

Cedar Wolf Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Cedar Wolf
Interviewer: Barbara Kaare-Lopez
Date of Interview: December 8, 2017
Location of Interview: Wheat Ridge, Colorado
Length: 65 pages

Biographical Note

Cedar Wolf served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Namibia from 2006 to 2008 as a math and science teacher.

Access

Open.

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Suggested Citation

Cedar Wolf, recorded interview by Barbara Kaare-Lopez, December 8, 2017, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Oral History Interview

with

Cedar Wolf

December 8, 2017
Wheat Ridge, Colorado

By Barbara Kaare-Lopez

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

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:00:00] Yes, I remember. Recording the recording also. Ok, so we can start now, we can start. OK, good afternoon. Today is December 8th, 2017. And I'm going to be interviewing Cedar Wolf, that's Cedar C-E-D-A-R and then Wolf W-O-L-F and my name is Barbara Kaare K-A-A-R-E hyphen Lopez. I'm the interviewer and we are in Wheat Ridge, Colorado, interviewing Cedar. And if I get some information wrong, just correct me Cedar. I was gonna say Peter. Cedar served in Namibia from 2006 to 2008 in science education. He'll tell us more about that in the interview. And also he was in the Philippines, the 2011 audio video specialist with the Response program. OK, so we're going to start with the questions. How are you doing today, Cedar?

WOLF: I'm doing great.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK, you got a chance to kind of look at some of these questions a little bit.

WOLF: [00:01:19] A little bit. Some will be surprises so.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:01:21] Yeah. OK, ok. Anyway, so whether we do all the questions, there are 13 questions on the guidelines. So we'll start with the first one. So the first one to talks about describe your present family, work, residence, interests. That's the first part of the question. So what is your current if you can start about your family or work, what are you doing right now?

WOLF: [00:01:49] So I actually work for the Peace Corps right now.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:01:53] Yes, OK.

WOLF: [00:01:54] Which is really great. I'm a recruiter, uh, field based regional recruiter for Colorado, and I've been doing that for about three and a half years here. I was a recruiter in New Orleans for one year when I started. So that was pretty exciting. And even before that, I was a campus recruiter, a part time campus recruiter at the University of Colorado Boulder for a couple of years and I was going to school there. And then even before that, I was a student assistant in the campus recruiting office for an additional year. So I been recruiting for a long time, since about 2011.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:02:30] Yeah, yeah, a long time. OK, your family.

WOLF: [00:02:36] Yeah. So I have a big family. I have two older sisters, two older half brothers who are both half brothers themselves. So that's a long story. And then while my mom is divorced from my former stepfather, I still consider my step siblings as my siblings. So there's two step brothers there and one step sister. So total eight of us growing up. And I'm the second youngest.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:03:06] Wow. OK, ok. OK. Where do you live?

WOLF: [00:03:12] Currently I live in Wheat Ridge in Colorado, that's a west suburb of Denver, and I've been here for about a year now and in Denver for about two years.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:03:23] Ok, what are your interests, Cedar?

WOLF: [00:03:26] I love multimedia. I love digital media, photography, video, audio. I was an audio video specialist in the Philippines and I've been, I got started in 2004 with video recording skateboarding.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:03:46] Recording skateboarding?

WOLF: [00:03:48] Video recording skateboarding. So I started skateboarding when I was 16 and one thing that I instantly found love with, it was just the artistic side of it, the photography, the video. And it always just seemed so amazing. And so finally, when I was in college, when I was 24, I finally bought a video camera because I wanted to sort out the tricks that I was doing. But then I quickly fell in love with the video camera, kind of more than the skateboard.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:04:18] Ok, OK.

WOLF: [00:04:19] And then when I went into the Peace Corps, well Peace Corps is a great subject material for video photography. And so that side of me really took off and I got involved in a lot of multimedia projects within the Peace Corps and then again in Peace Corps Response. And now I do it kind of do it on the side as a side gig when I'm not recruiting.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:04:39] Good. OK, I see. You know, you, as you know, joined the Peace Corps 2006. OK, so another part of this first question is the year before you joined the Peace Corps, what was your life like

then? For instance, that could be a long winded answer, or if you to just think of it in terms of other experiences that were relevant to becoming a Peace Corps volunteer.

WOLF: That's a great question.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Or your childhood, your education.

WOLF: [00:05:12] Yeah, yeah, so I've always thought of myself as kind of living the Peace Corps life within the United States, even from when I was a child. If we want to go all the way, way back.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:05:28] If you want to, we can. Yeah.

WOLF: [00:05:29] Just to kind of lay some groundwork, but I was born in a house with no electricity, no running water, out in the woods.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:05:38] In what state?

WOLF: [00:05:39] Washington State. And that was the first, you know, five, six years of my life and I have clear memories of that. And so like when I discovered the Peace Corps, I was like, oh, yeah, this is like going home. But I was in college when I first discovered the Peace Corps. It was my senior year in college at Western Washington University in Washington State, and I was 25 at the time and it was winter of my senior year getting ready for graduation. And it was over the winter break. And I remember just this feeling of, I don't know, kind of despondency in a way. I was looking at my friends who were applying for jobs. I was looking at my friends who were applying to graduate school. And I just remember none of that felt right to me. I was actually getting really kind of, I don't know, senioritis. I kind of fed up with school. This happened in high school as well. My senior year fired up and it actually took a couple of years off before I went to college. And so I had that same feeling my senior year in college. And I just I was looking for something. I

didn't quite know what I was looking for, but I was looking for something different than the traditional kind of path that I saw laid out before me. And I stumbled across the Peace Corps, the website name. I never talked to a recruiter before. I remember vaguely now, you know, thinking back, my high school art teacher had done the Peace Corps, but I wasn't thinking about that at that moment in my life when I was, you know, looking around and when I found the website, I started reading through it. It just seemed like it was the answer to what I was seeking, the international component, the service component. I really wanted to work with people and give back. I was getting kind of tired of academia and science, um, and yeah, submitting my application and the rest is history.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:07:36] Ok, OK. What did you as far as you go about college, what did you major in in college?

WOLF: [00:07:44] I majored in physics and applied math. A double major. So it was very intensive, very academic. I had my nose buried in books and behind computer screens most of the time. And I love science. But I just recognized I saw there's this other side of me that wasn't really being recognized or that wasn't allowed to, I didn't have like an outlet for it. And it was this kind of humanitarian side. This may be kind of more social side of me. The thing is, I grew up a very quiet, very shy person. And so, science and academia in school was just kind of a safe haven for me, was where if I could apply myself here, then I'll do well. I don't need to express myself. I don't need to work with people or anything like that. I just need to work with numbers and computers and books and emails and that that's kind of why I did it. And I was good at it, but it wasn't making me happy. So I love math, I love science for its beauty, but ultimately it wasn't the right thing for me.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:08:58] OK, the second question, this is the most common question from 1961 to the present is, of course, why did you join the Peace Corps? I'm interrupting myself. Some of these questions

might be a little redundant, because you did talk about it. But if you want to say anything else, why did you join the Peace Corps?

WOLF: [00:09:20] Oh, yeah. So I, I gave you a little bit of the reasons why, you know, my motivations for kind of looking for the Peace Corps, but ultimately like what, um, I guess convince me to submit the application and kind of go through the whole program. I remember very distinctly we were at staging in Washington, D.C., and we were going through line and getting kind of all our shots ready for Peace Corps service. And I was talking with a friend of mine about the Peace Corps, about why what about it appealed to, you know, each of us. And I said the Peace Corps seemed like a way for me to just really experience the rawness of humanity. That's what I wanted.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:10:09] You're making me smile. And of course, the listener can't see it. I've never got that answer. Experience the rawness of humanity, is that what you said? Can you expand a little bit on that, I'm digesting that one.

WOLF: [00:10:24] Yeah, it's, you know, living in America and especially these days can feel very superficial.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:10:33] Oh, yes.

WOLF: [00:10:34] We're behind our computer screens or behind our social media profiles. And sometimes it just doesn't feel real. And I've always, I'm not good with small talk. And part of the reason is because I like to get right down to the meat, the guts of how people feel about life and the problems they're going through. And I you know, I love that. I love that. Just digging into what makes people tick and the challenges that they're going through. And maybe it's because I've gone through so many, you know, in my own life and in my own family, I just it's I know that it's can be so present in people's lives, but then we just don't talk about it. And the Peace

Corps seemed like a way to put all that directly in front of you. You know, you're living it. You're living the challenges of life. But, you know, in Namibia, people were some of the living conditions day to day living conditions that people that they just kind of deal with every single day, like people in the United States couldn't imagine living like that. But, you know, there's people who live like that every single day of their lives. And I thought, all right, you know, if you, if someone has to, you know, face these challenges every single day, there's going to be something there that I'm not getting in my life that I want to see and I want to experience and I want to get to know. And it just seemed like it was a very intuitive kind of gut feeling. I was just kind of moving in that direction. It seemed like the right direction to go to really just kind of learn what it means to be a human, to be alive and to connect with people. And that that's what I wanted. I wanted rawness. I wanted just to kind of strip away all my comforts and to really just kind of expose myself as much as I as much as I could, because I've lived so much my life protected kind of in my own show.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:12:38] How you were raised, do you mean or how you just protected yourself?

WOLF: [00:12:42] Yeah, like I was talking earlier about, you know, the reason I feel like I focus so much on math and science. So it's because it's safe for me, I don't have to deal with my emotions. And so this is a way for me to kind of forcibly confront my inner self and my inner emotions and all that stuff inside of me that I've been kind of just hiding away from everything.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:13:06] That's a, if I may say, very interesting answer. I'm focusing a lot on that rawness of humanity. OK, yeah, I know you'll be telling us more in the interview about that. You sort of, you already touched on this a little bit. But I'll ask again, question three, how did you hear about the Peace Corps and what made you decide to apply if you want to add anything else to it? It says here,

describe the process, timing. And then did you have a specific country or project in mind?

WOLF: [00:13:39] I applied in winter of 2005, December of 2005, and I just applied on the, I found the website and I just applied to the website and I believe at that time you had to mail in an application or submit, you know, some things online. And so I so I that that was my first exposure to the Peace Corps. I have a vague recollection of maybe hearing somebody talk about the Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:14:11] You had mentioned a teacher earlier.

WOLF: [00:14:12] Well, there's an art teacher in high school. And I remember that she would you know, in class she would use some African words to kind of keep us quiet or get our attention or something like that. So I have memories of that now. But at the time when I was applying to Peace Corps, I wasn't thinking that, it's only now kind of after being so involved with it that I'm like, oh, yeah, there's a subliminal kind of message.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:14:39] Yeah. Something saturated in your brain.

WOLF: [00:14:42] Yeah. Maybe I maybe I went to a presentation and when I was in college, but I don't remember it really kind of standing out clearly it was more just stumbled across the website having that feeling of, you know, searching and then finding this and then applying for it. I applied for AmeriCorps, I applied for Teach for America and I was kind of casting a wide net. So but then Peace Corps got back to me and, you know, just it seemed really exciting and seemed really attractive. And I remember I interviewed at the University of, at Western Washington University, this recruiter in-person interview. And then the application process back then was much different. I just kind of applied and said, I remember I told them, I'll go anywhere, I'll do anything.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:15:27] Really? You had no specific part of the world in mind?

WOLF: [00:15:31] Nothing, nothing at all. It was all the same to me. I'd never traveled outside the country on my own at that point. I had gone to Mexico when I was a kid with my parents a couple of times. But when I was like 10 or 11. But I never, I had gone to Canada a couple times, so that doesn't count because Bellingham is like 30 miles from the border. So like every I felt that no matter where I go, I just had this kind of understanding that it's all on some level going to be the same to me no matter where I go.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:04] What will be the same?

WOLF: [00:16:06] It's all going to be new. It's all going to be challenging. It's going to be a new culture. So no matter where I go, it's going to be challenging and different.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:12] And I assume you welcome the challenge.

WOLF: [00:16:14] Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:15] You seek the challenge?

WOLF: I was hungry for it.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK, good.

WOLF: [00:16:19] I was, I was chomping at the bit and as far as the work, again, I was just open to doing any kind of work that they want me to do. Of course it's obvious looking back, that I did math and science, I did science education. Rewind a little bit. I actually applied for or actually got accepted as a math education volunteer. Within that, I switched to science. Um, but of course I did that. I mean, I was a tutor for three years and then I was a math and

science major. So now that I am a recruiter, there's nothing else I was probably qualified to do.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:59] But you had said I'd do anything.

WOLF: [00:17:01] I would have done anything if they wanted me to be a volunteer or environmental volunteer or anything. I was just, I believed in the mission of the Peace Corps and I knew I wanted to get involved with something that I believed in. And the Peace Corps seemed like something that I could believe in. And I knew that from that belief, that faith, I guess in the mission of the organization, I would apply myself to such a degree that no matter what I did, I would just pick it up, learn the skills they need to do, and then get involved with the community. And I knew it wasn't going to be super technical work necessarily. And even if it was, I mean, I just, you know, spent four years studying physics and applied math. I was about as technical as I could imagine.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:17:45] The physics is beyond me.

WOLF: [00:17:48] But I just thought you no matter what it is, I could teach myself what I need to know.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:17:53] Ok, all right. First question. What were your friends and family's reactions when you were accepted? For instance, was there any hesitation or reservations on your part? On their part? So how do they react when you were accepted?

WOLF: [00:18:13] Everyone was super excited for me. Oh, really very supportive, everyone. And this is my family. I grew up in a very, very liberal, very hippy. My parents were. You know, like I said, I grew up out of the woods, no running water and electricity.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:18:31] For how long? Without that. Without electricity, you know.

WOLF: [00:18:34] Yeah. Yeah. Well, I was a kid, you know, six when I was six years old when we moved into town. But they've been living out there for, you know, maybe ten years or so on this property.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:18:46] In a cabin or?

WOLF: Yeah, in a cabin that my dad built.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK.

WOLF: [00:18:49] Yeah, they were living off the land. That was their dream. And my mom was a social activist. So something like the Peace Corps just kind of made sense in a way. I don't know. I think I surprised a lot of people because, like I said, I never traveled outside the country on my own before. I was very kind of quiet, reserved person. So something like this was like, I liken it to finding the tallest cliff I can find and then jumping off into a lake. And that was what I was going for. I was like, give me something that I can really just kind of commit myself to.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:19:31] Ok, did you have any reservations? I think I know the answer, but I'll ask it anyway.

WOLF: [00:19:38] I did not have any reservations. I'm sure there was some fear back then, just not really knowing what I was going into. But I was not, I was not planning to do anything else. I put all my eggs in one basket. The Peace Corps application process was very long before you knew if you were actually accepted and going somewhere so. Well, my friends. Well, you know, I graduated college. My other friends were, you know, getting accepted in graduate school, getting accepted into jobs. And I was still waiting to hear back about the Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:20:13] What year did you graduate from college?

WOLF: [00:20:15] 2006 but I so I was just waiting it out. I got accepted into AmeriCorps. I turned it down because I told them I went to hear back about this Peace Corps thing.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:20:28] Ok, but you did get accepted there.

WOLF: [00:20:30] I did get accepted. I remember I got the envelope in the mail and it was a big manila envelope and it said Cedar Wolf and Peace Corps. And I was so excited. I before I even opened it, I drove over to my friend's house and I got around a couple of my best friends at the time. And we just sat down and we opened it together and pulled out the paper. And it's like, and then this is when I finally found out, oh, I'm going to, what? Namibia, where is that?

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:04] You didn't know where it was?

WOLF: [00:21:09] I had no idea where it was. And so that was super exciting, just figuring out that. But yeah, that was in, let's see, I graduated in 2006 from Western Washington University.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:18] Where is that?

WOLF: [00:21:21] Washington State, in Bellingham.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:22] Bellingham, OK.

WOLF: [00:21:24] And so I applied December of 2005. I didn't find out I was going to Namibia until probably August or September of 2006. So it was a long process.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:37] OK, I'll be asking more about that when you got to Namibia, I can't even say it!

WOLF: Just don't say Nambia!

KAARE-LOPEZ: Namibia, OK. The fifth question, what project were you invited to join? And then there's another part of that question is how did you prepare yourself and others for dislocation? To me, it seems a strange word to use, of entry into two years of Peace Corps service. So we can start with what project were you invited to join in Namibia?

WOLF: [00:22:16] So I was invited to serve as a math education volunteer in sub-Saharan Africa. That was what they told me. I remember I told the interviewer lady, I said, I'm not really sure that I can live in the Sahara Desert. And then she corrected me. Well, you know, sub-Saharan Africa means all of Africa, not the Sahara Desert.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:22:44] Ok, it would be.

WOLF: [00:22:46] Yeah, yeah. It's like sub Saharan. So like below. So basically I, you know, shows up on my geography. I just thought, oh, I'm going to live in a desert. I don't know if I can live in the desert. She said, you know, Peace Corps is not a vacation.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:23:02] Yeah. Yes.

WOLF: [00:23:03] And then ironically, I did end up living in a desert country. Namibia has two deserts.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:23:08] Does it? OK, OK.

WOLF: [00:23:10] But yeah, I got invited to serve as a math education volunteer in sub-Saharan Africa. That was the invitation. And then I later found out I was going to Namibia. And then three months into my service, my school actually asked me to switch over to science education. So that's why I tell everyone I was a science education volunteer. That's ultimately what I did, even though I was invited as

a math education volunteer. And then how did I get prepared for dislocation? After I graduated in June, my departure was later that year in November. And so I graduated in June and I took the summer off. I went and did a fun kind of Europe backpacking trip with some friends from college, just kind of like little postgraduation fun thing at a friend who was living over in Norway and we teamed up with him. So that was really nice, kind of mini taste, I guess, of what it'd be like to travel abroad. Of course, Europe is very different than Africa.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:24:24] I would imagine. Yeah.

WOLF: [00:24:25] Yeah. But that was that was nice. And then when I got back, I knew that I was going to once I knew that once I left for the Peace Corps, that, uh, when I came back, you know, I was basically I was leaving my life that I had kind of grown used to, and that when I came back from the Peace Corps, things would be different. And so I made a point to spend as much time as I could with my friends and family, uh, in Washington. I want to spend as much time with them as I could before I left. And so I just I just kind of hung out. I didn't get a job or anything like that, just kind of, you know, had a good time with my friends over the summer and just living with my brother and up in Bellingham and did some research on Namibia. You know what to bring, what to pack. Um, I didn't focus so much on researching, like, the cultural issues and the social issues or anything like that. I guess it just didn't really seem like it would be an issue for me. I knew that going there, I was going to keep a very open mind and just kind of, you know, uh, be prepared to learn about the, uh, the people and the culture. And I got there and not kind of have any preconceived notions or assumptions about the way people were going to be. I didn't I didn't really think about it. I just kind of knew that I would think I would work things out when they happened and take it as it comes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:02] Good. OK, the second question, these are questions about your training. Um, I'll start off. Where was your training, about the faculty? It says a syllabus, technical studies, anything you want to answer, reaction to other trainees on this first part of the sixth question.

WOLF: [00:26:24] The training happened in Okahandja.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:28] Could you spell that?

WOLF: [00:26:28] In Namibia. Okahandja is spelled O-K-A-H-A-N-D-J-A.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:37] D-J-A, in Namibia. Is that a big city, small town?

WOLF: [00:26:45] It's uh, it's not a real big city. It's about 40 kilometers outside of Windhoek, the capital city.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:54] Say the capital again.

WOLF: Windhoek.

KAARE-LOPEZ: How do you spell it?

WOLF: [00:26:58] W-I-N-D-H-O-E-K.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:27:02] OK. Never heard of it.

WOLF: [00:27:06] Yes, it's about 40 kilometers north of Windhoek and it's a small town, has a nice kind of outdoor arts market, but, you know, it's kind of a place that you just can drive through it on your way to the north of the country, which is many hours. And training was very interesting. We lived in the compound, as we called it, dorms or dorms and a big training facility where we are all there together, staying in dorm rooms, sleeping there together. In subsequent

years, volunteers would go live with host families during training. But for us, there's about 67 of us total.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:27:54] In that training group?

WOLF: In that training group.

KAARE-LOPEZ: To me that sounds large.

WOLF: [00:27:58] It was very. Yeah, they broke it up and yeah. Because we were, I guess we were a little bit of a troublesome crowd.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:28:06] OK.

WOLF: [00:28:07] And yeah, there's about 67 of us. We live in this training facility in Okahandja. And then I remember the trainings where, you know, they were intense in the sense that, you know, it was just full days, Monday through Friday, you know, nine to five kind of thing, going through all kinds of workshops and in these conference rooms with coffee and tea breaks multiple times throughout the day. So we felt like we were, you know, giving ten to. But it was fun. It was so exciting and energetic to be around so many amazing people, the Peace Corps volunteers, as well as the training team, who are mostly comprised of Namibians.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:28:54] I was going to ask. So it mainly were Namibians?

WOLF: [00:28:57] Right, yeah. The training team were all Namibians. And there was some Peace Corps staff, you know, like the medical officer, country director. But the majority of the training team were Namibians.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:06] Who spoke English?

WOLF: [00:29:09] Yeah, Namibia.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:11] What's the language they speak?

WOLF: [00:29:13] Namibia has about at that time they had, you know, 13 officially recognized languages in the country,

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:18] Caramba!

WOLF: [00:29:19] But English was the official kind of language that the country had adopted.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:25] Oh they did?

WOLF: [00:29:26] Yes, they teach it in schools. There's the largest tribe in Namibia is the Oshiwambo tribe. And so their language is spoken a lot. I'd say the predominant languages are English and Afrikaans, actually.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:43] Afrikaans like Afrikaans in South Africa?

WOLF: Yeah, exactly.

WOLF: [00:29:48] Ok, because Namibia used to be colonized by South Africa.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:52] So I didn't tell you this Cedar, but in my mind I'm thinking now what part of Africa is Namibia? Yeah, you could tell me now?

WOLF: [00:29:59] Take South Africa at the very bottom and you go up the west coast, on the Atlantic Ocean, it is the first country you get to just above South Africa.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:30:08] Did it have a different name years ago?

WOLF: [00:30:11] It used to be called South West Africa.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:30:12] Oh, OK. That was what it was. It was South West Africa. Geez. When did it become Namibia?

WOLF: 1990. So it's a pretty young country.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK.

WOLF: March 21st, 1990.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:30:32] Ok, anything else you want? Before we moved the language training, anything you want to add about maybe your reaction to the other trainees? You already said you had a big group, 67.

WOLF: [00:30:45] Yeah, yeah. I mean, as far as the other Peace Corps volunteers, you know. So the Peace Corps training group, the Namibians, I thought they were great. I love hanging out with them. I actually had a little bit of a crush on one of them. Her name was Annamarie. And I just remember hanging out with her a lot, really nice woman. And we had a good friendship. But then the other Peace Corps volunteers, really amazing group of people. But it was really interesting. I remember having a very difficult time connecting with a lot of them, just like any social.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Can you say why?

WOLF: [00:31:29] In any social group there's going to be small clicks. So in a group of 67, you can imagine there are lots of little cliques that were starting to form. And I just remember it didn't really seem like I fit with any of the groups and the cliques that were forming and so I would hang up on myself a lot.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:31:45] How what do you mean hang up on yourself?

WOLF: [00:31:47] Hang out.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Oh.

WOLF: I just hang out by myself a lot. Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:31:50] OK, hang out.

WOLF: [00:31:53] I hang out by myself a lot and just kind of draw in my notebook or journal or practice my language or hang out with some of the staff like Annamarie. But then after a while there I remember there were two other volunteers, Paul Johnson and, um, this other guy. They were both computer guys, kind of like me. So they were little kind of odd.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:32:25] Geeky? I'm sorry, I used the word geeky. Cedar didn't use it, but I just started with geeky.

WOLF: [00:32:31] Geeky or oddballs. Well, there was something about them where I don't know. We just had a little bit of kind of an unspoken knowing. And part of that was I think we just kind of thought outside of the box. And so they also were not really falling into any of the other groups. So for me and I, one thing that I really liked about these two guys was, they came to me one day and they're like, hey Cedar, do you want to leave the compound? And no one had left the compound at that point.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:33:02] Were you not supposed to?

WOLF: [00:33:07] We could, but no one did. It was kind of scary. It's like, we lived in this new town, like relatively soon after getting there and. And like this was in the afternoon after training had finished, around, you know, five or six. So you know, it's like getting dark. You don't really want to go into the town and they're like, yeah, let's go out and just kind of check out the area. And so we did. And we

walked downtown and we went into this *shebeen*, it's what they call a bar.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:33:35] Ok, spelled that.

WOLF: [00:33:37] S-H-E-B-E-E-N.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:33:42] *Shebeen*. It's like a bar, OK.

WOLF: [00:33:45] And we just walked downtown, went to the first *shebeen* that we could find and ordered a beer. They have these tallboys you know, it's like 750 milliliter beer. That's kind of the normal average size drink.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:34:00] And they call them tallboys?

WOLF: [00:34:03] Tallboys. And then we just started hanging out and talking with the locals, the people who were there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:34:12] In English?

WOLF: In English.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK.

WOLF: [00:34:13] We just wanted to go out and kind of see what life was like and see the people and start interacting with them. And that's what I liked about those two guys, like, they were adventurous. That's kind of how I thought, too. I wanted to get out and getting back to that experiencing life. I wanted to experience the culture and the community and what it was like to live in Namibia and part of that is you just have to get out there and see things and meet people. And even though I'm this shy, reserved person, I had this inner drive to kind of put myself in situations where, um, you know, maybe I have to get out of my comfort zone. I had, you know,

something inside me always kind of pushes me and things like that. And this is one of those situations. And then from there, it expanded into well, we saw a mountain that was kind of far in the distance.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:15] You going to go fly to it?

WOLF: [00:35:16] Ok, let's go climb the mountain. I was like one of the first people to leave the compound and go and climb the mountain and, you know, just different things like that. I really enjoyed it.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:27] All right. Anything you want, want to talk about your language training? You already told me that there is 13 official languages in Namibia. English is the official language. So did you have to learn any other language?

WOLF: [00:35:43] I learned Rukwangali.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:45] OK, you're gonna have to say, OK, hold on. Cedar's going to spell some of these words for me. Please spell that.

WOLF: [00:35:52] Rukwangali. It's R-U-K-W-A-N-G-L-I. Ru-kwan-gali.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:00] Rukwangali, am I saying it? Is it a dialect, would you say, a language?

WOLF: [00:36:10] It's the language of the Kwangali tribe. So, you take that R-U off the beginning and that's the name of the tribe.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:16] I'm writing a little bit while Cedar's talking.

WOLF: [00:36:23] Yeah. So I think I spelled it wrong. R-U-K-W-A-N-G-A-L-I.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:29] A-L-I, is the language of the.

WOLF: Kwangali.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Kwangali people. OK, got it. Kwangali people. I'm not sure what to even ask about Rukwangali. Well what type of language is that? If I didn't ask the question in a sensible way, expand on it please.

WOLF: [00:36:56] It's um. I guess you can say it's an offshoot of the Bontu, if you want to get into language roots. I know that much.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:37:07] Of the Bontu language. Yeah. I've heard of Bontu.

WOLF: [00:37:10] Or kind of the language system I guess, OK, to kind of branch out to a lot of different languages.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:37:17] Was there anything special, was there anything different about the language? I mean I think in Botswana like, there's the language that they use the clicks. And then there's in some Asian countries, there's tonal language. Was there anything unique?

WOLF: [00:37:41] Not for Rukwangali, some of the other languages in Namibia, definitely. There's the Nama people and the Damara people, they have, uh, the clicks. I think it's, in the language, I think it's called Xhosa. Or something like that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:00] Oh, I know. I know where that came from, X-H-O-S-A.

WOLF: Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:09] Am I kind of in the same?

WOLF: [00:38:10] Yeah, yeah. So, yeah, definitely there's some tribes within Namibia where like there's many, many clicks and just different, you know. That language is very present there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:25] Cedar, excuse me. The Nama people, N-A-M-A.

WOLF: Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: And the?

WOLF: [00:38:30] Damara.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Spell that please.

WOLF: D-A-M-A-R-A.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:36] Ok, so those peoples would have a language that might use the clicks but was it Xhosa?

WOLF: [00:38:46] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:46] For the listener I'm not sure if I'm saying it right.

WOLF: [00:38:48] No I can't. I mean it's so. Yeah. So if you've ever seen the 1980s comedy, The Gods Must be Crazy

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:57] Yes, I have. Yeah.

WOLF: [00:39:00] Yeah. Those people live in Namibia. Yeah. So they cross over into Botswana also.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:39:05] Yeah. I have a friend from Botswana. I think she tried to explain it to me. When you did work in the schools did you speak Rukwangali or did you speak English in the school?

WOLF: [00:39:22] I taught in English. And just to back up a little bit. Interesting, interesting story about my language training. I was very enthusiastic about language training at the beginning. I studied Rukwangali a lot. This is partly because I was, you know, just kind

of hanging out. So I studied the language, I got really into the language at the beginning, partly because I wasn't really clicking with any other group. So I was might as well study the language. And then about a month or so to our language training, once we figure out our placements, we were going to actually have a permanent sites. I realized that my community would be in this in this neighborhood, this village where they didn't actually speak Rukwangali.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:12] OK, you study Rukwangali, but your village would not be speaking it. What would they speak?

WOLF: [00:40:19] They would speak Rumanyo. And what happens is that in the Kavango region, this is in the northern part of Namibia where I lived, there's two neighboring tribes, the Rukwangali and the Rumanyo, and they're very close to each other.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:33] I'm going to stop. Spell Rumanyo for me.

WOLF: [00:40:36] R-U-M-A-N-Y-O.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:40] This is a people, like a tribe?

WOLF: A tribe, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK.

WOLF: [00:40:45] Now you might think that it's the Rumanyo or Manyo tribe, but it's not. It's the Gciriku, but they actually have a click in their sound.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:01] I don't know how to write the listener. We're stumped with how to spell things in Xhosa.

WOLF: [00:41:07] Yeah it's G. It has a silent G for whatever reason. I don't know. G-C-I-R-I-K-U.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:18] OK, I'm gonna read that back. G-C-I-R-I-K-U. That's a language?

WOLF: That's the people.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Oh that's another tribe.

WOLF: [00:41:25] That's the tribe that speaks Rumanyo.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:30] Let me see if these arrows make sense to me. This tribe speaks and this is the language. And just so you know, Cedar, in your future interviews, I know we're recording this when there's words that we think as the interviewer that people aren't going to know what we're talking about. We want them to be spelled out, right?

WOLF: Yeah. No, that makes sense.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Yeah. Goodness. OK. The selection process, we're still in question six. Were there any surprises, disappointments, enjoyments, or was there anything significant about the selection?

WOLF: [00:42:14] About my placement?

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:42:15] Yeah, well, back when, I don't want to talk about myself, but we all got selected. But in the past, I know maybe still, sometimes some people don't make it. They are told they can't continue whatever. Did most people in your group of 67 get selected or was there anything, were you surprised you were selected?

WOLF: [00:42:43] When I was selected, I don't think I was surprised, I was really excited. I thought I had a decent chance. You know, I don't remember thinking, like, that Peace Corps was so competitive that I was kind of worried about me getting in. I mean, nowadays, when I look at, since I'm recruiting, I look at people's skill sets, I actually think I was probably overqualified. Because most people I recruit nowadays, like they. Like I had three years of tutoring and education experience. I'm telling people, you know, have at least 30 hours of tutoring experience. So I thought I was pretty well qualified. In terms of like going in, you know, the selection process and going in with 67 people, I remember I remember hearing right at the beginning there's one person who just kind of turned away, like even at staging. And I just remember thinking that was kind of strange. And then we got into training and then there are a couple more people who, uh.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:43:48] Like you, didn't see any more or?

WOLF: [00:43:50] One guy had to leave early because there's something that came up with his parents, maybe a medical issue. Another woman who actually was becoming a good friend. She just, it was really strange, it was like, one evening Peace Corps came and she just left, just like that, no goodbyes. We think it may have been like a policy issue or something came up or it was like, OK, automatic disqualification and or something. We have no idea, no one never found out. Um, and she just left and then. So like people were kind of slowly kind of going home there is that people are still going home. And it was really kind of heartbreaking because you get so close to some of these people in such a short amount of time. And then over the years, you know, after about a few months, you start to think, OK, we've kind of weeded out all the people who are going to go home. But even then, you know, I remember some people got into car accidents and went home for that. Um, another person got some legal issues for various reasons. They got sent home.

Someone else just wasn't happy. After about six months, he went home. So all in all, there is about fifteen people total.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:45:20] That did not get selected or early terminated. OK, do you think your training prepared you for your Peace Corps service? Was it useful?

WOLF: [00:45:30] Yeah, yeah, yeah. We had a model school training where we spent a month just practice teaching in a classroom. We were in a host family. That was very helpful.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:45:41] OK, so you did live with the host family?

WOLF: [00:45:43] For a little bit, not for the entire training.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:45:46] Ok, yeah. How long was your training, two and a half months? Because that's what mine was. So how long were you with a whole family?

WOLF: [00:45:57] Yeah. I was with them about three or four weeks. In Okahandja. Actually, no, the host training, the host family with a lot of skill training was in Grootfontein.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:46:16] I'm sorry I'm laughing listener. Wait, hold on.

WOLF: [00:46:19] These are Afrikaans names and words.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:46:20] Would you please spelled that?

WOLF: [00:46:25] It's G-R-O-O-T-F-O-N-T-E-I-N.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:46:35] OK. And this was the town where you lived and did your?

WOLF: [00:46:40] The model school training, and lived with a host family

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:46:40] Model school training.

WOLF: Practice teaching.

KAARE-LOPEZ: I think that's a good idea. OK, moving on to question seven. Thinking back when you entered into the your country, Namibia, what was your initial reaction to the country? If you want to describe more specifically the project, the Peace Corps staff, your impression of the local people, physical environment?

WOLF: [00:47:22] I remember when we landed my first impression of, I'll just say broadly, Africa, when we landed in Johannesburg and we immediately were put onto a bus and driven to this hotel that was guarded by security guards out front who had these big assault rifles.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:47:49] OK.

WOLF: [00:47:50] And we were not allowed to leave the compounds of the hotel.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:47:53] OK, and they made that clear?

WOLF: [00:47:56] And I just remember thinking, oh, wow, what is this place? It was kind of surreal in the hotel we were living was like a mini world in itself. There was an amusement park and their dining. It was kind of set up to be like one-stop shop. That was my first impression of arriving in Africa, southern Africa. And but then we spent couple days there and then we flew up to Windhoek.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:26] And yeah, OK, I had that capital city.

WOLF: [00:48:30] And I remember flying in Namibia is a very flat, very arid country. And so flying in, you just see miles and miles and miles of

kind of desert. Desert, yeah. And so we landed, we got on a bus and we were just driving in the early afternoon and I just remember looking out the window and thinking like how beautiful the country was.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:58] Was there vegetation in the desert? Like what kind.

WOLF: [00:49:01] Some. It's kind of like stark desert beauty that you see in like Arizona and New Mexico.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:49:09] See, I picture cactus or yuca, I mean in New Mexico.

WOLF: [00:49:13] Yeah, there's just a lot of scrub brush, that's kind of the main thing. A lot of big anthills or termite hills I guess. And yeah, I'd actually lived in New Mexico for my first year, for grade one in school. So kind of I kind of have this fondness for that kind of like landscape. So arriving in Namibia kind of reminded me of that. And when we finally arrived, Okahandja, I had fallen asleep and we were all super tired. We were traveling all day long and we get there and the training staff is gathered around outside the bus in front of the entrance to the training compound. And they're all just standing out there dancing and singing and clapping their hands and just welcoming us.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:07] What time?

WOLF: [00:50:08] It was like eight p.m., nine p.m. or so. So but, you know, we've been traveling all day long. We're super tired and kind of freaked out, you know, because we're in this country and we land and I don't know what to expect. I just remember that moment was really special. Just give me a good feeling.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:31] What was your impression of the local people?

WOLF: [00:50:34] Namibia, I guess, it being a desert country, I don't know, but like, people are a little bit more kind of blunt and kind of just have a little bit more of a brusque attitude. You know, just a little bit kind of an edge to people in a way.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:59] Uh, defensive. I mean, I know what the words mean, but tell me more about an edge to them?

WOLF: [00:51:06] Well, because it's kind of it's a harsh environment. It's a desert country. And so, it's kind of hard to live there. Lack of water. Just there's not a lot of water. It's really hot. There's not a lot of vegetation or vegetables. Then maybe it's partly kind of the Afrikaans influence as well. Like Afrikaner people are also kind of very blunt and have kind of a rough attitude in a way. All the Afrikaner people I met, they easily cuss and just kind of speak their mind and be very kind of blunt in that sense.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:51:59] And was Namibia like a Dutch colony?

WOLF: [00:52:04] Well, it was colonized by Germany.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:52:08] Oh yeah. I went because you said Afrikaans and I'm thinking of Holland.

WOLF: [00:52:15] Afrikaans has some history. The language itself is has its history and Dutch roots.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:52:19] Right. Yeah. So Namibia was a German colony.

WOLF: [00:52:24] And you know, the Germans are have that stereotype of them kind of hard edged as well. I'm mostly German in my ancestry so in a way maybe I connected there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:52:42] Ok, anything you want to add about the Peace Corps staff?

WOLF: [00:52:47] Just very friendly and very nice.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:52:49] And mostly Namibians as you told me earlier. And I assume your training was English. Moving on to question eight. This is a question about your assignment. So they have different things you can answer, like the specifics of your job, living conditions, typical day. We'll start, tell me more about your job assignment, because you ended up being science education.

WOLF: [00:53:23] My job assignment was to be a teacher at a secondary school and Kayengona Combined school in the Kayengona village up in the Kavango region.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:53:33] OK, so now I have to stop you. You've got to tell me how to spell.

WOLF: [00:53:37] Kayengona.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:53:41] Spell that please.

WOLF: [00:53:42] K-A-Y-E-N-G-O-N-A.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:53:48] And that is a town?

WOLF: [00:53:50] It's a village.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:53:51] OK. And so you lived in this village?

WOLF: [00:53:57] If you look on a map, it's about 10 or 15 kilometers east of Rundu, and that's the regional capital for the Kavango region. Rundu is spelled R-U-N-D-U.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:54:13] R-U-N-D-U. And that's a town?

WOLF: Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK.

WOLF: [00:54:15] It's a large town.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:54:19] Ok, this interview is very interesting. But also there's more words that I've had to spell for other interviews. So you're a teacher in a secondary school, but what was the name of the school?

WOLF: [00:54:33] Kayengona Combined.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:54:34] Oh yeah. You already said that.

WOLF: [00:54:36] Yeah. That's how the village Kayengona. The school is Kayengona Combined. Combined means they combine the primary with the secondary students. So primary is grades one through seven, six or whatever. And then secondary is grades eight to ten. And then right next to Kayengona Combined, there's a larger school that had grades 11 and 12.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:00] Oh, it's separate. What would they call that if you just had the last two years of high school?

WOLF: [00:55:06] Uh, senior secondary school, I think.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:09] Oh OK. Tell me about a typical day teaching.

WOLF: [00:55:17] The day started about six o'clock, is when the sun will start to rise. We had a staff meeting at six thirty AM. And then classes will start at seven.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:33] Really? I'm going to guess because of the heat, but you'll tell me.

WOLF: [00:55:35] Yeah, yeah, I think so. Because of the heat. We would start the day with the morning prayer and assembly.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:43] Was this a public school or like private?

WOLF: [00:55:47] Uh yeah. It's a public school.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:49] But you prayed.

WOLF: [00:55:52] Well, Namibia's primarily Christian.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:54] Ok, so I mean that's interesting because you don't pray in public schools here, right?

WOLF: [00:55:58] Yeah. Exactly. Here we wouldn't do that. In Namibia, we'd have a staff meeting at 6:30 and then the kind of the pledge of allegiance to the Namibian flag and the Namibian national anthem and then a prayer around say like 6:50, announcements and then break for classes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:56:25] Hmm. When did the school day end, what time?

WOLF: [00:56:29] School would end about 1:00 PM. And the reason is that so that students could go home for lunch and possibly also to just break for earlier in the day because it'll get hot.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:56:49] How hot would it be?

WOLF: [00:56:51] How hot? I mean, it's like Arizona, New Mexico, you know, it's pretty hot, like probably get up into the 100 degrees some days, Fahrenheit. And don't remember being too big of an issue, I never got like seriously sunburned or anything like that, but I mean, you wouldn't want to be out in early afternoon for too long.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:57:25] Do they have, like in Latin America, siestas? Do they have siesta time?

WOLF: [00:57:30] No, not really. It wasn't like a common thing. But after 1:00 PM when classes would break, I would definitely will go home and rest for a bit because classes from 7:00 to 1:00, there's no breaks. Well, there's one break, but in between transitions. You finished class, classes would be 40 minutes, and finished a class and immediately the next class started.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:57:57] In the same room or?

WOLF: Sometimes different rooms. And so, you know, you're going to lose some time with kids move around. But I just always thought it was so funny because there was no like built in transition time between classes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:58:10] Yeah. No passing period. What were your living conditions like?

WOLF: [00:58:18] I lived in a cinder block house that was provided by the government for teachers. So a lot of the schools in Namibia, there's housing structures next to the school for the teachers. OK. And so that's what I lived in.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:58:38] Did you have your own little house or more of a room?

WOLF: [00:58:43] It was, uh, I lived in a two bedroom house and I shared it with a Namibian teacher.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:58:47] Ok.

WOLF: [00:58:49] Veikko Kamu Kwanyama.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:58:52] I have no idea what you said to me, say that again.

WOLF: [00:58:56] That's the name of my housemate, Veikko Kamu Kwanyama.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:59:01] Ok, if I should ask you to spell that. Was he a teacher?

WOLF: [00:59:06] He was a math teacher.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:59:07] Math teacher. Well, I guess what the heck, I'll have you spell his name, OK?

WOLF: [00:59:14] He's a he's a great guy. Veikko, V-E-I-K-K-O. And then Kamu Kwanyama. K-A-M-U. Kwan, K-W-A-N. Yama, Y-A-M-A.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:59:36] Ok, so that was your housemate? Interesting. OK, very good. What'd you do for food?

WOLF: [00:59:47] I eat mostly pasta, and I would fry up some onions and tomatoes to add to the pasta, and we had just some dry seasoning that would add to it as well.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:02] Did you have like a kerosene stove? Did you have?

WOLF: [01:00:06] I had electricity at my house.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:09] 24 hours a day?

WOLF: [01:00:12] Yeah. Yeah, all the teachers would get stoves, refrigerators, and beds. It was pretty nice actually.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:18] That was all provided?

WOLF: [01:00:22] By the Ministry of Education.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:23] Ok. Bathroom.

WOLF: [01:00:27] We had a flushing toilet and a shower, but no hot water.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:31] Yeah, OK. Water, drinkable potable water?

WOLF: [01:00:35] Yeah, Namibia is amazing. It has a large resource of water in aquifers. So we'd have these boreholes drill down, tap into the aquifers. Clean drinking water straight from the tap.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:51] Amazing for being a Peace Corps volunteer. Yeah.

WOLF: [01:00:54] But we lived right next to the river and so people would still drink from the river and they get schistosomiasis and giardia, you know.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:01:00] Yeah. But did they have access to the water from the aquifer?

WOLF: [01:01:08] They could get water from the school. Sometimes there are public boreholes that people can get water from. But part of it was just an awareness thing, an education thing. You know, you just you don't see water borne illnesses. And so you think that water from the river is fine.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:01:25] Uh, yeah. Some of this you've answered already. Anything you want to add about your relations with people of the country?

WOLF: [01:01:38] My relations, so I could go into a lot about relationships with some of my students. Namibia, I guess I'll just say Namibia, I've grown very fond of Namibia.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:01:52] In fact, aren't you going there tomorrow?

WOLF: I'm going there tomorrow. Yes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK. I mean, I already knew that listener.

WOLF: [01:02:00] I got to know some of my students very well, even some kids in the village who weren't my students. There's one small boy, and they called them "small boys."

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:02:21] Was that insulting? Oh, that was OK.

WOLF: [01:02:23] Oh no. It's OK. It's a term.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:02:28] Stature wise or?

WOLF: [01:02:31] It's like a status. Right. So you could be the 20 years old. You used to be a small boy.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:02:38] Ok, yeah. Just digesting that.

WOLF: [01:02:40] Yeah, it's a seniority thing. So there's an age and older, you know, elder age level and it's very important, you know, in the culture. And so the youngest person in the group, even if they're in their 20s or, you know, physically an adult man, he could still be a small boy. And small boys are expected to do what the older person says. And so basically they can be ordered around. They can be told to go there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:03:13] Even if they're adults?

WOLF: [01:03:15] Yeah, it's an expectation.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:03:20] Ok, that's new to me. And it's OK to be a small boy?

WOLF: [01:03:28] Yeah, it's just part of the culture, I think, you know, small boys, it's a translation. So I'm not entirely I don't know what the name is for it in Rukwangali or Rumanyo, but it's a cultural thing.

You know, the youngest person is expected to defer to the older people.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:03:46] Ok, you already told me you taught in English in your leisure time. And you had friends with folks in your town. What language did you speak with them?

WOLF: [01:04:01] With folks in the town in my leisure time, I was speaking English. A lot of the people wanted to practice their English with me. So that, I mentioned earlier that I was very enthusiastic about language at the beginning, but it kind of, I'm a person of practicality. And so once I realized it wasn't essential to learn the language, my motivation kind of waned. I still practiced because I wanted to just, you know, it's fun to learn the language to it shows respect to people.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:04:44] That you're interested.

WOLF: [01:04:47] That I'm trying to learn who they are and their culture. And so I tried to learn as much as I could. But I remember Peace Corps gave us these language tests and I just did abysmal.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:05:00] You stop studying?

WOLF: [01:05:01] Yeah, I stopped studying, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:05:04] What was your leisure time like?

WOLF: [01:05:07] In my leisure time when I was not teaching, at the very beginning, I spent a lot of time editing video actually.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:05:20] Ok, and you said you had electricity all the time.

WOLF: [01:05:21] So I brought my video camera and my laptop.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:05:24] This is a different experience than mine back in the late '70s.

WOLF: [01:05:34] I didn't know if I know I was going to have electricity so it was a little bit of a gamble. But I thought, you know what, even if I only have access to electricity, one day a week is still going to be worth it to be able to document what I'm experiencing and then edit that video with those photos and to be able to show people. And so yeah, I brought my laptop, I brought my camera, and then I made the first three first months in country during training, I documented everything with my video camera.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:06:05] Were the people OK with you filming them, did you ask permission?

WOLF: [01:06:10] It was mostly the other Peace Corps volunteers, so it was mostly the training that I was documenting. And so then sometimes the training would involve people from the community or students and you know, everyone else had cameras too. So it wasn't really an issue like people didn't seem to mind. Um, but then the first few months aside, when I started teaching, I remember I just felt had a really hard time kind of integrating into the community. So after school, I'll go straight home and close my door and just stay inside for a long time, for hours on end.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:06:49] What about your roommate?

WOLF: [01:06:50] He'd do something. He'd be at the school sometimes for after school, kind of extra.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:06:58] Did you hang out with him?

WOLF: [01:07:00] Not really. He's younger than me. In his early twenties, I was like 26, 27 at the time.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:07:06] When you went to the Peace Corps.

WOLF: [01:07:08] Yeah, and so I kind of had this feeling like he's a little bit of a playboy. And so it was hard for me to really connect with him at first. So I kind of kept to myself a lot at the beginning and spend a lot of time, uh, just when I wasn't filming things with my camera and editing that material on my computer. I spent a lot of time doing this my first three months on site because I was actually putting together a video of our training.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:07:40] Did they did Peace Corps ask you to do that?

WOLF: [01:07:44] This is just something for fun. It was just like a friends thing or something. And so I put together this 60 minute video of our training and just all the first experiences that we had. And to this day, it's one of my most favorite things to watch when I get together with my Peace Corps friends.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:03] Yeah. Did you share it with the Peace Corps staff? I mean, do they have access to it?

WOLF: [01:08:08] It's online. It's on YouTube. And I called it Omweyapo.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:16] OK, let's stop right there listener. So Cedar has made a YouTube of his Peace Corps training and it is called once again?

WOLF: Omweyapo.

KAARE-LOPEZ: And you'll spell it?

WOLF: [01:08:31] O-M-W-E-Y-A-P-O.

KAARE-LOPEZ: And what does that mean?

WOLF: Means it's a phrase that is used to mean when new people come to live with you and work with you. And you're welcoming them.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:47] Oh, welcoming new people.

WOLF: [01:08:48] Yeah, that's what it was. You know, we were Peace Corps volunteers arriving in country. And so during training, I showed a quick 20 minute version of the video just for like a talent show at the end of training. And then after going to site, I spent the first three months taking all of my footage and putting it together to make this 60 minute, much longer, more detailed version. And the entire time I just knew, like, this is going to be so great. It's going to be so much fun. And everyone, all the other Peace Corps volunteers are going to love seeing this.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Did they?

WOLF: Yeah, everyone loved it. I mean, 10 years later, we still like, you know, go back and watch it.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:09:34] And you enjoy you love that stuff, the editing, shooting, creating, editing?

WOLF: [01:09:38] Well I what I love is knowing that the effect it's going to create in other people, the actual editing process is very tedious. But what drove me through and got me so excited was I could imagine the final outcome. And I just knew that one of my friends would be able to watch this. They would all just love it so much. So because and so in a way it was like a gift to all the others.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:10:06] Other that's special, it really is.

WOLF: [01:10:12] But, you know, after a while, you know, I finally came out of my room and started hanging out with students and people.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:10:17] Yeah, OK. And that's the end of, that's another suggestion for the eight question, how life and work changed over the months. So you got out of the room. And what did you do?

WOLF: [01:10:30] After about six months, let's see, it took me a while, but I guess the turning point was, I remember I had this office on the school grounds where because for the science we kept all the science equipment. Yeah, and it's just like a storage room. But I use it as an office just hanging out there because I could lock the door and keep to myself.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:11:01] I just kind of I won't say anything.

WOLF: No, no, no.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Because you say you're quiet and shy and then you locked yourself in your room, but yet you welcomed and you were frothing at the bit. I'm saying that you were so eager to go and experience this totally unknown culture. It seems like it doesn't, a contradiction.

WOLF: [01:11:24] Yes. Yeah, it's hard for me to understand it as well, but it's this ongoing contradiction I've always seen in my life where there's a part of me that just likes to have a very quiet life, keep to myself and very little stress, no social involvement. And this other side of me that is just like gung ho, go get out and go out into the world and try the most.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:11:50] You're a Peace Corps recruiter.

WOLF: [01:11:52] Yeah. I mean, if you if you look at my parents, you can understand my mom. She's got that fire inside. She'll go out and try the craziest thing she does. Yes, she does it. My dad, he is extremely passive and just keeps to himself, lives up in the mountains and doesn't really hang out with people that much.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:12:12] Oh, they're divorced?

WOLF: They're divorced, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: This is a stereotype. But, you know, I would have kind of guessed maybe your dad was the gung ho person, but it's your mom.

WOLF: [01:12:24] No, that's my mom. All the way, 100 percent.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:12:28] Is your dad still living in the mountains, I mean, in Washington?

WOLF: [01:12:31] Here in Colorado, that's why I moved back here.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:12:36] Because your dad's here. And where is your mom?

WOLF: [01:12:38] She lives in Mexico. She's half Mexican.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:12:44] Question nine. End of the first year. OK, you can go back so it would be 2007 sometime. Anything you want to answer about notable events, reflections after one year, joys and woes, etc.

WOLF: [01:13:03] So actually this completes what I was saying before is that after about a year, and it really did take me this long, there was a turning point where in my service where I really started to kind of open up and connect with people in my community. And I was hanging out in my office, the shed for all the science equipment, slash my office. And this small boy, you know, he was really small actually, he was a third grade student, came and knocked on my door and I opened up and he had a bowl of food. And he asked me, he said, sir. They'd always say sir. [speaks local language] And it means, are you hungry? And he wanted to share his food with me.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:14:01] That's nice, that's special.

WOLF: [01:14:03] Yeah. And I let him in and he sat down next to me and we shared a meal and then he came back the next day with some more food and the next day.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:14:14] He wasn't your student?

WOLF: [01:14:15] He wasn't my student. He was in grade three. I was teaching grades 8, 9, and 10.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:14:18] Yeah, I didn't ask you that. OK, continue.

WOLF: [01:14:22] Yeah. And over time I got to know him. He didn't actually speak English very well, so he couldn't really communicate very well because I didn't speak his language either. But we just started to share this mutual bond of connection and his name is Matjayi.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:14:45] And spelled that please.

WOLF: [01:14:46] M-A-T-J-A-Y-I. I got to know him pretty well over the second year and it turns out that he's an orphan. I found out that both his parents had been killed.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:15:06] Who did he live with?

WOLF: [01:15:07] And he lived with his extended family, their homesteaded was nearby me. And I actually knew his older, um, cousins. They were in some of my classes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:15:19] Oh. Because I was wondering, how did he know you?

WOLF: [01:15:22] Right. His older cousins were in my classes and I got I became friends with them. I was friends with them initially. But eventually I became kind of closer friends with Matjayi. And it was just it's hard to describe because we can't really communicate. But there was a connection. And so he kept coming around. We kept

hanging out and it was just a friendship. And I think that in some way we were kind of fulfilling different needs for each other. I missed my friends and family back home, which included about ten nieces and nephews, which I had always been, you know, the uncle to them. So I really missed them. And so he kind of filled that role for me of having a younger person to kind of be a role model to. And then to me, you know, I guess I imagine in some way I filled that space of his missing parents.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:16:24] Yeah, well, that's a special story.

WOLF: [01:16:28] Yeah, and that that so my connection with him really helped to get me out to the community because he would invite me over to his home safe food and to meet his family. And then we'd go walk down by the river, so we just through our relationship, I could then get out into the community and walk around and meet people. And then people started to make comments like, oh, Matjayi, he's Cedar's small boy, he's Cedar's son, you know, things like that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:16:59] Cedar's small boy, which was OK. You've already told me that. He's Cedar's small boy, aww. OK, listener, I'm jumping way ahead. This is not on the interview questions. Will you be seeing him on this trip? You still keep in touch with him?

WOLF: [01:17:18] Actually I went back last year, it was my first time going back to Namibia in about eight years, nine years. And I had no idea if I was going to meet him. When I left Namibia, one of the final moments that I had was saying goodbye to Matjayi. And I remember we hugged each other and he told me that he doesn't know if anyone would ever love him the way that I loved him.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:17:52] Oh, you're like a big brother or something to him, or maybe his daddy.

WOLF: [01:17:56] Yeah. He was he was really attached. It's a long story but I actually stayed in Namibia for a third year and I moved into Rundu town and he would come and just kind of show up at the door, looking for me.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:18:14] Is he like a senior in high school maybe?

WOLF: [01:18:17] Now he's a young man.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:18:22] Was he a high school student?

WOLF: [01:18:25] Uh yeah, he'd be like late teens and early 20s, I think he's still in school now. Oh, but I went back in December last year. I had no communication with Matjayi ever since that final day when I left back in 2009. Oh, I didn't know if he's still in Rundu, Kanbango, or, you know, still alive. I had no clue. Nothing, no connection. And just dates that be. I went back last year and somebody saw me. They said, sir, do you want to see Matjayi? Just some random person, you know, and they had his number. They connected me. I connected with Matjayi and we went out and we had a reunion. And there's like two days where I finally connected with him and we only hang out.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:19:23] Does he still live with that extended family?

WOLF: [01:19:30] Yeah. We went and visited the homestead, saw all the family and that was really great. They all remembered me, we had a nice little moment but everyone just getting excited and dancing around.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:19:45] That's special. This is off-track, but have you ever thought about being a Big Brother?

WOLF: [01:19:53] Yeah. In some ways I, you know, I kind of am already. Like I said, I've got so many nieces and nephews that I feel like I have my hands full being a mentor to all of them.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:20:06] It just because that reminds me of that. My husband and I were friends with Denver kids for years. It's like a mentoring program. Anyway, lovely story. Thank you for sharing that. Anything else you might want to add? Health problems? Where did you go on vacation? Did you go any travel?

WOLF: [01:20:31] I never had any major health problems. I kept pretty thin, pretty healthy for most of my Peace Corps service. I did go on some really interesting holidays. My girlfriend at the time, I traveled up to Malawi one time over Christmas break and we passed through Zambia and I ran into a friend of mine from college who had joined the Peace Corps after me and then gone to Zambia.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:21:02] Oh, really? You didn't know that he or she was in Zambia?

WOLF: [01:21:05] Yeah, she came afterward. And then I just I forget how I found out, but we connected and then we met up with her and then we all together we traveled up from Zambia and then up into Malawi and had a really good time. It had a little bit of a crazy turn and that one of the people in our group got really sick. And there's a swimming accident actually that happened too. And anyway, we ended up spending Christmas at this Peace Corps house after a friend just got out of hospital. She came down, we think, malaria or some form of it. That was a crazy, intense trip, just traveling across country, you know, Namibia to Zambia, to Malawi through all forms of transportation.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:21:53] Would it be by bus?

WOLF: [01:21:55] Yeah, we took bus, taxis, cars breaking down, you know, hitchhiking, you know, all just kinds of ridiculousness.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:22:08] You know, to really ask about health problems in general. But because I'm a retired nurse, what were some of the health problems that people might succumb to in Namibia or in your area?

WOLF: [01:22:24] There was up in the northern part of Namibia in the Kavango region, there's the Okavango River, which passes across the border, maybe Angola. And people would swim in the river. There's a lot of, you know, defecation on the banks. And so when the rains come and the river banks would flood over, then, of course, all that defecation gets in the water. And so if you walk down there barefoot, you'll get schistosomiasis, you know, critters, they'll crawl into your feet.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:22:59] I could guess, but do you know how to spell it?

WOLF: [01:23:01] Schistosomiasis, S-C-H-I-S-T-O-S-O-M-I-A-S-I-S. We called it schisto for short. S-H-I-S-T-O, Shisto. Somiasis, S-O-M-I-A-S-I-S. I won the spelling bee in third grade you know.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:23:28] Yeah. OK, I didn't know that but thanks for telling me. And what was the name of the river?

WOLF: Okavango River.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Spell that again.

WOLF: [01:23:37] O-K-A-V-A.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:23:40] Wait. I had a senior moment. Sorry.

WOLF: [01:23:42] O-K-A-V-A-N-G-O. Oh that's really interesting because the region is called the Kavango region, but then the dominant tribe in Namibia is the Oshiwambo and they put Os in front of everything. So, the river is actually called Okavango. I don't know why, but it's interesting. You know, the Kavango region has the Okavango River.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:24:08] Besides schistosomiasis, I would guess giardia or just things like that.

WOLF: [01:24:16] Malaria. A good friend of mine got malaria, Peace Corps volunteer.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:24:23] Any other health conditions?

WOLF: [01:24:27] Well, for the people, HIV AIDS was a big problem.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:24:30] Yes, I'm not glad that it's there. I'm glad you said that. You know what that rate would be?

WOLF: Twenty percent.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Of the population were HIV positive?

WOLF: [01:24:41] It's a pretty high rate for the region, for southern Africa in general.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:24:47] OK. Maybe we'll move on to question ten. We're on page two of the interview. End of tour. Oh, before we get to that, anything you might want to add before we get to end of tour? Anything I might not have asked?

WOLF: [01:25:10] Um, I don't think so. Yeah, I see some of these other questions will cover what I want to.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:25:14] OK. So then, end of tour question. What was your sense of achievement or failure, pluses and minuses, in your relations or with the work. Anything like that, regrets, satisfactions?

WOLF: [01:25:32] Yeah, see, the first year I remember I spent a lot of time outside Nahudj working on other Peace Corps projects like leadership camps, traveling a lot. And this actually came up with my principal. She says she's a little bit concerned about spending so much time away from the community.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:25:55] Oh, did Peace Corps ask you to do these projects or you discovered them?

WOLF: [01:26:01] And it's just like that, you know, Peace Corps committees will form, you know, there's like Camp GLOW, there's the diversity tour. There's different things where, you know, you can volunteer to get involved in them. And that's what I did. And but it was taking me out of the village a lot.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:26:17] But you are teaching I'm guessing. You did show up for class.

WOLF: [01:26:20] So I would, you know, leave lesson plans for people to do. Hopefully they would do them.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:26:27] Oh, you weren't even going to class sometimes. That's my question.

WOLF: [01:26:32] Well this is part of the, you know, sense of achievement slash failures. The first year I felt like I was away from my community and neglecting them. So then my second year, I decided I wanted to change things. And so I focused a lot more on my teaching, on my class, on staying in the village. And people noticed and the other Peace Corps volunteers noticed too.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:26:59] Oh, were you the only volunteer in town? I've been meaning to ask you.

WOLF: [01:27:05] Yes. There had been a volunteer there before me. And then one came after me. So I wasn't the first or the last. And so then that second year, I wouldn't say that I made any astounding accomplishments in terms of my student passing rate or anything like that, at least nothing that I really noticed or tracked. But in terms of just a general sense of feeling like I was connected with my community, it really changed their second year.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:27:37] Mainly because of your principal maybe saying something to you?

WOLF: [01:27:40] Yeah, well, she voiced the concern and also I just felt not really connected to my community. And so then that second year, just really, you know, spending a lot more time in the village, I got to know, I just felt a better relationship with everyone, and one of which was my roommate, Veikko. I mentioned before I felt like he was kind of a playboy at the beginning. I didn't really have a strong relationship with him, you know, I wouldn't to really try to connect with him that first year. The second year, by the time I left, we were calling each other brother. We because we just kind of grown to know each other much more. And so, I'd say my biggest accomplishments as a Peace Corps volunteer weren't really the results that I had attained in my teaching outcomes, but they were in the connections and the relationships I made with the students and the other teachers. And when I say probably more so, but my students, because, you know, teaching is such an interesting thing, you don't see the results of your work right away.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:29:00] Yes. I have been married to a teacher.

WOLF: [01:29:02] Yeah. It's only years later when a student comes back and says, hey, you know what, you really made a difference in my

life. And I've done that to teachers in my past. And I've gone back and told them that they really mattered to me. And that's happened to me also. I had students, you know, ten years after Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:29:25] Ok, anything else with that before we go to 11?

WOLF: [01:29:29] Um, that was the main thing. I did a lot of multimedia work, which is really fun. I mean, I did some kind of Peace Corps documentaries where I traveled around the country and I interviewed volunteers and turn that into.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:29:44] That's what we're kind of doing now. I see you in a different way. But for the listener, this interview is going to be forwarded to the JFK Library.

WOLF: [01:29:53] But yeah, I was interviewing volunteers way back in 2006, 2007 for a video project and I used that. I put that together as a kind of a training video for Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:30:07] Let me interrupt you of sorts. Did you choose to do it or the Peace Corps asked you?

WOLF: Yeah, I chose to do it.

KAARE-LOPEZ: And did they asked you to do any of these projects?

WOLF: [01:30:15] No, no. So when I arrived in country and I made that video of my training, it was just kind of a fun thing to do. I showed it to everyone. Another volunteer named Jason Sears, he saw that video and he saw that this guy's got skills. And he recruited me to work on a video project that he was doing.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:30:35] Oh, OK.

WOLF: [01:30:36] And that was, which was this volunteer training video. And so I teamed up with him. And then we worked together to kind of travel around the country interviewing volunteers and Peace Corps staff and then put all that together into this hour, hour and a half long video about Peace Corps life in the Namibia and then the Peace Corps in Namibia would use that to show to training groups.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:31:02] So it's been utilized. Good for you.

WOLF: [01:31:05] Yeah, I did following videos and I did after that. I applied for a grant to travel around the country and interview volunteers living with families and interviewing the volunteers and then some family members about what life was like in that situation.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:31:21] Good. And if I may say then, 11 years later, you're deciding to be part of the Peace Corps Oral History Project. OK, good. I'm going on to question eleven. We're coming to a close. How would you evaluate your service in light of the three goals of the Peace Corps? And you have the questions too. We've touched on this, to provide technical assistance were requested. You've given me some examples.

WOLF: [01:31:51] Well, I was a teacher, you know.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:31:55] So did you teach your students technology or no?

WOLF: [01:31:58] Well I taught them physical science and I tried to make it fun and interesting and engaging. And, you know, these are kids who their day to day life is working out in the field, you know, plowing fields for, you know, for millet. And so, you know, you can imagine how learning about the structure of an atom is not really relevant. So I tried to make class really interesting and engaging just the way that I taught, I mean, a fun teacher. And so in that sense I guess I try to get them excited about learning. And so in terms of, you know, meeting the first goal of the Peace Corps,

which is training people, educating people, I guess, in my situation, um, no, I accomplished that to the average degree, I must say. I wouldn't feel like tremendous outcomes there. But the second and third goals, I feel like I've really gone above beyond the second goal, just sharing who I am, my culture. Definitely did that during my Peace Corps service, but even in years afterwards. Just recently, I had a friend of mine, a former student of mine, come and visit the United States from Namibia.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:33:21] Did he stay here or?

WOLF: [01:33:22] He stayed with me for three weeks.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:33:25] Oh, good. How was that?

WOLF: [01:33:27] It was amazing. Wonderful. Yeah, it's a dream of mine to bring him here and also dream of his, you know. And he was one of my students from my science class, grade nine. His name is Pontianus Mukishi. And so I was able to share with him my culture. And then third goal, I've been talking about my Peace Corps service for ten years.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:33:55] And you're a recruiter.

WOLF: [01:33:57] Yeah. And it's part of my life. And I wholeheartedly believe in the importance of people traveling the world and learning about other cultures and other people opening themselves up to these experiences. I feel that it changes people for the better, um, just by putting yourself in these situations where you have this visceral experience and just by being in the presence of somebody else who is of a different culture and different country, I feel like that changes people for the better.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:34:32] Yeah. You know, question 12, you've answered this, all about your contact with people from the country. You know, you're

going back tomorrow. You're a Peace Corps recruiter. You've got one and a half more years, you told me at some point. You're involved with the third goal activities. Anything you might want to add that's not specified in that question?

WOLF: [01:35:00] Let's see. This is question 12. Yeah, I would say I haven't really talked about Ponty a whole lot, so let me just.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:35:11] Ok, and I might have missed something here.

WOLF: [01:35:13] I was talking about Matjayi earlier.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:35:14] Yeah. And Ponty, is he the young man that came to you recently? OK, hold on just a minute. As you talk about how you spell his name, please.

WOLF: [01:35:22] Pontianus, P-O-N-T-I-A-N-U-S.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:35:28] That's his first name.

WOLF: [01:35:29] It's his first name. He goes by Ponty.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:35:31] And his last name?

WOLF: [01:35:32] Mukishi. M-U-K-I-S-H-I.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:35:38] And he was a former student.

WOLF: [01:35:40] He's in my grade class.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:35:41] OK. What would you like to share with us about Ponty?

WOLF: [01:35:47] I could talk about him forever. Ponty, he's a special person. I knew this right away when I first met him. It's hard to put my finger on it in words, but sometimes you just know something

about somebody you can, you know you can trust them. You know they have integrity. And I did tell that about him. I can tell that he's a good person inside. In Namibia we had Camp GLOW.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:36:21] I know a little bit. We had a Peace Corps meeting, one of our bi-monthly meetings. We had talked about it.

WOLF: [01:36:28] So GLOW is Girls Leading Our World and we changed it to Girls and Guys Leading Our World. And so Ponty applied. He got accepted to go, actually taking out one of my, Matjayi, one of my other students, Matjayi's older cousin and he applied. He got accepted, but then he got thrown in jail and kind of had a falling out. And so Ponty filled in his place. So we went and did this leadership camp and that's how I really got to know Ponty much better through that experience. And so then, you know, Ponty and I just started to develop a friendship, relationship. I wasn't, like, super close with him for a while. But I guess towards the end of my service, I just started to see a lot of potential in him. And I wanted to help him out if I could. I felt like I felt like if I invested in this guy, he's going to make the most of it. And so when I left Namibia, there's another volunteer who, I told her, can you help? I'm going to give you some money. Can you help pay for his school fees so he can get into senior secondary school?

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:37:44] Could I interrupt you, was school free?

WOLF: [01:37:47] All the students had to pay for school.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:37:51] Even grade one?

WOLF: [01:37:52] Uh, I don't know about the primary schools.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:37:56] But later on, it's a public school but they had to pay fees.

WOLF: [01:38:02] They had to pay school fees and they had to pay for exams. So it's very challenging.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:38:08] Was it expensive or was it a reasonable price for them?

WOLF: [01:38:12] It was expensive for them. In U.S. dollars, you know, ten, fifteen dollars, you know, it's not a whole lot. But when you don't have a steady income and you live in a subsistence farming.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:38:24] Yes.

WOLF: [01:38:24] OK, so I told my friend to help if she would help pay for Ponty's school fees, I'll transfer money to her and then she could transfer money to Ponty. And so that's how I kind of stay connected with him. I helped him get into the grade 11, grade 12, and then he was finally able to graduate from secondary school.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:38:45] Yeah, that you had a word for it because your school went to the tenth grade. What was the name for grade 11 and 12?

WOLF: [01:38:51] Senior secondary.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:38:53] Senior secondary. OK, continue.

WOLF: [01:38:57] But that was kind of the end of it. You know, this was like 2009, '10. I just, you know, didn't really hear a whole lot from Ponty afterwards. Every now and then maybe I'd see something on Facebook. You know, I started getting on Facebook at that time, but it wasn't until 2012. I was in graduate school in Colorado at Boulder, and I was just working on my computer and I get this little notification pop up and I look and I'm like, who is this? And it turns out it's a Google video chat request from Ponty.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:39:37] Ok, OK.

WOLF: [01:39:39] And when I left Namibia, I didn't even know that he knew how to use a computer, but.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:39:47] Oh and so they had no computers in school at that time.

WOLF: [01:39:49] But I had given to a bunch of my students photos of myself with my email written on the back. And I said if you guys ever learn how to use email contact me. And so he did that and he found me, he tracked me down and we had a really great moment of connecting there. And then following months, found out that he had a baby daughter and he actually named his daughter after my girlfriend when I was in the Peace Corps. And then we just started stand in touch. And then I, he started to tell me about this idea that he had where he started getting involved in this kind of business training, business consultation. And so I was really excited. I was like, well, Ponty, you're moving up. You're doing great. And he told me, like, you know, I'm getting kind of tired of this working for this company. They're working me too hard and not paying enough. I want to start my own project. Oh, what do you want to do so I can help? And he said, yeah, you know, I can come on board. And I started we were just talking about this idea and I just put together a simple website for him and he wanted to call it the Institute of Accounting and Economic Development. IAED. And so I thought was great is like, OK, let's just, you know, pursue this idea and see what happens. This is kind of fun. And then this very kind of out of the blue opportunity came along where I was offered this chance to go to graduate school for this new program at Regis University.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:41:39] Ok, in what field?

WOLF: [01:41:42] Master's of Development Practice. Oh, and I thought, all right, well, I'm going to try this out and see where it goes and start to get involved in that. And then it's a practitioner's degree. So it's focused on development work. Not so much theory, but practical work. And so then we have to do all these research projects. And I

decided, well, I'm going to take Ponty's project here and use that as my focus. And so over the past year and a half now, I've been focusing on my development practice, research on this project that Ponty and I are now working on. And then the program actually became a Peace Corps Coverdale Fellows program. So now I'm a Peace Corps Coverdale Fellows student studying this development project with a former student of mine in Namibia. So it's really cool. I mean, I just love that it's all just kind of coming full circle. And we're focusing on business training and computer development, or computer training and business development, sorry.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:42:53] Who is his target?

WOLF: [01:42:55] Right now we're focusing on a secondary school in the Comango region. He partnered up and he found a principal who wanted to try this training program out with us. And at first, we started out with just teaching entrepreneurs basic money management skills and how to run their own business. And now we've been kind of expanding into teaching computer training classes to students about schools. And commanders still don't have computers and students don't know how to use a computer. So we're focusing on that right now. And as students will pay a small fee to take, you know, a three month course. And so, yeah, I went down last year in December to reconnect with Ponty for the first time, seeing each other in eight, nine years. I brought down a bunch of computers. We, um, I delivered them to Ponty. We kind of set up this Institute of Accounting and Economic Development program. And then, yeah, to eight, nine months later, I was able to return the favor and bring Ponty to the United States.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:44:02] Ok, did you tell me which more what you did with them? I mean, as far as did you provide opportunities for them to go to schools or I'm just making up things or is it look at Apple computers. I mean, I just curious what he got to do.

WOLF: [01:44:19] Well, initially, I just helped pay his school fees so he can get to grade 11 and 12.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:44:26] But when he got here?

WOLF: [01:44:31] Oh, when he got here. This was in October. And so when he when Ponty came, well the whole reason why I wanted to get Ponty to come to the United States was just for the simple act of him being here and seeing what it is. And so then it would help to maybe just dispel any myths that he might have or, you know, just to add some more reality to this kind of mythical idea of what the United States is to so many people in the media. Well, they just see what's on TV and so I want to I want to show him, uh, you know, what my life is like. And so that was the main reason I you know, of course, once he got here and once he started preparing plans, he found many opportunities to promote the work that he's doing. And all the people we presented to really loved this idea and they want to support him and help now.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:45:25] So could it be a Peace Corps partnership?

WOLF: [01:45:28] Uh, could be, but we need to have a Peace Corps volunteer currently serving. And we've explored that a little bit, but haven't had too much luck yet. But ultimately, what I want to do is set up an official non-profit entity in the States that can support the work he's doing in Namibia. He's registered as an official business in Namibia. So he's got that already taken care of, and then I want to support as much as I can from here in the States. And ultimately we can turn this into, I mean, if I'm being really ambitious, this could be my future job, future career.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:46:08] Helping with development.

WOLF: [01:46:10] Yeah. Turning into a more well-established kind of non-profit organization. Right now we're at the very initial beginning

stages. But you know, I feel like we have the foundation of the seeds for something like.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:46:23] Wow, that's a great story, sincerely. I think so. Wow, what can I say? I know you've got to get ready for your trip tomorrow to Africa. Well, I'll just word it this way. Number question thirteen. You've shared a lot of information, personal, your Peace Corps experience, et cetera. Thank you. Thank you for sharing. Anything else, anything else you might want to add about how the Peace Corps has affected you? In your view as a person, career plans, you just sort of mentioned that are you still in that program at Regis? You are still a graduate student at Regis now with this development practice. Sounds interesting. OK, anything else you might want to add or something that I didn't touch on?

WOLF: [01:47:23] You know, I never imagined that I would do the Peace Corps when I was younger, like, you know, high school, early 20s, I never thought of this.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:47:37] So you were like mid 20s when you went?

WOLF: [01:47:39] I was 26. And I just I would say that for the majority of my early life and into my early 20s, I felt kind of lost. I was searching for something, I was searching for meaning, searching for just some direction. And I couldn't really put my thumb on, you know, what would be the right path for me. And I guess like what the Peace Corps has given me, it's been kind of like a compass in my life, a moral compass, if you will.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:48:16] A moral compass.

WOLF: [01:48:18] It's served me on many different levels. It's given me something to invest myself and to commit myself to a cause, to commit myself to, which I think is such a powerful idea. If you can find it, if you can find an idea that you believe in, that can be such a

motivating force in your life. And so this has given me an idea to commend myself and, uh, commit myself to and to believe it. And it's not to say that I'm gung ho about the Peace Corps itself. It's more about what the Peace Corps is trying to move towards and trying to represent. It's very idealistic. You know, we're trying to create a more unified and harmonious world, to learning about each other and understanding each other's cultures. And that's something that I wholeheartedly embrace. And I always tell people, um, you know, yes, you can do the Peace Corps, but what I care about most is that you open yourself up to traveling, to other people and other cultures, and you can do that through traveling. And the Peace Corps gives you a gateway to do that. And so, you know, for me, it's just really helped me to kind of find direction in my life. It's become that in a very real way by working for the organization. But I have to think beyond a Peace Corps. I'm not going to be a recruiter forever.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:49:50] You can't, you're limited to five years I believe.

WOLF: [01:49:54] And so I only have a year and a half left and I got to figure out, OK, what am I going to do? Well, I know I want to work in development work. I want to be involved in development work to some degree for the rest of my life. I just know that. I know that I love multimedia work. And Peace Corps gave me an opportunity to explore that. And to a great degree, which I don't know if I would have had otherwise or had the courage to pursue that as much as I did.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:50:22] Are you interested in teaching?

WOLF: [01:50:24] Not really.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:50:25] OK, the reason I asked is because you were a teacher.

WOLF: [01:50:29] I was, but it was extremely difficult for me. Yeah, I do really great in one-on-one situations, yeah. I can focus directly on one person.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:50:39] But the whole class is different.

WOLF: [01:50:41] A group is really hard on me. It drains me. And that's why after I get done with a day of teaching, I'll go home and close the door, recoup, get my energy back. And then plus being a teacher you have to be the disciplinarian. I'm not a disciplinarian. I like to be the friend. So when I'm one-on-one, I can do really well, so if anything, I would be like a counselor maybe.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:51:07] Yeah, OK, but not the classroom teacher, that's fine.

WOLF: [01:51:11] That's why I'm not the classroom teacher. I love the power of a story. And so what Peace Corps has given me is, power story. It's given me many stories to tell. It's shown me how powerful connecting with other people can be and opening up yourself to other people can be. And just in recruiting so many people over so many years, it's been really encouraging on the one hand, because I see how many people want to make a difference in the world.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:51:44] Really, still? I wonder about that.

WOLF: [01:51:49] Well, you know, I interact with people reaching out to me about this every single day, so I have a little bit of a skewed perspective. Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:51:59] And just for the record, the interviewer is a baby boomer, so I wonder if young millennials are still interested. That was not part of the interview question, but I just thought I'd throw it in. And I really do wonder, do people really care about development or what's going well? Not that I don't think people do.

WOLF: [01:52:21] It's not so much that they want to, like, care about development. It's that what I've seen as like an underlying current theme is that people want to have meaning and purpose. They want to do something that they want to do work that means something. And a lot of times people, you know, that may be in a job that just isn't very fulfilling, doesn't feel like they're doing anything that matters. And that's kind of what keeps coming up over and over again. Meaning, yes, they want to do something that makes a difference. And that's why I first sought out the Peace Corps. When I started searching around my senior year in college, I was looking for something that would give me more meaning in my life. And I wasn't getting that from my studies and science. And then, you know, I stumbled across the Peace Corps. But that initial impulse was to try and find something, some kind of work that I could do that mattered.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:53:20] And you found it.

WOLF: [01:53:23] And I found it.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:53:24] It's a process, isn't it? Yeah. Thank you so much, Cedar. I can't think of anything else to ask you. You've shared oodles. I mean, it's been very interesting. And by the way, listener, Cedar is contemplating or will be maybe the resource person or what's the official title for this, coordinator for the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Oral History Project. So I was happy to interview Cedar.

WOLF: [01:53:51] And if anything and I guess I can close out with this. I want to give back to the Peace Corps community in some way. I wanted to leave my mark, however I can on this organization, this community, this idea that has influenced and changed my life in so many great lives. And so hopefully through my involvement with something like this through this oral history project, maybe that can be a way for me to do that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:54:22] Yeah, good. Thank you so much. And so are we closing the interview now, Cedar?

WOLF: Yeah, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: OK, I guess we can turn off the recorder.

WOLF: Or wait for round two!

KAARE-LOPEZ: I don't have any more questions right now. OK, that was Cedar Wolf. C-E-D-A-R W-O-L-F. OK, thank you.

WOLF: Thank you.

KAARE-LOPEZ: Can you help? And then for me. Do I just turn that off?

[END OF INTERVIEW]