray College, and I was very active in a lot of our campus events. Got a degree in sociology, which I was just grateful to get it. Spent the year, a year before I graduated, I spent a semester in Washington, D.C., which was at American University, which was involved in doing a lot of interviewing with people in government. So I'd seen, well, chief justices, justices of the Supreme Court, met with Teddy Kennedy, had a tour of the White House. And I worked on a criminal justice, I think I did a thesis on youth crime, something you plan to build, it had just passed in the early sixties. At the same time, we're doing some classes at American University, but primarily we were doing a, sort of a log notebook on all the different interviews that we had experienced and what we learned. It was a group of kids from all over the country. So that was my more interesting experience while I was at college.

KINSLEY: [00:03:32] Ok, well, I guess why did you join the Peace Corps and how did you hear about it? What made you decide to apply?

SWIGART: [00:03:43] It was a long time ago to try to remember why. I mean, I don't know why I did something yesterday. Let alone 40 years ago. It just seemed like it seemed like, just the right the right thing to do. I was ready, I was ready for an adventure. I'd spent the summer in Europe the year before traveling around. I thought I could manage in the international environment.

KINSLEY: [00:04:19] Did you have a specific country or project that you were interested?

SWIGART: [00:04:23] No, no, it was at that point, it was pretty much of a crapshoot. You were going to go wherever they want to send you. I was, I thought, oh, that would be. My preference was something where they spoke Spanish. Of course I got Brazil, which speaks Portuguese. So that was. I really can't give you a motivation. I'm sure there was something noble

about it. I can't remember that at this time nor did I get drunk and sign up. I think it was a pretty deliberate point of looking for an adventure, I think.

KINSLEY: [00:05:02] Ok. What were your friends and family's reactions when you were accepted? Was there any hesitation or reservations either on your part or on their part?

SWIGART: [00:05:16] Um, besides my girlfriend not being very happy?

KINSLEY: [00:05:22] That's the first I've heard that one.

SWIGART: [00:05:24] Yeah. Well, I don't think she was too pleased and maybe it was a premise I didn't want to get married at the time, and that was another motivation motivating factor going away for two years to give me two years to grow up. I don't know, I don't think they were terribly comfortable with it, I think it was scary for them to have me go far away and not quite know what kind of an environment I was go into. I wasn't that concerned about it. But that's part of my sort of worldview about things will work out something positive.

KINSLEY: [00:06:06] Ok. What project were you invited to join?

SWIGART: [00:06:11] Invited? What was I assigned to? It was a focus on distributing Food for Peace in rural schools, which is what our whole group was supposed to work on, is fostering the use of the powdered milk that Food for Peace, McGovern Food for Peace was distributing. They had other they had other projects, and our major purpose was to encourage rural school systems, primarily rural mayors in Brazil, to develop and expand school lunch programs. There was a great concern that the school lunch stuff was coming into a few schools and it was just being handed out in powdered form for the kids. And so they weren't getting the nutritional value, and very often they weren't certainly getting the hygienic value of cooked milk and water prepared, et cetera, for drinking the milk and how it was being used by the families. So it's really a premise of trying to set up a lunch, fixed lunchtime with a meal, with whatever they could use, and that was both in the plaza and the city centers, as well as a number of ex schools that were outside of the municipality. The municipality I was in

was 90 miles square, 90 miles by 90 miles. So that's what, 80,100 miles square. But it was 90 by 90, so the schools are spread out all over the place.

KINSLEY: [00:08:05] What did what did they do with the powdered milk before they got somebody to?

SWIGART: [00:08:10] Well before the mayor really sort of signed up for the program and it was, you get a Peace Corps volunteer to help you do this. And we had just apparently just had a change in office at the town I went to. I think the stuff just sort of went and sat.

KINSLEY: [00:08:27] So it didn't ever get used.

SWIGART: [00:08:30] And it wasn't, it was a very I was primarily in the two schools that were in the city and it didn't get out to the rural school.

KINSLEY: [00:08:39] Now was that through CARE or something like that?

SWIGART: [00:08:42] Well, it wasn't through CARE. It was really through a government, U.S. government program that went to the that was giving Food for Peace, labeled Your Food for Peace, the United States of America and distributed to Brazil. And then they had Brazil, had a government leader, state affiliated with the governor's office, whose job it was to distribute, get the stuff out and use the Peace Corps mechanism to do that to a lot of, to most of the cities.

KINSLEY: [00:09:10] So this is going back a little. Did you prepare yourself at all for being away two years, I imagine probably not too much because.

SWIGART: [00:09:22] No, I mean, I'd just been away for four years, yeah, but for two more years wasn't much more difference to me.

KINSLEY: [00:09:29] Ok, let's talk about your training. Where was it? What was the faculty like, the syllabus, technical studies, reaction to other trainees?

SWIGART: [00:09:42] The training was in Georgetown University in the summer. So it's always nice to be in Washington, D.C., in July and August. It was just stifling. But we were on the Georgetown campus. We had, well, I would say excellent, excellent teachers. A number of them were, not quite refugees, but they were political asylum type folks who had left the country, Brazil, because it was a dictatorship at the time, it was a military dictatorship. So they were in the States, to some extent, do their activism. That's just information we gather, we really sort of get a head full of their philosophies. I thought the syllabus was good, I'm just I'm not very good at languages. It was a real struggle to pick up Portuguese for me, even though I'd had college level Spanish. And it wasn't much of an immersion, unfortunately, so that didn't that didn't help either. It was sort of another class. All I remember is the language, while I remember the language classes, and I remember animal husbandry that we had to do because we were in a nutrition program, we were supposed to raise rabbits and chickens and all sorts of different gardens and they taught us how to kill chickens and how to kill rabbits.

KINSLEY: [00:11:43] This is all at Georgetown?

SWIGART: [00:11:45] All at Georgetown, I couldn't imagine, for such an urban environment. That was how to. Yeah. They worked on the nutrition aspect of it. And they taught us how to be good wives. That was an interesting premise.

KINSLEY: [00:12:06] Well, how many were in your group?

SWIGART: [00:12:12] There may have been 20 of us to start. Yeah, there was probably about 20 of us. We had two groups that were in Peace Corps training at the time. There was another group that was. At the University of, I teach at the university level, so these are primarily master's degree people who were on campus with us. And their job was, I'm not sure what they were going to do at the universities, but I think they were going to be assigned to Brazilian universities.

KINSLEY: [00:12:49] How was the selection process, were there surprises, disappointments, enjoyments, you know, or did you lose a lot of people?

SWIGART: [00:13:04] No, I think. I think I do remember the anxiety at the end of our training when people were still waiting for their FBI background check. And that just took forever, and it got pretty nip and tuck at the end as well where somebody was going to go or not. Which created anxiety for all of us because we got fairly close. I think a few of the people that had gone through the training didn't go. And they really were cut loose or didn't they didn't. I don't. I don't recall any of that came in our group.

KINSLEY: [00:13:55] So all of the training was it was here in the States, is that right?

SWIGART: [00:14:02] Yeah, through the Experiment in International Living, they had contract for our initial in-country stay. And so we stayed for a month. Each of us was assigned a family home. And so we were in, our group is divided into two. Half of them went to Espírito Santo, which is on the coast of Brazil, and the other half went into the interior into the state of Goiás, where I was, and the capital of Goiás is Goiânia and it was a city of about 350,000 people. And so we were each with the 10 of us, 10 or 12 of us that came by the, um, each was assigned to a family home. And when we got, when we landed in Goiânia, we were just sort of taken off by these families with the in-country leader, was situated in Goiânia and he was in the capital city. And so we lived with these families for a month before we were then assigned to our specific villages that we went out to. Nobody stayed in the capital city

KINSLEY: [00:15:33] So the month was in the capital city and then you went out to places.

SWIGART: [00:15:38] Yeah, so and it wasn't there were meetings, but primarily it was an adjustment time. There was I don't recall us having a great deal of additional training. In the capital city, most of it was living life with these, these people basically working on the language skills, which was the crucial part. So that was the immersion, that was the beginning of the immersion process.

KINSLEY: [00:16:11] Did you have any choice in where you're going all?

SWIGART: [00:16:15] No, no, they just said.

SWIGART: [00:16:16] In pairs or singly?

SWIGART: [00:16:25] I think we were all singly assigned. So, yeah, we're all in our own town by ourselves. There was a married couple that stayed together. The rest were all distributed.

KINSLEY: [00:16:45] Ok. How do you feel that the training prepared you and was it useful to your service?

SWIGART: [00:16:55] Well, the language was at least a start. And it gave me some. They gave me some confidence to try some things. I think that was in there, trying to raise rabbits and did other things and start a garden. Things like that. The success there, I think, is really dependent on the politicians and the individual towns. My mayor was a real successful farmer, just became mayor, was pretty illiterate, but he was very committed to the project, so that made the difference.

SWIGART: [00:17:59] So the mayor assigned somebody, assigned me a driver and a truck, a Land Rover, stick shift Land Rover, which I didn't drive, that would have been nice to have some training because I didn't drive stick. No idea.

KINSLEY: [00:18:15] You had a driver though?

SWIGART: [00:18:17] I had a driver and I had somebody that the mayor paid to be the escolar coordinator. So we traveled everywhere together.

KINSLEY: [00:18:32] So your primary focus was setting up the the lunch programs. Now what about, you know, gardening and rabbits and chickens?

SWIGART: [00:18:40] I tried all that, but it all failed. Yeah, the ants ate all the gardens and the rabbits. The dogs killed the rabbits.

KINSLEY: [00:18:50] I introduced rabbits to my village. And then when I went back, you know, 15 years later, there were no rabbits left, but at least I started.



SWIGART: [00:19:02] Yeah, you got it going. I kept only these cages and the wood and those materials are really pretty dear at the time. The dogs just were adamant about the rabbits.

KINSLEY: [00:19:15] Now I just ran into another guy that was in my group who was actually coming here to work as an organizer on the recall campaign for Darling.

SWIGART: [00:19:25] Oh, really? Against Darling, I hope.

KINSLEY: [00:19:29] Yeah, yeah.

SWIGART: [00:19:29] Are we getting our political views in here?

KINSLEY: [00:19:34] And he made this washing machine, you know, which is really I mean, it was a good thing, but you know, they didn't have a water supply. And he went back last year and he went into the villages and said, I was here so many years ago, and he says, oh, were you the guy with the washing machine?

SWIGART: [00:19:57] Oh, really?

KINSLEY: [00:19:58] Yeah. So it seems like these funny things, these are these failures actually have more impact. Yeah. Ok, so let's see where were we. Ok, let's start with your initial entry into the country and your reaction and describe your project.

SWIGART: [00:20:20] I had a wonderful family that I stayed with. And in fact, it became a family that I had maintained a long-term relationship with, and only recently has that fallen apart. Christmas cards, they came here to visit. My wife and I went back to visit them. So that long-term relationship was created just by that month stay and then I was supposed to. And then when we came back to the city for different meetings, people made different arrangements, but my Brazilian mother insisted that I stay there. Rather emphatic about it, so it was a. That was just a good idea, and that was one of the best things that came out of my experience in Brazil, was this wonderful family that I really felt a part of.

KINSLEY: [00:21:25] What about the physical environment? Is it different than you expected or?

SWIGART: [00:21:36] No. I can never forget, quite the toilet process, but I but the rest I you know. It's interesting that people that were instructing us in Georgetown were these very elite, very elite people. They were highly educated. The college professors to some extent had no idea about being out in the sticks somewhere. They have no more preparedness for that than a fly, just really didn't have a ruralist, in the sense of a somebody who would say these are the potential things you're going to run into. And at the same time, I would think, unless somebody truly knew the specific environment you were going into in Brazil, it would be really hard to project what a rural existence would be. And coming to Brazil, at least, it would be like coming to the United States and going to either an Indian reservation or somewhere down south or out of it with Native Americans in New Mexico and Appalachia. There was no way you could have had a consistent perspective on what it would be like to be in a rural area or a small municipality, that was just no way.

KINSLEY: [00:23:02] You know, we had the same problem in Turkey, you know, from the big city, the capital or whatever. These agricultural agents would come in, but they couldn't, wouldn't even shake hands with the villagers and they couldn't relate to them at all, right? And we were kind of acting as a conduit between them in the villages because at least we had some trust from the villages. But boy, there was the one guy who wouldn't shake hands with them. And, you know, they really put off the villagers.

SWIGART: [00:23:36] There's no respect whatsoever, you know. Yeah, I experienced that with the Americans. Flew into, never talked to me. Didn't want to talk to me, didn't want to. Oh, OK. I don't know why they were there, I think they were looking at the mine probably. Very rude ministers to American missionaries. Not anxious to deal with anything there. But the in-house transition. You just had to make it on your own. There was no way to introduce you to a village, especially a village where everybody is watching you. I think I made some good political decisions about where I was going to live. Not totally aware of it, but moving to a much cheaper

environment, pension to the hotel, the hotel quote-unquote, and moving away from the small little Protestant sect that was there in the village to living in a much more Catholic environment, although I'm Protestant. It seemed to just being a cheaper place was a better move.

KINSLEY: [00:25:10] Now you were still in the city?

SWIGART: [00:25:12] Ah, well, this is a city of three thousand people. So it's not a, I mean, didn't have any big roads. And it didn't have. It had electricity, some electricity at night. Had running water, but basically stuff came down from the mountains nearby, so the water was sort of funneled into it.

KINSLEY: [00:25:40] So that was your base and then you went to the villages?

SWIGART: [00:25:43] Yeah, we went out to the different, other different settlements, I think would be the term. And some of the school the schools of the city were built by the Alliance for, Alliance for Progress? Kennedy's program. Alliance for Progress, I think. But with Kennedy, a lot of schools were developed at that time. The mayor himself had been in schools out in the interior. A lot of sort of startup stuff too. It was really hard to get started in my town. I didn't have any great opposition, people are very friendly. I didn't feel like there was great barriers.

KINSLEY: [00:26:52] So they accepted you socially, pretty much.

SWIGART: [00:26:57] Yeah, I primarily interacted with kids and the kids in the school. Then I got a little crowd, a little high school English, which was certainly drive me. I would never want to be a teacher or couldn't be a teacher. It was very hard.

KINSLEY: [00:27:16] What were the specifics of your job that was assigned, living conditions, typical day, relations to the people?

SWIGART: [00:27:32] I mean, no day had any structure in it whatsoever, so, really. I did not have a structured day, so I had to create everything, yeah. I just had I had to create everything negotiated with going out the Food for Peace. Food would come in by truck. We were working on getting that out

to the town. Encouraged me with the principals and the local principals, the two local principals are great ladies and we would work on increasing and improving the quality of the food lunch, the food meal. There was two grade schools and one high school, middle school, really. So we just had the food program in the two grade schools.

KINSLEY: [00:28:35] Now was the food program more than the milk?

SWIGART: [00:28:39] Yeah, well, they would send other they would send other food sources and they would have some dried soy powder. They had cornmeal that came out. They had a blend of soybean oil and cornmeal, which was better. They would send oil for soups. Some flour, flour also. So there are some variety of foodstuffs, so it wasn't always available, and then we look at work on different recipes for that they would put together.

KINSLEY: [00:29:29] What about the local agriculture? What did they raise?

SWIGART: [00:29:33] There is primarily cattle and rice. They had a big, the city of the center of the city was a rice processor. No, I'm not quite sure what you call it, but a rice mill. And so people would bring up their harvests of rice, that was a big aspect of them. The other, the big farms were cattle raising farms. So the sort of highlands, I'm not sure, I don't know, how they raised rice? But they raised rice. There was some industry there. There was a, in fact, my brother, the brother of the family that I stayed with, had a mica processing a little factory there, so people sat there all day long slicing mica into different grades and separating it in different grades and then shipping it out.

KINSLEY: [00:30:32] Very interesting.

SWIGART: [00:30:33] My brother never came up there to see it. I will never meet, never quite made that visit, but there were some other folks that came that I had met in Goiânia who came up there doing the work, but. So, yeah, it was basically a farm town. You know, they would ship the rice out. You paid for them and what they did with the cattle, I have no idea. I have no idea. I don't know. I don't recall ever seeing them slaughtering the cattle,

how they what they did with that, how they got, how do they got any money out of the cattle? I don't know.

KINSLEY: [00:31:19] Did they eat beef there?

SWIGART: [00:31:22] Yeah, every day. Every day. I had bread and coffee for breakfast and then for lunch, I would have a little piece of meat like a. That's what I would have twice a day. I'd have the bread and then the rice and beans and rice and beans. If somebody was, if somebody else stayed at pension, then sometimes we got something a little more exotic.

KINSLEY: [00:31:59] Did you cook for yourself?

SWIGART: [00:32:00] No, no. I was in a bed and breakfast, well, a rooming house, basically. And, um, the only people that really came and stayed there. I was, I was the main financial support for that, because every once in a Dona Viday would come and say, she'd asked me if she could borrow some money. She was just short because the bus driver stayed there, so I'd see him every other day and then because the bus would come into the village one day and then go out the next and then come back the next day. And the other interesting guy was a guy from Rio de Janeiro who came in and was in charge of malaria eradication. So that was nice to have somebody to talk to there with a broader world view.

KINSLEY: [00:32:57] So you really worked on your Portuguese. Is that right?

SWIGART: [00:33:04] Well, you know, the truth was I, well, I am bad at languages. So that was a struggle for me, and I think I'm not sure how in the world they understood me, to be perfectly honest. And when we did our final processing in Rio de Janeiro, we took the language test from the Foreign Service language, I guess. And then, you know, very sophisticated Rio ladies are giving me this test. I was thinking, this is like giving an English test to somebody who spent two years in Appalachia, to great extent, because I knew my language skills were terrible and they were full of these strange aphorisms that the people used in the sticks, right? And I said, I'm not going to go into the Foreign Service of Brazil. So I don't know, my language wasn't that good at all, but they tolerated me.

KINSLEY: [00:34:07] You mentioned before something about there was a Protestant area and a Catholic.

SWIGART: [00:34:11] Well, there was at least a little Protestant sect. And that was that was the guy with a fancy store and the hotel where, you know, people stayed when they came into town. Had a little Protestant church, which I didn't attend. But I did finagle that we could borrow the organ and move it over to this incredibly old slave construct of the village, I was at least three hundred and fifty years old, so it was a really old slave type gold mining town. And so they had this church that had been abandoned by the priest as soon as his mother died. One of these guys have made a vow to his mother that he would be a priest, but when she died, he was gone because he was the English speaker. He taught English in the high school, he ran the high school. So that's what they asked me to teach high school because they had to have an English teacher, so I tried. Uh, that was really unique. There was a gorgeous old hand-carved, wood carved Catholic Church and have. So we got to play the play the organ for weddings over there. I used to. I didn't know anything about playing bass, so I just played the same notes at two different levels.

KINSLEY: [00:35:37] That was for Catholic?

SWIGART: [00:35:39] Yeah, that was for Catholic wedding.

KINSLEY: [00:35:40] I did the same thing when we went to the big city, like once a month, I stayed at a. It was, I guess, a monastery or some Catholic. You know, there were brothers from Italy there and there were some. There's an American air base in the city and they came to the Catholic Church for service. But none of the guys there spoke English. So my father is a minister, so I just get out there and conducted the Catholic services and in return.

SWIGART: [00:36:13] And translated everything into English?

KINSLEY: [00:36:14] Yeah, in return for room and board.

SWIGART: [00:36:19] Makes do, crosses barriers. What was it? What was the original question?

KINSLEY: [00:36:29] Um, I don't know about, uh, I guess, your relationships with people of the country and living conditions, typical day.

SWIGART: [00:36:39] Yeah, the typical day. Well, there really, there really wasn't much of it, some planning and some hanging out, visiting them and waiting for the car to be fixed. But we would go out, we would do a lot of deliveries because it was like a month, every month we'd have all the different things.

KINSLEY: [00:37:00] So you had a schedule?

SWIGART: [00:37:00] We had a regular, pretty regular schedule to go out to these. I think there were, we probably had six different sites in the sticks. Some were overnight because it was such a far. And those were incredible adventures in and of themselves because there are no roads. There were no roads, and in the rainy season the bus would come in and I would go for a week or two weeks. The bus couldn't get through because bridges were out. The bus was the only connection to the exterior and we would go out into these places and get on barges and go across river on barges and go up these crevasses where you thought the Jeep was going to turn upside down. The road you'd have to go down and go through water because the whatever, whatever that was washed out, there's huge crevices of wash outs all the time, the road system.

KINSLEY: [00:38:06] Well were you prohibited from driving yourself?

SWIGART: [00:38:10] No, I just, I couldn't drive stick.

KINSLEY: [00:38:13] So some of the other people in your group?

SWIGART: [00:38:16] This one guy was hired as a.

KINSLEY: [00:38:17] Oh, some of them did their own.

SWIGART: [00:38:20] I have a feeling I just got a Jeep because of where I was, because of the rural, very rural nature where I was. Other places had paved streets and sidewalks. And those people would come into our meetings when we'd have our gathering meetings in the capital. I mean, they'd have bandages on their arms, they'd have all these diseases and illnesses, and I never got sick at all.

KINSLEY: [00:38:49] And you were probably in the remotest part.

SWIGART: [00:38:52] I was, by far. One of the Peace Corps volunteers came to visit me once, took the bus all the way up. They did refer to my place as *fin do mundo*, which is the end of the world. And that was just a general assumption. So I was the pension had no ceilings in it so that you could hear from room to room. So I woke up after Sarah got there. She was in her room. And she says, Steve, I can't see. Whatever happened is there she had bites all over her eyes. So she was, her eyes had swollen shut, she couldn't see. She was tough, but nobody came to visit me after that, after Sarah's trip. And I had to take her to the next town where there was a doctor.

KINSLEY: [00:39:48] So she got it in your town?

SWIGART: [00:39:50] Yeah, yeah. Overnight, yeah, whatever attacked or attacked her. So the next day we had to pay to have somebody drive us over by Jeep, to the hospital, to the nearest town, which was 90 miles away, I think.

KINSLEY: [00:40:08] So what about your relationship with the PC staff and other PCVs and then maybe going to work time versus leisure time?

SWIGART: [00:40:24] Well, since there were no other PCVs at my town, so there was no issues there. I think the director came to visit me once and it was quite fluid. Whether I'm fantasizing that or not, I'm not sure. So we really, we had a great, we were a good cohesive group. I think it's a very caring group, a sense of supporting each other. There wasn't a lot of, there was very little conflict. Everybody wanted to tell stories about their own place. It's fascinating. For me, it was fascinating to see some of these women



who may not have been the prettiest women in the world who just sort of blossomed as females in the Brazilian culture. That was really one of the interesting things that I saw with these women. They just sort of suddenly their bodies were so appreciated that they just sort of blossomed as women. Men didn't blossom in particular. There were some that had problems. One woman had all sorts of diseases when we first got there, got illnesses and finally they shipped her home. It could have been pretty, pretty psychosomatic, I think really bubbly young woman. Husband and wife got a divorce while they were there.

KINSLEY: [00:42:06] While they were there?

SWIGART: [00:42:07] Yeah, they separated while they were there, I guess, and all. But otherwise, there were some very close friendships that developed over at the time.

KINSLEY: [00:42:21] So did you like go to the big city once a month or something like that?

SWIGART: [00:42:27] No, I didn't feel compelled to do that. I just came in when we were supposed to come in. I couldn't think of a good excuse to go. Plus, for me, it was an eight-hour bus ride and overnight in one town, the next bus ride, the three hour bus ride to the capital city. So it is a two day trip and a long, long bus ride. And that was discouraging. I would be happier in my own little bed.

KINSLEY: [00:43:00] But what about work time versus leisure time?

SWIGART: [00:43:11] Well, I thought I was always working in reality when you were representing your country. I was always working. I didn't have a lot of leisure time. I organized, bought and organized the volleyball. So we had, we played volleyball for the youth group, the young people. We had volleyball every day.

KINSLEY: [00:43:40] So you introduced volleyball, pretty much.

SWIGART: [00:43:43] I wouldn't say introduce. I facilitated it and made it possible to get the nets and the ball and brought that back with me. So that, or maybe we had the net and I just had to get the ball, I don't know. I made it possible.

KINSLEY: [00:44:01] In Turkey, all of the guys used to hang around in the coffee shop and gamble all day, so I figured, you know, get them outside, get them some fresh air and, you know, get them doing something physical. So I actually did get them to get out and play volleyball, and they started gambling on the volleyball games. So what are you gonna do?

SWIGART: [00:44:26] You can take the Turk out of the coffee shop, but not... But I guess I never thought there was a leisure time.

KINSLEY: [00:44:34] Oh, sure. So you were pretty much on full time.

SWIGART: [00:44:37] I really appreciated the, especially during the rainy season, the rainy season, but there was nothing to do.

KINSLEY: [00:44:45] Did you have that book locker?

SWIGART: [00:44:46] I was just going to refer to the book locker. You know, the book locker was a life saver during the rainy season. When it rained, there was just nothing happened, and I always thought, people think that people in the tropics are just lazy. But I think I learned with the rainy season. You just you can't do anything, and it has nothing against, you know, motivation or how enthusiastic you are. It was just, you know, mud up to your knees now. Awful things.

KINSLEY: [00:45:24] How do you think life and work changed over the months? And then you can reflect on maybe the end of your first year, you know, things, how you thought things went the first year, you know, what were your joys and woes? Health problems, vacation, travel.

SWIGART: [00:45:49] I don't think anything. I have no sense of how things changed over a two-year period, so if you can get more integrated into the community, have more context, develop some public trust.

KINSLEY: [00:46:09] So you got along well with your driver?

SWIGART: [00:46:13] Yeah, yeah, well, the money, which was a mistake. I learned that. I learned a few things about life in the future, do not loan money, do not. But I was a naive 22-year-old. I finally got along pretty well. I don't think. We had a great parties, festivals in the town, so great square dancing. It's a little participate in all that stuff. But it was a very isolated town, so they did a lot of, there's just a lot of things that they did together as a group of people. I was sort of careful about who I allied myself with politically because there were factions at the top, obviously. Good relationships with everybody. Much more relationships with the kids in town because those were the right ones to influence I thought.

KINSLEY: [00:47:27] Were you involved with any women at all?

SWIGART: [00:47:31] No, no, no. But that's that could be a disaster. I was living with three women at the time. Dona Viday, her widowed daughter and her, another widowed daughter and another daughter. Four women.

KINSLEY: [00:47:50] At the pension?

SWIGART: [00:47:50] Pension, yeah. That was enough, I'm sure, the information about me was all over town.

KINSLEY: [00:48:00] Ok. What about vacation and travel?

SWIGART: [00:48:05] Yeah, we did. The guy in the next town, town next to me. Took off for two, what'd you get, two weeks or so. Took a bus trip from Brasilia, which was near to both of us, from Brasilia all the way up to the Amazon. So we took a great bus trip. It's a long bus trip, but.

KINSLEY: [00:48:38] So you stayed right within Brazil?

SWIGART: [00:48:41] Yeah, most of the time I stayed in Brazil. I went to Carnival one time.

KINSLEY: [00:48:46] Was there more vacation than two weeks?

SWIGART: [00:48:53] Yeah, yeah, I think we had four weeks. I went to Carnival for very wet, wet Carnival. It was fabulous, to say the least. And then I, one year I flew up to, uh, I flew to Venezuela and met my future wife in Aruba.

KINSLEY: [00:49:19] You just happened to meet her there.

SWIGART: [00:49:21] She just happened to tell me that where we were meeting, the arrangements. That created problems because I was having problems getting out of the country, when we got to leave because I changed my status as far as visas and things. That was a point where I didn't think I was going to leave. Somebody fixed something somewhere, so. We got to leave the country. And then a group of us traveled back through the rest of South America and went down to Buenos Aires, and then flew to Lima and Cusco. I went to Machu Picchu. And then took a train from, we went to La Paz. From La Paz we took a train across Lake Titicaca to Peru and Peru to Machu Picchu.

KINSLEY: [00:50:28] Did you have any illnesses at all? Not really, it sounds like.

SWIGART: [00:50:31] No, no, the only thing when I came back. When I came back, they you know, they do the stool samples, and I had a parasite and a tapeworm. Which was pretty easy to resolve with good medical care. Tapeworm was just sort of medical like ether balls I took. The parasite gets a medication and that was it. I didn't have any other issues.

KINSLEY: [00:51:06] Now that was at the end?

SWIGART: [00:51:08] Yeah, that was determined at the end.

KINSLEY: [00:51:12] Ether balls?

SWIGART: [00:51:16] Huge pills like this one like marbles. And you took about eight or 10 of them. And I thought they were like.

KINSLEY: [00:51:22] They tasted like ether?

SWIGART: [00:51:24] They smelled like it I thought. Burp and put myself to sleep. But I think they just sort of relaxed the whole system and the tapeworm would just be excreted. So the good news, it was good, quick medical care when I got back. I wasn't in any dire need. I wasn't feeling sick. Yeah, I lost some weight, which was sort of.

KINSLEY: [00:51:53] So did I.

SWIGART: [00:51:53] Not bad. I could use a tapeworm. I thought that would be that could be a pretty easy diet program for people.

KINSLEY: [00:52:04] Ok, what about at the end of your tour? What was your sense of achievement, failure or pluses and minuses in your relations and work with the people?

SWIGART: [00:52:15] How much impact I had on the school lunch program? I think it was just the fact that there was somebody from outside come in, whether it was me or somebody else outside coming, really got the mayor to do that. He thought that was a good political thing to do. Therefore, he promoted that. How much influence I had on that, I have no idea. I didn't. I really didn't feel like I had accomplished a lot. The contribution.

KINSLEY: [00:52:51] Probably a lot of just getting to know the people.

SWIGART: [00:52:55] Yeah, I thought that was going to have been back. They thought I was dead. I ran into some people from the village, about three years after I got back from the Peace Corps, after I got married and moved to Brazil. They all thought, the rumor was I died at home.

KINSLEY: [00:53:12] So you've been back, have you been back?

SWIGART: [00:53:15] I've been back. I've seen people from the village. I have not been back to the village. My goals for. You know, there's not any travel into Brazil. You know, I didn't want to take a five-day chunk of time. And I was working. Just go to my town, which would take the eight-hour bus. They've got roads up there now, and I think transportation is better

because they've reopened the reopened the mine. There's a huge. The village I was in was called Niquelândia, which was nickel land, obviously, and it was a huge mine during the war where it was doing nickel, copper, something else, it was all mixed in. Sort of an expensive ore to break down that's neither categories, but it had value. So they reopen the mine.

KINSLEY: [00:54:08] So was the mica mine in the same place.

SWIGART: [00:54:10] Oh, I don't. I have no idea. I don't know if that's not. I went down in a mica, I went down in the holes where they were like rope seat being dropped down into where they were digging the mica out. That was pretty interesting.

KINSLEY: [00:54:26] I did the same thing in Turkey where they mined the meerschaum, you know, they use it for the pipes?

SWIGART: [00:54:30] Oh yes, sure.

KINSLEY: [00:54:32] And they have to go down on the ground.

SWIGART: [00:54:33] Cappadocia, were you in the Cappadocia area?

KINSLEY: [00:54:36] No, I wasn't there, but I went to the area where they have the meerschaum. They even, one guy carved, this was, you know, back in the mid '60s and Ali was at his prime. And one guy actually carved a statue of Ali and said, welcome, w-e-l-l-c-o-m-e, welcome to Turkey, you know they were riding the crest there. But yeah, it's evolved.

SWIGART: [00:55:17] So I don't feel badly about it, they didn't send a volunteer in after me. And I don't know why. I think it was, I think it was too far out, really, and it was just too isolated.

KINSLEY: [00:55:32] Do they have other programs like yours coming in after you?

SWIGART: [00:55:37] No, that was it. I would imagine that the escolar continued, I would imagine the Food for Peace continued for quite a while and maybe it was evolved enough.

KINSLEY: [00:55:48] And you get along pretty well with the mayor then.

SWIGART: [00:55:50] Yeah. He was pleasant to me, I was pleasant to him. we weren't bosom buddies.

KINSLEY: [00:55:56] And there was one other guy that was assigned to him?

SWIGART: [00:56:01] Maybe it was a guy that I worked with, so he kept his eye on me. I kept his eye on him. He was a really hard worker and it was great. I didn't have to push him very hard to get him out and going.

KINSLEY: [00:56:16] Ok, now we're going to try to evaluate your service in light of the three goals of the Peace Corps.

SWIGART: [00:56:24] What are those three goals?

KINSLEY: [00:56:26] The first one is, I got some notes here. The first one is to provide technical assistance where requested. How do you feel you did in that area?

SWIGART: [00:56:46] Well, I think I did help as far as getting expanding the milk program and pushing that expectation and sort of just by being there in a sense of monitoring their use of the Food for Peace stuff, so that was used appropriately and the kids are getting the right meals. I think just the presence of being there did that, achieved that.

KINSLEY: [00:57:12] And do you think that was taken over by somebody else?

SWIGART: [00:57:14] Yeah, I think they did continue it. You know, this was a real cutback and they had cooks at the two grade schools in the city. That was what they did, made those hot meals.

KINSLEY: [00:57:26] Yeah, OK. And the second goal is to promote better understanding of the United States. How do you how do you feel?

SWIGART: [00:57:33] Well, you know, I don't know. What were you in Turkey for?

KINSLEY: [00:57:36] '65 to '67.

SWIGART: [00:57:38] And I was there for '66 to '68. There were strange things happening in the United States in those years, that was the King assassination, and it was the Kennedy assassination. There was a lot of racial stuff going on. There was a lot of explaining that was, there was a lot of conversation around, you know, the Vietnam War. Yeah.

KINSLEY: [00:58:06] So the issue of the racial issue was big in Brazil.

SWIGART: [00:58:09] In Brazil, yeah, because Brazil is a big country. The ratio of gradations are pretty significant. And it's sort of big middle melting pot that's sort of a lovely tan color. Then there was white folks, there is very clear white folks of the upper class and the lower class in Brazil, of course, was the black folks. This was a community that had a lot of slavery, a history of slavery in it. They had a slave church that was filled with voodoo and all sorts of underlying mysticism at the time. Which was really strange because I was attacked by all the upper-class ladies in conversations about the racism in the United States. Aren't you a terrible country? Wow, you guys are just as racist, you just don't know.

KINSLEY: [00:59:13] You guys are just as bad.

SWIGART: [00:59:16] You don't quite see it in the same way. There's this whole middle group of tan folks. So, yeah, I thought it was a it was good to have somebody to interpret that. I ran into a lot of oh my god. The thing that I was not prepared and surprised me was a lot of drunk, uh, veterans of World War II who fought with the Americans in Italy. Brazil sent a contingent there. It must have been a big contingent because I ran into a bunch of drunks, guys are serious drinking problems and pretty, still, post-traumatic stress or syndromes, but talking about that and the whole affiliation with the Americans in Italy.

KINSLEY: [01:00:15] How did how did that go?



SWIGART: [01:00:18] It was. They were all positive. Oh, but they were, you know, my buddy type routine. Hard to deal with because they were pretty screwed up. Yeah, they're really screwed up, but that war really, really, it was a World War II. So this is, what, it is 20 years later now, easily 20 years later.

KINSLEY: [01:00:40] And the third goal is to promote better understanding of other peoples by Americans.

SWIGART: [01:00:49] Very true. I think it changed my life. Not as far as an openness to other people, but it just. Brazil got under my skin as far as a pace and a pattern of living and a way of enjoying life and each other. I may not have changed them, but they certainly changed my pace of life. It was very interesting, and I knew it and I felt it all my life, but that was a sort of, a life pace changing thing. And I'm glad. It doesn't make me a type A but maybe move me to a type A minus or something. Sort of a type A personality. Very different, but I'm glad. I'm glad I did it. Certainly.

KINSLEY: [01:01:48] Through the years, have you continued any kind of involvement with your country of service or contact with the people?

SWIGART: [01:01:54] Yes. Oh, by country of service, the country I was in, Brazil? Yeah, we've had visitors from the International Institute here with a preference for Brazilians through their State Department contracts. I think we've had three different Brazilian visitors here for dinner, for overnight, whatever the case may be. And we've also, that opened this up to a whole range of other visitors from other countries we've hosted over the years. Just had an opportunity this weekend to have some Iraqis, but I was gone all week so I didn't have them.

KINSLEY: [01:02:38] Is that still through the institute?

SWIGART: [01:02:41] Yeah, the international Institute is still doing it.

KINSLEY: [01:02:44] Is Derek still there?

SWIGART: [01:02:45] Yep, and so proud that he's the longest serving executive director after my boss. So pleased to continue.

KINSLEY: [01:02:55] Because when I was a recruiter for the Peace Corps here in Milwaukee, I was stationed at the International Institute, and that was when I was on an island. He was quite a character.

SWIGART: [01:03:07] Yeah. So our tape now is going get in trouble.

KINSLEY: [01:03:12] No, I think it said you can delete certain things.

SWIGART: [01:03:16] That would be one that I prefer to delete. He's been here and the daughter came up to Indiana University and attended school there, so she was with us for Thanksgiving and Christmas, his older daughter.

KINSLEY: [01:03:37] Now you knew her from there?

SWIGART: [01:03:39] No, I just met her in Goiânia when we came to stay. And then she, after I did that, then she came back to the States to get an advanced degree. Uh, her parents came up, so we got to entertain them with the other two daughters. Just a wonderful relationship that has somehow disappeared through the ages. Communication breakdown. Never trust the Brazilian mail, and I haven't been able to find an email address for them.

KINSLEY: [01:04:21] Have you had any continuing Peace Corps involvement at all?

SWIGART: [01:04:25] No, not really.

KINSLEY: [01:04:28] Have you kept up with any people in your group at all?

SWIGART: [01:04:30] No, I have written to them and I ever got any responses out of the director, so I was out of the directory.

KINSLEY: [01:04:39] That's kind of unusual. Have you been involved in any third goal activities like trying to, you know, giving slideshows or telling people about your experience?

SWIGART: [01:04:53] Bored people with my two years in Brazil? I've certainly done that. I've done that. I've certainly fostered Brazilian things. There's a group out in Waukesha who are supporting an orphanage in Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paolo. So they have a Carnival event every year, which I attend. You know, I've met other Brazilians here, and we got involved with a number of Brazilians who were who lived in Milwaukee who taught at UWM and others who are married to, connected friends. We have other friends here who have lived in Brazil, traveled there.

KINSLEY: [01:05:42] You've had some contact with the returned Peace Corps volunteer who will be having to or have.

SWIGART: [01:05:50] No, not really. I haven't.

KINSLEY: [01:05:53] Oh, are you open to that?

SWIGART: [01:05:55] Oh, sure. I'd like to be involved in that. Yeah, I've done it. I did it once. I went to a party at the Urban Ecology Center for a kickoff for the new volunteers and their families were there and some people who had just returned were there to talk. I should say there's a history of us all.

KINSLEY: [01:06:29] Ok, well, do you have any like words of wisdom to anybody who might be listening to this?

SWIGART: [01:06:40] No, I guess my only thing would be. I came back and I tried to weigh the Peace Corps experience in my life trajectory. Uh, well, one of the unique things that I experienced was I came back from the Peace Corps and eight months later, I was in the Army, so I refer to those as my war and peace years. So I spent two years in the Army after coming back from the Peace Corps. So I after graduation I was out of circulation for four years, five years. It was a little hard to get back engaged, you know, earning a living. So for some extent in comparison to my contemporaries where they were sort of off on their jobs, I was going nowhere. So it took a while to get really engaged, but I think over a long view, it was worth it. They gave me things that I couldn't have got anywhere else, the sort of personal understanding, personal values, a way of looking at the world.

Nothing is more interesting than looking at your country through Third World eyes. We don't quite look as lovely.

KINSLEY: [01:08:01] Yeah, that's for sure.

SWIGART: [01:08:03] So it was really interesting to learn that to learn at 22. It was a good time to learn that, you know, how what you're doing impacts on the world and how people in other parts of the world live.

KINSLEY: [01:08:21] Like as an example, most of the Turks that that the Johnson bumped off Kennedy because that's how they would have done it.

SWIGART: [01:08:28] That's how they would do it. A good conspiracy theory. Yeah.

KINSLEY: [01:08:36] And then, of course, like Sargent Shriver was our director at the time. And, you know, we tried to, you know, tell them that he was Kennedy's brother-in-law, you know, to try to help out. I don't think that did much good.

SWIGART: [01:08:57] Kennedy was such a star.

KINSLEY: [01:08:58] Oh, he was. And over in Turkey, you know, like every hotel or bar you're going to, there's a picture of Ataturk. But then during the Kennedy administration, he was right under Ataturk. I mean, he was far more loved there than he was here.

SWIGART: [01:09:11] Oh yeah. I would guess Obama's in the same place.

KINSLEY: [01:09:14] Yeah, yeah. Ok, here's your last chance.

SWIGART: [01:09:24] Last words of wisdom. Ok, turn let me off.

KINSLEY: [01:09:28] Ok.

[END OF INTERVIEW]