

Barbara Ann Sterling Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Barbara Ann Sterling served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras from January 1979 to December 1980 in a rural pilot school program.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Barbara Ann Sterling

July 15, 2018
Golden, Colorado

By Barbara Kaare-Lopez

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

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:00:06] Okay. Now, we tested the new Zoom recorder and it's working well. So we're going to start the interview, okay? And Barb, I know, Barbara Ann. Should I call you Barbara Ann or should I call you Barbara?

STERLING: [00:00:25] Or just Barb is fine.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:00:26] Okay, Barb. And by the way, this interview is being done by Barbara Kaare K-A-A-R-E hyphen Lopez, okay, and I'm interviewing Barbara Sterling today, July 15th, 2018. So we're going to be talking about, we have this outline that we may not follow exactly, but we'll start by letting Barb, not me, the other Barb, describe her family, present family, work, what she wants to tell us, her current residence, interests. This is part one, first part of the first question. Okay, Barb?

STERLING: [00:01:07] Okay, I'm ready. I'm Barb Sterling. I work for the U.S. federal government. I'm a federal government employee. I work for the Bureau of Land Management, which is in the Department of Interior. I'm remotely located in Denver, and I work for the Washington office. I'm a natural resource specialist, primarily in the oil and gas realm, but also I work in solid minerals and lands as well. My current family, uh, my extended family lives here close by on the front range of Colorado. I currently live in Golden, Colorado. I moved here six years ago from Craig, Colorado, which is where my children all grew up. I worked for the BLM out in Craig, Colorado, previously before moving here to Golden. I have three children that I'm extremely proud of. And.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:02:15] Could you tell us the names of your children?

STERLING: [00:02:17] Yes. Margaret Ballard. She's married recently to Johnathan Ballard. She's in the U.S. Air Force out in Las Vegas, Nevada. My middle child, Millie, just changed her name recently. She is Millie Irene Sterling. Sterling is my maiden name, not my married name. I took my maiden name back. And then my son is Greg Blackston. He works in New York City right now, so my children are spread far and wide. The oldest in Las Vegas, Millie, the middle is in Germany, Darmstadt, Germany, working for Boeing. And my son is in New York City and about to transfer out to San Francisco.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:03:04] Okay. Thank you, Barbara, or Barb as I call you. Okay. Do you want to tell us anything about your interests or should we? Yeah, just tell us briefly about your current interests.

STERLING: [00:03:16] Well, I really enjoy walking, hiking. I'm a member of several different walking clubs. I am also interested, or concerned about I guess, I'm not so interested in, the homeless situation in the United States. And of course, I'm also very interested in the state of the environment as well. So.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:03:38] Okay. Now, you were in the Peace Corps in 1978. Can you think back to about the year before you joined Peace Corps,

which would be 1977? What can you, what would you like to tell us about your life then? That could be what you were doing, like your education, or other experiences or childhood experiences even that are relevant to you becoming a Peace Corps volunteer?

STERLING: [00:04:08] Well, I'm an Army brat, they call us, a military brat. My dad was in the Army and I traveled pretty extensively as I was growing up through my childhood. President Kennedy was shot when we were living in Turkey, Ankara, Turkey. And I remember that having a very dramatic, um, what do you say?

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:04:34] Effect?

STERLING: [00:04:34] Effect, yes, on the family at large. The kids, we didn't hear about it. We had no radio, no TV while we were living in Turkey. So we didn't hear about it right away. My dad came home from work and told us that he had been killed a few days ago. So, you know, we didn't hear about it instantly. Then when I returned to the United States, of course, the Vietnam War era was upon us, and there were a lot of Peace Corps commercials on the TV. And I think because of the effect that it had on the family, President Kennedy dying, the Peace Corps commercials had a big impact on me as well. So even in high school, I knew that I really wanted to join the Peace Corps.

STERLING: [00:05:23] When I went to college, I went into natural resources at Colorado State University, and I met my future husband there, and he took off to go into the Peace Corps in 1977, the year before I graduated. He went to El Salvador and went through all of the training. And then at the end of the training, he decided to come back to the United States, and we decided that we would go into the Peace Corps together. So I was working on a dairy, well, we were both working on the dairy, not only working, but living and working on the dairy, plus going to college.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:06:06] And where was the dairy at?

STERLING: [00:06:07] In Bellevue, Colorado.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:06:09] Is that, that's by Fort Collins, I think.

STERLING: [00:06:11] It is by Fort Collins.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:06:11] Yeah. Okay.

STERLING: [00:06:12] Yeah. So when we put our names in the hat, applied for the Peace Corps, they put us into the agricultural program because we were both working on a dairy at the time and we were helping them harvest hay and milking the cows, of course, but also doing just general farm labor too as well. So they put us into a program called the rural pilot schools program in Honduras, Central America.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:06:46] Okay. Rural pilot schools program. And I'm jumping ahead. I think you mentioned before we started, you don't even know if that. Well, Peace Corps is not even in Honduras.

STERLING: [00:06:55] Right. Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:06:56] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:06:57] No, but you know, the rural pilot school program was not, uh. I don't think it had a great success rate as far as people being able to complete their service in the program or even being very happy with the program once they got to their country. When we first started out, they did three months of training for us in Costa Rica.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:07:27] And may I ask you, you've told me on other occasions, why Costa Rica for the training? Why not Honduras?

STERLING: [00:07:35] Well, it was a pretty big training camp, I think, for all of Central America and even for South America. I'm not positive, at least in the agricultural.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:07:44] For agriculture.

STERLING: [00:07:46] Venue or whatever.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:07:47] Okay.

STERLING: [00:07:48] Right. So we had 4 hours of Spanish a day and then we would have 4 hours of training in agriculture. They taught us how to raise pigs, even castrate pigs, which was pretty impressive to me. And chickens. They taught us how to raise chickens. We raised vegetable gardens. We didn't milk any cows there, that was kind of a bigger project I think. But they also taught us how to raise bees as well and get honey from the hives. So we got quite an extensive training there in Costa Rica.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:08:23] You'd say it was a good training?

STERLING: [00:08:24] It was an excellent training. However, probably half of the people in our group, and it wasn't even really a very big group, maybe 24, 25 people, about half of them left and decided not to go on to Honduras.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:08:39] Did they go elsewhere?

STERLING: [00:08:41] No, they went back home.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:08:42] Oh. Huh. Okay. We might get back to the training to. Okay, thank you. Before something about, still on question one. Did your husband then, former husband, influence you, encourage you to go to the Peace Corps also?

STERLING: [00:09:00] Well, he.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:09:01] Because you said he went in 1977 to El Salvador.

STERLING: [00:09:03] Right. And so that was one of the reasons, you know, he wasn't, um. He was having a real struggle deciding whether or not he was going to stay in El Salvador or not after he completed his training. And he didn't really want to return back to the United States

unless he felt pretty sure that, you know, I wanted to go into the Peace Corps too. So we definitely talked about that, but mostly in letters because we didn't have phones or cell phones then. So this was all by letter.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:09:35] 1977 when he was there, correct?

STERLING: [00:09:37] Correct. Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:09:39] Okay. We'll go on to the second question. The most common question, of course, is why did you join the Peace Corps? I mean, and also I will say some of these questions we may have touched on already, we kind of follow the outline, but you may have already said some things.

STERLING: [00:09:56] Mm hmm.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:09:57] So anything else you might want to add about why you joined the Peace Corps?

STERLING: [00:10:01] Well, I knew that I wanted to work for either the Forest Service or the BLM in natural resources. So besides all of the other reasons that people normally go into the Peace Corps, wanting to see the world, helping others. I also did want to complete service so I would get that one year of non-competitive eligibility to work with the federal government. My degree was in range management and for individuals in that degree there's really no option for employment unless you live on a ranch or something. There is, the federal government is really your only employer, the only employer I knew of at the time anyway. So it was, it worked out very well for me before I even left Honduras. Before I completed service, I got a job offer from the U.S. Forest Service before I even left country. So it worked very well for me.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:11:02] Okay, good. Once again, I'm repeating what I said. We may touch on things that you've already talked about. The third question is, how did you hear about the Peace Corps and what made

you decide to apply? I don't know if there's anything else you want to add.

STERLING: [00:11:18] Yeah, I don't know that there's anything more. I think I already mentioned that it was mostly through commercials on TV, I think, when I came back to the United States after being in Turkey.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:11:30] Okay. When you did apply, did you have a specific country in mind?

STERLING: [00:11:36] That I did not, no. Since my husband at the time had been to El Salvador, he was hoping to go back to Central America or a Spanish speaking country since he spoke a little bit of Spanish. I had a little bit of French. So I thought, you know, I could go to a French speaking country would be good. But I didn't mind going to Central America either. In those days, you didn't, you didn't put down a preference for any kind of country, and I did not have a preference at that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:12:13] The fourth question is, what were your friends' and or families' reactions when you were accepted? For instance, well, like I said, what were their reactions? And was there any hesitation or reservation on their part, your part?

STERLING: [00:12:32] So I was raised in a military family. I think I already said that before. My parents were extremely upset. My brother went, uh, so there's a long history of military in my family. My father had gone to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point as well as my grandfather had. My brother went to West Point and my sister went to the Air Force Academy. My parents were very upset that I would even consider going into the Peace Corps. In fact, my father told me that, you know, at the time you got a \$7,000 not, it was an adjustment allowance to help you get back.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:13:20] When you finished, yeah.

STERLING: [00:13:21] When you finished. And my dad told me that he would pay me that amount if I did not go to the Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:13:28] Oh, I never heard that story, Barb, okay.

STERLING: [00:13:31] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:13:31] And I'm going to guess, and then you can tell me if this is correct or not, because it wasn't military? I mean, Peace Corps is so opposite.

STERLING: [00:13:39] That's right. And they felt like I was going against their, you know, long tradition and history of the family and being pretty rebellious, I guess, in this sense. So they were pretty upset and they never came to visit me. They rarely wrote to me the whole time that I was in the Peace Corps. They weren't too interested about hearing what I did in the Peace Corps. So I guess you could say I didn't get much support from my family at all. Now, my children love to hear the stories about the Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:14:20] All three of them do?

STERLING: [00:14:21] All three of them do, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:14:22] Okay. And of course, it was their mother and their father because you went as a married woman.

STERLING: [00:14:26] As a married couple, yes. And we were both in the same program too. We weren't even, you know, we weren't working in different programs. We were on the same project.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:14:35] Yeah. Okay. Did you have any hesitation when you were accepted?

STERLING: [00:14:40] No, I really did not. I didn't really know what I was getting into. I think I had. And I didn't even really have the fear of the unknown. It looked like a grand adventure to me.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:14:51] Yeah. Okay. We'll go on to the fifth question. What project were you invited to join? And well, first of all, then I'll continue with the second part. So what were you in? What was the project, which you've already touched on?

STERLING: [00:15:05] Touched on. It was rural pilot schools. And what they wanted you to do was go into the elementary level schools and teach the teachers how to grow vegetables better. How to grow corn and beans better, which is the staple crops of the country at the time. And the schools were set up where they had one central school in the bigger town and then they would have little satellite schools around that central school. So my husband at the time then worked in the central school and I went out to all the surrounding little aldeas or villages around the central school. So they really didn't, uh, the Peace Corps at the time didn't really give you great instructions about what they expected you to do at all. There was one principal there in Taulabé, Honduras.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:07] Okay, will you, will you?

STERLING: [00:16:08] Oh, sorry.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:08] Yeah. No, that's fine. Will you spell that town you just said? Because.

STERLING: [00:16:13] Taulabé?

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:13] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:16:14] It's T-A-U-L-A-B-E and it has an accent over the E.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:21] Okay. And so that's a small town, Taulabé.

STERLING: [00:16:25] Taulabé.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:25] Okay. Thank you.

STERLING: [00:16:27] So anyway, each of us went kind of a little bit separate path on what we did with the project. When I went out to the smaller schools, the female teachers there asked me to talk about health items more, about boiling water, about washing your hands. So I would give little talks. They called them *charlas*.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:55] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:16:55] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:16:56] And for the reader I'll spell. C-H-A-R-L-A, *charla*, little talks.

STERLING: [00:17:01] Right. To the teachers and sometimes to the students as well of course. I tried to put in a vegetable garden at each of the little schools that I went to, and then I put in these stoves called the *estufa lorena*.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:17:18] Okay, so we'll, this is for the listener, okay?

STERLING: [00:17:21] Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:17:21] We'll spell *estufa*.

STERLING: [00:17:23] Which is stove in Spanish.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:17:25] E-S-T-U-F-A. And then *lorena*.

STERLING: [00:17:27] Lorena.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:17:28] L-O-R-E-N-A. Could you, could you explain that stove?

STERLING: [00:17:31] So that stove was designed to send the smoke out of the house or kitchen area where the meals were being prepared. Most Hondurans at the time anyway had open stoves where the smoke would come right back into the kitchen. They burnt wood for their

main fuel so they, uh, when they were cooking all of their meals, they would also have quite the smoky kitchen that would get into their house or their hut wherever they lived. So the *estufa lorena* sends all the smoke outdoors and it's much more efficient too. You don't have to burn near the quantity of wood to get your meals prepared.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:18:19] But it operated with wood.

STERLING: [00:18:21] It did.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:18:21] But less wood.

STERLING: [00:18:21] Less, much less wood. Yes. And they were easy to build with the. So *lodo* is mud, *arena* is sand. So with clay and sand you could build these stoves "loreña" from just the native materials that you could find right there. Sand, clay and water.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:18:46] Okay, good. Um. This I think we might've touched on, but maybe you have some more information to share. How did you, how did you prepare yourself for the dislocation of entering two years of Peace Corps service?

STERLING: [00:19:08] Prepare myself? I don't think I really prepared myself at all. You know, when we flew down to Florida, they just told us to pack a minimal items, which I had no problem with. I had to store what few things I had because I really didn't have much from being in college at my parent's house and I know we had to get all the shots of course. I didn't try to study Spanish before I got there at all.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:19:33] You had, you knew French?

STERLING: [00:19:35] I knew French.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:19:36] Another romance language. Okay.

STERLING: [00:19:37] Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:19:38] Okay. So we'll go on to your training. This is the sixth question. And like I said, you've already talked about it. But if there's anything else you want to share about where the training was in Costa Rica. Oh, what town in Costa Rica?

STERLING: [00:19:54] La Guacima. Alajuela, La Guacima.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:19:57] Okay, you'll have to spell that for us.

STERLING: [00:19:58] Yeah. La Guacima is L-A and then capital G-U-A-C-I-M-A.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:20:06] C-I-M-A. And that's Costa Rica. Okay. Is it by any other larger town?

STERLING: [00:20:14] No. You know, it's really, I think it's not too far from San Jose, but I haven't been back and I don't really remember exactly. But it's not that close to San Jose. You couldn't get there easily. Of course we didn't, um, have a vehicle. All you could do is get to somewhere by bus or whatever. And it seemed like Costa Rica, I mean, San Jose was about an hour away or something like that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:20:38] Okay.

STERLING: [00:20:39] So we were out in the country. The only thing I would like to say about the training is that they made it pretty severe there at that training and I wish they hadn't. I was criticized heavily for my Spanish and the instructors often would say, well, do you really want to be a Peace Corps volunteer? Do you really want to do this? Well, then you better try harder in your Spanish.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:04] Really?

STERLING: [00:21:04] You better study harder. You're not going to make it. Yes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:09] I'm surprised. But that's a personal opinion.

STERLING: [00:21:11] Yes. And I was not the only one, of course, that they did that to. And that's why I believe so many of the students, you know, that were in my group left, about half of them.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:24] You said that, about half. Speaking of Spanish, what was, what kind of language training did you get there in Costa Rica?

STERLING: [00:21:30] Well, it's very interesting, and I think that actual training was very successful, really, for Spanish. They, we didn't have any books. There were flashcards. And you would just, it was immersion, learning Spanish by immersion.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:21:46] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:21:46] Constantly surrounded by Spanish speaking people. We were not to speak English even to the host family that we were living with, because some of the people, of course, would have known a little bit of English. But we were supposed to speak Spanish constantly, that we didn't learn the written word at all. It was just conversational Spanish all the time. And there'd be flash cards and.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:22:11] No books?

STERLING: [00:22:12] No books at all. Just books with pictures.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:22:16] Wow. I won't go into my training, but that was different than mine, that's for sure. Okay. Anything you want to share with us about the faculty?

STERLING: [00:22:24] Well, I think.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:22:26] You've said that, yeah.

STERLING: [00:22:26] The most important point was that one that I wanted to say.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:22:30] Anything you want to add about the technical studies? I mean, some of this you've talked about already.

STERLING: [00:22:35] Right. So the other part of it, you know, I think we had, must have had a set of two different instructors because I certainly don't remember the critical approach at all for everything else that we learned as far as our gardening and our taking care of the animals and bees. That seemed relatively stress free. All the stress was right, it was around the Spanish portion of it, learning Spanish, and getting up to that level of one plus, you know, Foreign Service.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:23:06] Yeah, the Foreign Service Institute test, FSI test, they would call it. Yeah. Okay.

STERLING: [00:23:12] I almost felt like writing to the Peace Corps and saying, look, you know, I just don't think this is quite justified to have this kind of stress and pressure on people that have volunteered to go into the Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:23:27] I agree. But the interview is about you, but I would agree with that. Where did you live during training? What I mean is, did you live like with a host family, you and your husband, or in a dormitory situation? Where did you live?

STERLING: [00:23:44] Yes, all of us, each of us lived with a host family. And so my husband and I lived in the same house with the host family. It was a two bedroom house with about ten people in the house. It was a wooden structure. There was no running water of course. There was electricity during parts of the day. So we took up one of the bedrooms, which I felt pretty badly about. And the whole rest of the family was in the other bedroom.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:24:18] Right. Yeah.

STERLING: [00:24:18] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:24:20] Okay. Now we're going to ask a question. This is still question six about the selection process. You know, when because you said half the people went home. Anything you might want to share with us about how you and your, how David, I'll say, your former husband, got selected. Any surprises or disappointments from the selection process?

STERLING: [00:24:45] No, I think that all went fairly smoothly for us. I don't recall any, you know, there was nothing. They didn't say, oh, you're going to go to Panama and then change it and say, now you're going to go to Honduras or anything like that. It was, it followed pretty smoothly, step by step.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:25:02] Okay. In hindsight, did your training, do you think the training prepared you with your Peace Corps service?

STERLING: [00:25:11] Well, I didn't quite do as many animal projects probably. We did have rabbits and we did have bees. So I'm glad for the bee training that I got. I wasn't, um, I almost wished I had had more. It's not so much the training, but it would have been better for me to have another connection there. In the school system there was the principal who worked with my husband, but there really wasn't anybody who could work with me to kind of help me design my program. But what I eventually did was there was another Peace Corps volunteer in the next town over, Siguatepeque, which was actually pretty far away.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:25:57] And can we stop and you spell Siguatepeque?

STERLING: [00:26:00] Sure. So it's capital S-I-G-U-A-T-E-P-E-Q-U-E. It's a long.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:12] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:26:12] Long city name there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:15] Yeah, Siguatepeque.

STERLING: [00:26:17] Yes. So anyway, she was a Peace Corps volunteer. She was the one that knew how to build those stoves. And so I went out with her on numerous trips to go build the stove in various *comedor infantiles*.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:31] Okay, what is the *comedor infantil*?

STERLING: [00:26:33] It's a kitchen for women and children where they serve usually, I think, one or two, maybe two meals a day, to women with young children or women that were pregnant, um, to help ensure that they got a good meal at least once a day.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:26:58] Okay.

STERLING: [00:26:58] And they were just kitchens and little feeding centers. And so in these kitchens they were burning wood as well, and wood smoke was going into those feeding places. So the *estufa lorena* was a big improvement to those *comedor infantiles*.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:27:18] Okay. Question seven. What was your initial entry reaction to the country where you, which to which you were assigned? And we know that was Honduras. Once again, I'm interjecting this, that this is somewhat redundant, but do you remember how you felt or thought when you entered Honduras?

STERLING: [00:27:43] Well, we, um. In some sense, I'd say we were kind of lucky in the town that we went to because the principal of the school where we were going to had arranged for us to live in the house. And it really wasn't a house. What it was, was an old gas station, a very tiny little gas station building. But the gas station pumps were no longer there. But it was right next to his house and it was quite a suitable, acceptable housing for us. And he helped us around town, you know, right away, showed us the little house, told us that, you know, this was available for us to stay in. Very friendly fellow. And, um, I mean, there were some surprises to me, that there was no running water. You had to collect your water in *pila* from the roof.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:28:46] And what is the *pila*?

STERLING: [00:28:47] It's a big concrete basin, I guess, that everybody had to collect their water in.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:28:55] Yeah. Okay. And your town, that was Taulabé?

STERLING: [00:29:01] Taulabé.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:01] Taulabé. Okay. Um.

STERLING: [00:29:02] I also was a little distressed by the open sewer that was there. It was a little cement canal went through the town that people could throw stuff into and water flowed through it almost constantly. But it was where you would put your waste products into this.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:25] Open sewer.

STERLING: [00:29:26] Kind of open sewer.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:27] And where did that go to?

STERLING: [00:29:28] I have no idea. Probably to the river, I guess. Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:31] Do you remember what river you were by?

STERLING: [00:29:33] I do not.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:34] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:29:35] It was a coffee growing region. It is mountainous in Honduras. So it's beautiful that way. It wasn't hot like other areas of. So I was very pleasantly surprised about that. Poinsettias grew wild and naturally I loved that. As well as wild tomatoes were everywhere.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:29:55] Wild tomatoes? I never thought of that.

STERLING: [00:29:57] Yeah. So it was, um, so parts of it I loved. I was also surprised, I guess, by the smell of rotting vegetation everywhere. There were banana trees like crazy and people would just throw the peels and whatever, you know, the vegetable matter out. And then pigs and donkeys and all these other animals, creatures, would come along and eat those scraps that they found. So anyway, as you can imagine, the smell of the organic material decomposing or whatever sometimes could be kind of overwhelming.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:30:34] Yes, I can imagine. Okay. Yes. Question number eight, regarding your assignment, um, which you've reviewed quite a bit. Is there anything else you might want to add about the specifics of your job? Or if not, I'll go to another part. You've talked about it.

STERLING: [00:30:56] Well, I, I just don't want to be too negative really, um.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:31:01] Go ahead.

STERLING: [00:31:02] I, uh. My job was good, but Peace Corps didn't really give me very much direction. But I can't really, I don't really complain about that too much really. I'm a pretty self-motivated person. And I found my way eventually and worked on the projects that I was interested in. But there were some things that dismayed me that I learned about the United States while I was in Honduras. One of them is that they had shipped a lot of, um, agricultural pesticides to the country, and there they were sitting in warehouses and. Well, not warehouses really, but just like some of the school buildings, you know, where they stored things. There were these sacks of pretty heavy-duty pesticide chemicals that the, um, people of Honduras really, the community, didn't really know what to do with. So they were just sitting there.

STERLING: [00:32:00] And I'm not, plus I was not a big fan of using heavy duty pesticides on agricultural crops that people are going to eat either. So I wasn't about to go ahead and try to explain to them how to use pesticides. So as far as I know, those sacks of pesticide remain there to this day. There was also a warehouse or storage room filled with

sewing machines. Well, these sewing machines had been provided I think by UNICEF. But there was no electricity in the town, so how could they use these sewing machines?

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:32:36] Yeah. Okay. So we didn't get, so no electricity in the town?

STERLING: [00:32:40] Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:32:41] Okay.

STERLING: [00:32:42] Then there was another thing, and this is something that a lot of the, or the other Peace Corps volunteers experienced, as I did, in those rural pilot schools program exclusively, was there was a, um, there was a product known as wheat soy blend, WSB. And this product was supposed to be used or promoted by Peace Corps volunteers to, for people to eat, even at these feeding stations that women and children that I already told you about. That you would be able to make pancakes or other things out of this wheat soy blend, and they would have better nutrition and better protein in their diet. Well, this product was not accepted by the people that I knew in my community.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:33:41] Did you taste it yourself?

STERLING: [00:33:42] I did.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:33:42] And how was the taste?

STERLING: [00:33:44] A little bitter.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:33:44] Yeah. Okay.

STERLING: [00:33:45] Yeah. The soy I think in it makes it pretty bitter. And so they were not fond of it at all. And I think others, you know, in the same program as me found that as well. In fact, there was one fellow named Gary Coyle and I can't remember what town he was in, but he was in my group. He made a t-shirt that said, "I survived the rural

pilot school project" and there was a skinny person on it feeding a sack of WSB to the pigs.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:34:17] And he made that t-shirt?

STERLING: [00:34:19] He made that t-shirt, and I wish I still had it, but I don't have it today. I lost it somewhere. But we all, the remaining people that were in country in our project, bought one. And, um, but that's what they did with the wheat soy blend, is they would feed it to the animals because the people would not eat it. And they had, you know, good food there really, tortillas made of corn and beans and eggs from the chickens so.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:34:49] Milk products, right?

STERLING: [00:34:50] Yeah, they had a little bit, they didn't really use milk too much but, you know, you could go to, uh, buy a little pot of milk if you wanted to have milk.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:05] Could you describe, oh, anything else you might want to add about your living conditions, which you've touched on?

STERLING: [00:35:11] We had very nice living conditions, really, in our place.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:14] In your gas station.

STERLING: [00:35:15] In our gas station. It had tile floor, which I was so happy about really, because almost everybody in my town lived on a dirt floor.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:24] Okay.

STERLING: [00:35:24] So we lived in kind of a nice, nicer place, really, you could say. We had shutters, we had windows too, which was nice. And we had shutters on the windows. No screens, of course.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:36] Was there a mosquito problem?

STERLING: [00:35:37] Not too badly, but we did sleep under a mosquito net at night.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:44] Okay. And you already mentioned no electricity in the town and you didn't have running water.

STERLING: [00:35:49] Well, so.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:35:50] Or did you?

STERLING: [00:35:50] Actually, there was. You would have 2 hours of electricity at night if the generator was up and running. And then when you had the electricity in our gas station house, there was actually a little sink there that had, so you could have running water for 2 hours a day if the generator was running.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:14] Okay.

STERLING: [00:36:14] So.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:15] Okay.

STERLING: [00:36:16] So that was kind of neat.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:17] Yeah. Would you like to, can you think back to a typical day? Could you describe a typical day? With your work, I'll say.

STERLING: [00:36:25] With work, yeah. So I would usually get up and travel to one of those smaller villages, towns. Most of the time, I either had to walk. There were, I think there was one or two that I could get to by bus, but mostly I had to walk. Occasionally I got to ride a little donkey, not very often.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:51] Where did you get the donkey from?

STERLING: [00:36:53] From the other teachers.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:55] Oh, they had their own donkeys?

STERLING: [00:36:56] Yes. Little horses and donkeys.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:36:58] Okay, so you would borrow a donkey?

STERLING: [00:37:00] Right. So that was kind of fun. But I didn't do that too often. Most of the time I walked.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:37:05] You know, on a personal level, I'm just curious. Are they hard to ride?

STERLING: [00:37:09] Yeah. So it's a little uncomfortable because they have a pretty short gait. You know, it's not like riding a nice big horse. Even the small horses that they rode on had a pretty choppy gait. So you bump around a little bit.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:37:22] Okay, I never rode a donkey. Okay. What would you like to, oh, anything else you want to add about your typical day?

STERLING: [00:37:30] No. And then I would usually try to meet with the teacher there at this smaller school. Sometimes there would only be one teacher there at the school. Other places there'd be a couple of teachers.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:37:46] How were your relations with the people of, you know, your town?

STERLING: [00:37:51] Of the town? I would say generally friendly. I mean, they definitely looked up to Americans, so they respected us. Of course, they felt like, I think probably, that we were a lot wealthier than they were, but they were very friendly. That's part of the amazing thing, that I think that people that live in poverty, they always want to share whatever they have with you. Whereas it seems like wealthier people are the ones that are a little more stingy and not willing to share what they have with you. So they always wanted you to come in and have

a meal with them. Um, I was a little concerned as far as I would never go out at night by myself, ever. There was a little bit of roughness in the town as well. There was a little bar and the machetes would come out sometimes and.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:49] Did your husband ever go to those?

STERLING: [00:38:51] No, he never did.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:52] Yeah, because I know male volunteers would talk about.

STERLING: [00:38:55] About that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:38:55] In general, like they could be hassled in the bars.

STERLING: [00:38:59] Yeah. So one of the women that lived near, it was actually a Dutch woman that grew orchids down the road from us. So I would go visit her sometime and she said that the only reason that I was never accosted or attacked by the men of the village as I traveled out, and she told me this much later, is because I was white and that I wasn't Honduran. And she said most Honduran women in the village like that wouldn't travel alone, you know, out to the villages like I did, just walking. She said that because I was an American and white skinned, that I had that privilege or whatever, which, you know, when I first started there, I didn't really think about it too much. I always, I always thought I blended in and looked like a Honduran, but I realized that was just my naivete. And later realized that, yes, the women there do have a much harder time wandering around independently.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:07] I wonder if you being married too.

STERLING: [00:40:09] Yes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:10] Might have helped, yeah, as far as being accosted as you said or.

STERLING: [00:40:16] Right. But I always felt safe and I felt like people were very friendly. We hitchhiked everywhere, we rode busses everywhere. And, you know, everybody was just so friendly and we never had any problem at all as far.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:30] That's good to hear, yeah.

STERLING: [00:40:31] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:32] As we know, things have changed in Honduras.

STERLING: [00:40:35] Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:35] For the listener, Peace Corps is not even in Honduras.

STERLING: [00:40:37] It's too dangerous, too violent.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:39] Right.

STERLING: [00:40:40] It wasn't when I was there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:40:41] Nor myself, yeah. Were there other Peace Corps volunteers in your town?

STERLING: [00:40:45] Not in my town, no. But there was a Peace Corps volunteer that came after we left and she contacted us. I don't know that she completed service, but she lived in our same little gas station.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:01] That's cute. Um, now here they're talking about the assignment, but then they talk about Peace Corps staff. Did the Peace Corps staff come to visit you or give you guidance? Because you were under, I know you were rural pilot school. So who were you under as, which sector were you under in Peace Corps? Like there is education sector. I was under the health.

STERLING: [00:41:25] Agriculture I guess.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:26] You were. Who was your, um, what do you call it? I'll say supervisor. That's not the word I want to use.

STERLING: [00:41:32] Right. So I felt like we had pretty much zero contact with anybody from Peace Corps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:37] Okay.

STERLING: [00:41:38] So I did. They never came out to visit us. No contact, never. Not by written word or anything as to how you're doing, what are you doing. Come in to Tegucigalpa or to the capital city and come see us. We're going to have a meeting or.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:54] Never?

STERLING: [00:41:55] Never. Nothing. Zero.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:57] It was different in the health sector, so.

STERLING: [00:41:59] Okay, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:41:59] Huh. How would you describe your leisure time in Taulabé? I'm not sure if I'm saying it right.

STERLING: [00:42:09] Yeah. Um, so leisure time was great although, you know, I think we saved it all up. We worked Monday through Saturday, we had Sundays off. That's when I would go to the market because that's when market day was usually.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:42:27] Sunday?

STERLING: [00:42:27] Sunday. People would go to church and then after church they would go to the market, in our town anyway.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:42:33] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:42:33] I don't know how it was elsewhere. We lived next to a pretty large lake where.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:42:39] What was the name of the lake?

STERLING: [00:42:41] Lago Yojoa.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:42:42] Yeah. Okay. And that is, um, Y-O-H-O-A? I can't remember.

STERLING: [00:42:47] Y-A-J-O-A [sic].

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:42:52] A-J-O-A. Okay.

STERLING: [00:42:54] And actually, apparently, I had no idea while I was there really and I never saw evidence of it. But supposedly it's an internationally known lake for fishing bass.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:43:06] I didn't know that.

STERLING: [00:43:07] Yeah. So Americans go there and people all over the world go there I guess to fish bass. It's quite a large lake and all along the lake shore they had little stands where people would sell fish and lunch. So it was fun to go up to Lago Yojoa. There was a cave in our town too, and every once in a while, a Peace Corps volunteer would come and visit the cave, and we would go in the cave with them as they were spelunking.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:43:34] Oh, so did you spelunk?

STERLING: [00:43:36] A little bit. Not very, not very deeply, but we did a little bit.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:43:40] Yeah, I guess I should ask you how to spell spelunk.

STERLING: [00:43:42] Yeah. S-P-L-E-U, I don't even know, N-K-I-N-G [sic]? Spelunking.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:43:48] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:43:49] Something like that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:43:50] Huh.

STERLING: [00:43:52] But we did manage to make it to the, let's see, um, I guess it was the Atlantic coastline to the beach there. So we would travel around the country. Went out to the islands off of the coast of Honduras in the Atlantic side. We did a wonderful river trip up the Mosquito River, they call it.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:44:17] Okay, and we should probably. Or is Mosquitia?

STERLING: [00:44:19] It's La Mosquitia.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:44:21] Let's spell that.

STERLING: [00:44:21] Yeah. M-O-S-Q-U-I-T-I-A.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:44:26] Okay. So you went on a river trip there?

STERLING: [00:44:31] Yes. Fascinating river trip.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:44:34] Really?

STERLING: [00:44:34] Yes. It was in the park, the national park of Honduras. That was a Peace Corps project too. So we went up and this fellow Peace Corps volunteer arranged our entire trip for us. The men from the jungle there, so they were native to the area, were our guides, and they fed us and showed us all around that. I can't remember, but I think it was a good ten days or whatever that we were out there and it was just fascinating. All of the tropical birds and we ate iguana eggs and it was just a fascinating trip.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:45:17] I bet. Wow.

STERLING: [00:45:19] But even back in the jungle there, there was evidence of the United States. There were gold miners back along in the jungle.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:45:28] Okay.

STERLING: [00:45:29] And they, they were not there when we traveled there. But you could see evidence of their camps.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:45:34] Was there gold there? I guess there must have been.

STERLING: [00:45:36] There must have been, yes. I don't really know. But the other thing that was there that was fascinating was there was evidence of prehistoric people had made carvings into the rock that you could see along the river as you, uh, as we poled up the river. And it just seems like it doesn't matter where you go in the world, there's always evidence of people leaving their mark on the land.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:46:04] Yeah. Well. Okay, I never, I went to the La Mosquitia just barely into it for a health trip. So anyways, now we are on question nine. If you can remember back to the end of your first year, um, can you, what were some of the notable events or how did you feel about your first year there in country? Work wise, Honduran folks wise.

STERLING: [00:46:41] I can't picture.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:46:43] Uh, joys and woes.

STERLING: [00:46:44] I just can't remember one year from the next, I can't. It's all kind of a jumble to me. The travel, like I said, was, or was the highlight of my visit there really I think, and meeting up with other Peace Corps volunteers through the country. Going out to the island was fascinating as well. It was an island where, um, pirates, the descendants of the pirates had been.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:47:09] You mean at the Bay Islands?

STERLING: [00:47:11] Yes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:47:11] Do you know which one you went to? There's Roatan.

STERLING: [00:47:15] We didn't go to Roatan. We went to Utila.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:47:17] Yeah. And that's U-T-I-L-A.

STERLING: [00:47:19] Right. Did you go there too?

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:47:22] Yes.

STERLING: [00:47:22] Yeah. So that was just fascinating for me. We also went to the ruins of Copan, which there are Mayan ruins in Honduras. Again, fascinating. And supposedly the Mayan ruins up there were connected by paths and, I don't know, all tunnels even some, to that cave in Taulabé. That's the story anyway. I don't know if it's true or not. I have no idea, of course. But I do know, I think I've said this already, that I had met that Peace Corps woman in Siguatepeque. She was a married person as well. I often think that if I hadn't met her, I would have been a lot unhappier in my work there. She took me under her wing. Her name was Andrea George.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:21] Oh, I know who she is. Yes.

STERLING: [00:48:24] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:24] What town was she in?

STERLING: [00:48:26] Siguatepeque.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:26] Oh, yes, you said that. Okay.

STERLING: [00:48:29] Right. So she kind of took me under her wing and showed me what she was doing and how she was going out to villages and putting this stove in. And she and I did that, like I said, a few times together, and then I was able to do it on my own. But I often think that

if I hadn't met her, I probably wouldn't have been anywhere near as successful in my work.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:50] I think she'd love to hear that. I've seen her at Peace Corps.

STERLING: [00:48:54] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:54] Honduras reunions.

STERLING: [00:48:56] Reunions, right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:57] Yes.

STERLING: [00:48:57] Yes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:48:58] Huh. And she was married also.

STERLING: [00:48:59] She was married as well.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:49:00] Yeah. To another Peace Corps volunteer, I believe?

STERLING: [00:49:03] Correct.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:49:03] Okay. Huh.

STERLING: [00:49:05] So I owe her a debt of gratitude I think.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:49:08] Well, write that down, because, well, maybe she's on my email list. As an aside to the listener, there's going to be a Peace Corps Honduras reunion in September in South Lake Tahoe, California.

STERLING: [00:49:20] And I'm going to miss that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:49:21] And you're going to miss it, and I'll be going, okay. How about any health problems?

STERLING: [00:49:26] Well, I did have one episode. I don't, I was, like we were pretty far away from any help. And I had an extremely high fever. I couldn't really get out of bed. My husband at the time didn't really think that he could travel with me to get me to a doctor. So it took me probably a week to get over that. We never had, I never went to the doctor. I don't know what I had.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:49:57] Was there a clinic in your town?

STERLING: [00:50:02] Uh, kinda sorta.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:03] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:50:03] Not really. You know, no doctor there, no Honduran doctor there at all. Um. I kind of felt like maybe I had either dengue or malaria, but I have no idea really what I had. I just knew that I was pretty sick.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:19] Yeah. You know, as an aside, do you know what altitude you were at? Because I think, I know some of the volunteers that were like in the mountains, mosquitoes weren't a problem, is my understanding.

STERLING: [00:50:30] Right. They weren't. But as I've told you.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:32] When you travel.

STERLING: [00:50:33] I traveled quite a bit, so I don't know what I, I don't know where I picked it up, what I picked up. I don't know. And of course, I got the, you know, intestinal tract thing a number of times.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:46] Like amoebas or giardia or some such thing. Worms, maybe.

STERLING: [00:50:50] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:50:51] Okay. Before we get to the 10th question, which is the end of your tour, anything else you would like to add about your work life in Honduras? Leisure, the people, the government, anything that you can think of that we might not have touched on? We've got four more questions.

STERLING: [00:51:15] Well, I think the only, you know, I think it's an overall good idea to try to help improve the nutrition of people no matter where they are. I think it wasn't really the lack of food there because there really was food. There were fruits and vegetables growing naturally. Corn and beans were, although not abundant I would say, they were sufficient usually. I think it was more of a thing where, um, probably would have been more helpful is the whole water issue. Getting clean water to people and then having people wash their hands, teaching them that. That was probably another thing that was critically important.

STERLING: [00:52:01] The other part of it is that oftentimes they would give the men of the, if food was lacking in the household, they would give the men the best food, the father the best food in the house. And I think there would have been a great advantage to helping them learn that children really need to have good nutrition to be able to grow properly and survive. So I think that education probably would have been good.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:52:35] Yeah. Did most of the families, did they use latrines? Did some places have indoor toilets?

STERLING: [00:52:42] No, no indoor toilets that I knew of. It was all latrine. And then, like I said, there was that open sewer where they would dump stuff into as well.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:52:53] Yeah.

STERLING: [00:52:53] And I don't know that very many towns really had that, but Taulabé, the little villages outside of Taulabé did not have that.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:53:01] Okay. Now we're on question ten out of the, out of the 13 questions. At your end, the end of your tour, did you have a sense of achievement? Failure? Were there pluses, minuses in your relations with the people that you worked with, the people you lived by? How would you describe the end of your tour?

STERLING: [00:53:29] So I felt like we had started a lot of successful projects, not only in the core school, but in all of the other little schools that were the satellite schools as well. I didn't have a good sense that it would be able to be continued after we left.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:53:52] Hmm.

STERLING: [00:53:53] Both of us put in a lot of effort and time, and I'm just not sure that there was anybody, of course, to carry on that work into the future. We built a chicken house for broiler chickens, a very big chicken project, really, when you think about it for that small town. And I have a feeling that it was probably converted to schoolrooms at the end. I suspect after we left that that might have been what happened to that concrete building that we built out there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:54:28] Okay.

STERLING: [00:54:29] So I don't know how, you know, successful we were as far as in helping improve the nutrition of the people in the village that we lived. But our projects that we did were pretty successful while we were there.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:54:44] Mm hmm. Do you know if any Peace Corps volunteers followed you and David?

STERLING: [00:54:49] Well, there was one woman that was there, but I don't even know that she was in the same.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:54:55] Program?

STERLING: [00:54:56] Program that we were.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:54:56] Yeah. Okay.

STERLING: [00:54:57] I think they kind of terminated that program, the rural pilot school program.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:03] It sounds like a wonderful program. I mean, my opinion.

STERLING: [00:55:07] Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:07] Yeah. Do you have any regrets about working with this project or, and or satisfaction?

STERLING: [00:55:17] So, regrets. I wished I had made better friends with some Hondurans. I really don't think that I made very good friends, really, with any Honduran people. Um.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:29] I mean, if I may ask you, I think sometimes if you're married at the time, you might depend more on your spouse.

STERLING: [00:55:36] Right.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:37] Than some of those of us who were single at the time.

STERLING: [00:55:39] Yes, that's a possibility.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:55:41] Yeah. I mean, it's easier. Yeah. What were your plans for the future when you finished, when you terminated?

STERLING: [00:55:49] So I think already mentioned this too. I was delightfully surprised with a letter. Of course, the Forest Service at the time was undergoing a class action suit where, uh, they had been found to be negligent in hiring women. And so the Forest Service sent me a letter probably about two months before I left our COS Honduras.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:56:18] And what does COS mean, Barb?

STERLING: [00:56:21] Completion of service.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:56:23] Yes, okay.

STERLING: [00:56:23] Um, that they were offering me a job on the Boise National Forest in Mountain Home, Idaho, which coincidentally was the town where my college roommate was living. Mountain Home, Idaho. So I was so excited to be able to start working for the Forest Service right away as soon as I got back to the country of my birth, the United States. Ronald Reagan had just been voted in as president, so I was a little discouraged about that. And he put a freeze on government hiring as soon as I got back. So there was, once I got back to the States, I was really worried about whether or not I was going to be able to really get my job and keep my job with the Forest Service.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:57:11] So did you go to Idaho?

STERLING: [00:57:12] I did.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:57:13] Okay.

STERLING: [00:57:14] Mountain Home, Idaho. Yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:57:16] Okay.

STERLING: [00:57:16] And started with the Forest, started my federal government career there. Permanent.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:57:21] Yeah. And David went with you I'm guessing?

STERLING: [00:57:23] He did. Now so he was not offered a job. And so this is a sign of the times, right? The Forest Service had this class action suit, and so they were trying to follow affirmative action and hiring more women into nontraditional jobs. They didn't need any more white males, which was my husband's gender and race.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:57:46] A white man, yes.

STERLING: [00:57:49] So he did not get a job offer. And then when President Reagan became president in January of 1981, he put a freeze on all government hiring. And so my husband did not get a job through that program, his noncompetitive eligibility. So that was, that was not so great.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:58:10] Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Um. We'll go on to question 11. How would you evaluate your service in the Peace Corps in light of the three goals? The first one being to provide technical assistance where required, well, where requested, excuse me. How would you evaluate that?

STERLING: [00:58:33] Well, I think that as far as the two of us together, I think we were pretty successful with that. But part of the reason we were successful is we were able to tap into different funding sources that the native Hondurans were not able to tap into. Like we got money from the Christian organizations and all sorts of organizations that try to help out low income areas and countries that are struggling with poverty. So we were able to start our chicken project, our rabbit project, our fish project, our bee project, you know, with funds from outside of the United States.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:59:22] Oh.

STERLING: [00:59:22] Flowing in. They were grants, basically, I guess you would call them.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:59:26] That Peace Corps volunteers could access?

STERLING: [00:59:28] Correct.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:59:28] Yeah. Okay.

STERLING: [00:59:29] So and we were pretty successful in getting that kind of funding for projects in our area. Which, you know, if you're Honduran, you probably don't have that same ability.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [00:59:42] Right, right. Okay. How would you evaluate your service in the second goal, promote better understanding of the United States?

STERLING: [00:59:50] Well, I think they, you know, just by seeing us and living near us in the town, I think they became to realize that, you know, even though we were probably better off than most of them there, that we weren't anything different from any other person, really. They did, like I say, show us a lot of respect. Any time any American or European came into town, they would show them to our house, like immediately, so that we got to meet just about everybody that traveled through.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:25] Yeah.

STERLING: [01:00:27] Through the town.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:27] I can't remember if I asked you, were there other Peace Corps volunteers in the town?

STERLING: [01:00:30] Not in our town.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:32] Okay, not when you were there.

STERLING: [01:00:33] No.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:34] Okay. Other Americans that might have been working for other agencies?

STERLING: [01:00:37] No. There was, it was a small rural village. So really there were no other non-native people there. There was that Dutch woman that lived a couple of villages down from us, probably to the east. I think she lived in a town called La Lajas.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:00:57] How do you spell that?

STERLING: [01:00:59] Um, L. Las, L-A-S, and then Lajas, L-A-J-A-S. She and her husband, who was deceased at the time, were missionaries to Honduras, and when he died, she stayed in Honduras and started growing orchids.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:01:21] Oh.

STERLING: [01:01:21] So she had a beautiful orchid farm there. She had four Dalmatian dogs. So when she would travel back to Europe or whatever, I would go down there and stay in her house and take care of her dogs and the orchids while she was gone.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:01:36] Oh, interesting. Okay. The last part of this evaluating your service question is, how did you do with the part, the third part, to promote better understanding of other people by Americans? Which to me is like when you come home.

STERLING: [01:01:55] When you come home? I found that most people really weren't all that interested.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:01:59] Yes.

STERLING: [01:02:01] In my Peace Corps service. And it wasn't until I moved to Denver that I actually found a group of returned Peace Corps volunteers to connect with and, you know, start talking about things a little bit, about the things that I did in Honduras or experienced in Honduras. I try now to bring it up at work or when I'm doing any sort of. I teach at the national training center for the BLM sometimes.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:02:37] Where is that at?

STERLING: [01:02:38] It's in Phoenix, Arizona.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:02:40] Okay. So you go there to teach?

STERLING: [01:02:42] I go there to teach. And it's usually people that are just starting with the BLM or in the Lands Academy. And I always try to

mention the Peace Corps at some time throughout that training, to encourage people to look into the Peace Corps, the Peace Corps Response program, because I'm there talking about the BLM and their careers to some degree. And so I always try to work that into the discussion.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:03:09] Okay. Anything else before you go to question 12? Okay. The 12th question. Through the years, have you continued any kind of involvement with your country of service and or contact with people from that country? Or have you, and if not, another part of that is any continuing Peace Corps involvement.

STERLING: [01:03:33] Well, I wish I had. That's probably my biggest regret, that I didn't make a little bit better connection with some Hondurans. We did keep in touch with the principal there for a little while, um, through just letters, Christmas cards. Again, you know, there was no telephone service or anything like that. You couldn't send even really packages because the packages would get stolen or robbed or whatever. So all you could really do was send a letter and, you know, we responded maybe for one or two years and then that was it.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:04:12] Yeah. Yeah.

STERLING: [01:04:13] I'd love to go back and see how things are in Taulabé, but I haven't ever been able to go back to Honduras either.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:04:21] Yeah. And for the listener, things have changed. I think it was either 2011 or 2012 when Peace Corps pulled out of Honduras because of the violence. So, um, you have to be on your toes if you go back.

STERLING: [01:04:39] If you go back, yeah.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:04:40] Have you been involved with any third goal activities since you've come back? Or maybe because you said now in Denver?

STERLING: [01:04:48] Right. No, I wasn't at first, I think I was just worried about working for the federal government and keeping my job and doing a good job at work. But now that I'm a little more senior, like I said, I do mention Peace Corps at the training center. I am now involved with the returned Peace Corps volunteer group here. I haven't, I can't say that I've been very aggressive about any of that, you know, as far as talking or speaking to the rest of the world about Peace Corps. But any time there's Peace Corps volunteers that have come back recently to the country and they're looking for jobs, I usually like to try to talk to them about the working for the federal government too and taking advantage of that one year of non-competitive eligibility, because that is still a feature of the Peace Corps program.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:05:45] Yeah. How long, just as an aside, how long have you been working with the BLM, Bureau of Land Management?

STERLING: [01:05:52] Well, my federal career is almost 30 years now. I took.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:05:56] Almost 30?

STERLING: [01:05:56] Yeah, I took 15 years off to stay home with my children while they were young.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:06:02] Yeah.

STERLING: [01:06:03] But so I would have had about 45 years in if I had continued working through.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:06:11] Okay. We're finally up to the last question. Question number 13, which is, what was the effect on you of your Peace Corps service? Um, we've mentioned your career, but how about you? Did it change you, at that time when you came back? Long term? What was the effect of your Peace Corps service on you? And then you might want to add something with your career?

STERLING: [01:06:42] Uh huh. Well, I feel like it increased my level of tolerance for different viewpoints, different ways people have of expressing

themselves. That I think has increased. I have a greater empathy for those that are struggling to work their way out of poverty. That's one of the things I still try to work with is the homeless people in the United States, and I have always helped in that area of service, I guess, even since I returned from Honduras.

STERLING: [01:07:28] Poverty. I came to realize when I was in Honduras that, you know, these people that are living in poverty, they don't see any light at the end of the tunnel. There's no way out. Where I always knew that I was going to return to the United States in two years and I would be removed and kind of relieved of all the struggle of poverty. So I have appreciation of people that live in poverty and are trying to make a better world for their children and their community.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:03] So anything else that I may not have asked you?

STERLING: [01:08:07] No.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:09] Okay.

STERLING: [01:08:09] I think that's probably good.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:10] Okay. Well, thank you, Barbara Ann Sterling. And once again, Barbara served in Honduras. Um, I was, I was going to say 1978. But it says here, actually January 1979 until December of 1980 with the rural pilot schools program in Honduras. But her Peace Corps training.

STERLING: [01:08:30] Was in 1978.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:32] That was 1978 in Costa Rica.

STERLING: [01:08:34] In Costa Rica.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:35] Okay. Now, this is my first interview, I'm going to put a mark on and this is the end of our interview. Listener, I hope you've

enjoyed this. Thank you very much. Goodbye. I don't really know what the marks mean. So now.

STERLING: [01:08:52] I hope it's all recorded. Don't want to go through that again.

KAARE-LOPEZ: [01:08:55] Oh, I know. And then.

[END OF INTERVIEW]