

Ruth Ficek Stepien Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Ruth Ficek Stepien served as a Peace Corps volunteer in India from 1966 to 1968 as a staff secretary.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Ruth Ficek Stepien

June 10, 2007
Olathe, Kansas

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:03] Today is June 10th, 2007. This is Bob Klein. I'm interviewing Ruth Ficek Stepien, who was a Peace Corps volunteer, 1966 to '68 in India in the worldwide secretaries program. So let's go back about a year before you joined to talk about what was going on.

STEPIEN: [00:00:27] What was going on, alright. I was, I was working. I had, um, I was working in a job and I was there for a couple of years and I had a boyfriend, and he just joined the Navy.

KLEIN: [00:00:39] Where was the job?

STEPIEN: [00:00:40] The job was in, um, Kansas City, Missouri, for the Borden Company. And, and I had graduated from, um, a technical vocational school, and I was a secretary.

KLEIN: [00:00:54] When did you graduate from business school?

STEPIEN: [00:00:58] About '64, 1964.

KLEIN: [00:01:01] And before that? Where had you grown up?

STEPIEN: [00:01:04] Before that, I grew up, um. I was born in North Dakota. Moved to north Missouri when I was ten, graduated from Trenton High School in 1962.

KLEIN: [00:01:17] Where in northern Missouri?

STEPIEN: [00:01:20] Trenton.

KLEIN: [00:01:20] Trenton.

STEPIEN: [00:01:21] Trenton High.

KLEIN: [00:01:21] And during the high school years, did you do any volunteer work, any extracurricular activities, any travel?

STEPIEN: [00:01:30] I was, uh, my dad was a grade E dairy farmer.

KLEIN: [00:01:35] Uh huh.

STEPIEN: [00:01:35] And so being a dairy farmer, you didn't travel much. So, but they were, they were leaders, uh, 4-H leaders. So I grew up from, um, from age during the 4-H when I was about eight or nine clear on through high school and they were the leaders. And so of course we had our, we had our, all our projects, our farm projects, our sewing and cooking and. And, um, even one year I raised, I raised a litter of pigs.

KLEIN: [00:02:05] Uh huh.

STEPIEN: [00:02:05] And, um, that was exciting.

KLEIN: [00:02:07] So you lived and worked on a farm?

STEPIEN: [00:02:09] Yes, yes, outside of town. And we were kind of a model farm for the, um, FFA people that the students and they'd come and observe the dairy farm and, and the crops and we had a very, very nice, nice, nice farm.

KLEIN: [00:02:27] Any brothers and sisters?

STEPIEN: [00:02:29] I've got, um, three sisters, older sisters, and a younger brother.

KLEIN: [00:02:33] Oh, okay. So you went to high school?

STEPIEN: [00:02:37] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:02:38] And then when you finished high school, what were your options at that point?

STEPIEN: [00:02:43] I wasn't terribly interested in a regular four-year college, and, um, and I'd been interested in probably being a secretary. And, and, um, so I went to Kansas City, Missouri, it had a business college. So I, I went there and I, um, it was like a two year program and got my diploma as a secretary.

KLEIN: [00:03:07] Right. And during the two years, any travel, any special activities?

STEPIEN: [00:03:11] Uh, not really. Not really.

KLEIN: [00:03:14] Yeah. Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:03:15] Yeah. And of course, on weekends, I go back home and, and, uh, help out and visit.

KLEIN: [00:03:21] Okay. And then so after school, you, did you go straight to work for the Borden Company?

STEPIEN: [00:03:29] Yes. Uh huh. I went to Borden Company and I was there for about two years. And meanwhile, I'd been dating this, this fellow I'd met at

the business college, and he, um. Uh, we were getting serious, but not ready for marriage or anything. And so he joined the Navy, and it just, it just sounded like he went off to, well, he went to Vietnam.

KLEIN: [00:03:55] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:03:55] And, and I just felt there was something, something else I should be doing.

KLEIN: [00:04:03] Do you, do you remember when you first heard of the Peace Corps or how you heard of the Peace Corps?

STEPIEN: [00:04:08] Oh, this was in 19, about 1964 at the time. And it was, you know, you could. It was in the newspapers, it was on, um, TV, newspapers. And, and there's a lot of mention of the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:04:23] Do you remember your reaction to hearing about it?

STEPIEN: [00:04:26] I just, I just thought that, you know, it was, it was something pretty exciting and, and something I probably should look into.

KLEIN: [00:04:35] Well, good. And do you recall the how and when you made the decision? Well, I'm going to join the Peace Corps.

STEPIEN: [00:04:47] Well, of course, I, I started, you know, I, I got the. I don't even, I don't remember where I got the application from. I think I sent off.

KLEIN: [00:04:57] Were you living and working in Kansas City?

STEPIEN: [00:04:59] In Kansas City at the time. And I send off for more information. They sent me a 12 page application and I, um, went ahead and filled it out and progressed from there.

KLEIN: [00:05:13] And you didn't have any sense that they were really just looking for people with bachelor's degrees or anything?

STEPIEN: [00:05:19] At the time, they didn't. They didn't state that's what they were looking for.

KLEIN: [00:05:26] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:05:26] Because they said there's, you know, there's, there's agriculture, there's health, health groups. And, um, and I really didn't know what I could be doing.

KLEIN: [00:05:40] What was the reaction of your family and your friends when, or you didn't tell them?

STEPIEN: [00:05:46] Well, I did. And I think they knew, um, what I was doing.

KLEIN: [00:05:52] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:05:52] And, um, of course, my parents, you know, they. Of course, they were concerned about me the whole entire process and the time I was gone, of course. And, um. But.

KLEIN: [00:06:10] What did your sisters think of you? They, I gather.

STEPIEN: [00:06:13] Well, nobody else had done anything quite like this.

KLEIN: [00:06:15] Exactly.

STEPIEN: [00:06:16] A couple of sisters who went off to college, you know, and one sister had a nursing degree. And then my oldest sister is a medical technician. And, uh, and of course, they'd been to, been to college and another sister at home doing a, um, um, art and working on art.

KLEIN: [00:06:34] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:06:35] But no one had taken the steps of going out of the country.

KLEIN: [00:06:39] Right. Right. So they thought you were crazy or they just?

STEPIEN: [00:06:42] Oh, pretty much. Pretty much. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:06:44] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:06:45] But I always had a kind of an adventurous, you know, an inquisitive past anyway. So I don't think they were too surprised.

KLEIN: [00:06:54] You were the youngest of four sisters.

STEPIEN: [00:06:55] The youngest of the girls, yes.

KLEIN: [00:07:00] Some, in the application process. Often in those days when you signed up, you could indicate an area of preference. I'd rather be in this part of the world. And sometimes you could even indicate a job preference. Do you remember?

STEPIEN: [00:07:15] I remember that. And, and, I was, I was very unsure because I'd never been outside of the country.

KLEIN: [00:07:23] Right.

STEPIEN: [00:07:23] So I had absolutely no preference.

KLEIN: [00:07:25] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:07:26] No preference. And as far as working at something, like I said, I'd been a secretary. I didn't know what else I could do. And, um.

KLEIN: [00:07:37] Except you'd grown up on a farm.

STEPIEN: [00:07:38] Right. Farm background.

KLEIN: [00:07:40] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:07:42] And, uh, so I just put down on the application what I knew and what I felt I could do and.

KLEIN: [00:07:48] Right.

STEPIEN: [00:07:49] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:07:50] And then you seem to remember that you took the entrance exam.

STEPIEN: [00:07:53] I think I took one, yes. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:07:55] In the post office building.

STEPIEN: [00:07:56] Post office basement. Um, some government exam.

KLEIN: [00:08:01] And you got the references.

STEPIEN: [00:08:02] And got the references and, uh, and then sent in my application and, and, uh, just kind of supplied them after that, what they asked for and.

KLEIN: [00:08:13] And then what happened?

STEPIEN: [00:08:13] Well, they sent me, of course, my medical exam. They sent me to a doctor and dentist and, um, sent everything in and just kind of waited around.

KLEIN: [00:08:25] And in the meantime, you were still working?

STEPIEN: [00:08:28] I was working. I was working.

KLEIN: [00:08:29] Had you announced at work that you might be leaving or?

STEPIEN: [00:08:32] Um, no, I don't think so.

KLEIN: [00:08:35] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:08:36] I don't think so.

KLEIN: [00:08:37] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:08:37] And I enjoyed my work. You know, it's my first, first real job. I enjoyed it.

KLEIN: [00:08:44] And then what happened?

STEPIEN: [00:08:45] Well, I got, um, I think I got a letter that said I was, uh, either letter or telegram, that I was accepted and then the information to, uh, um, report for training at a certain, certain date. And this was about March of, um, 1996 [1966], I believe.

KLEIN: [00:09:12] '66, yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:09:15] So, of course, I gave my notice at work and informed my family.

KLEIN: [00:09:24] And what?

STEPIEN: [00:09:24] And of course, they were excited, you know, for me, of course, the opportunity.

KLEIN: [00:09:28] And did you have any second thoughts?

STEPIEN: [00:09:30] No, never. Never.

KLEIN: [00:09:32] So, you were ready.

STEPIEN: [00:09:33] I was just ready to just, just. I was ready to do anything.

KLEIN: [00:09:37] Did the letter or telegram indicate where you'd be going?

STEPIEN: [00:09:42] Um.

KLEIN: [00:09:43] Or just that you'd be going into training?

STEPIEN: [00:09:44] I think. I think, you know, I don't remember. I don't remember, but somehow when I got to training, maybe that's when I found out. When I got to training in Washington, D.C.

KLEIN: [00:09:56] Okay. So you flew to Washington.

STEPIEN: [00:10:00] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:10:00] Was it the first time flying?

STEPIEN: [00:10:01] Yes, it was. It was the first time. I'm just a farm girl, you know?

KLEIN: [00:10:06] Yeah, yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:10:07] And, uh, first time flying. So I left out of Kansas City, TWA. And, uh.

KLEIN: [00:10:14] That must have really made it an event.

STEPIEN: [00:10:15] It was wonderful. I just loved every minute of it. And went to D.C. And I think when I got to Washington, and we all met at a hotel and stayed at a hotel, I think that's where we got our information on where we were going. And of course, our training, our language training.

KLEIN: [00:10:34] So the program described to you was worldwide secretary?

STEPIEN: [00:10:41] Right.

KLEIN: [00:10:41] So you were reasonably sure that whatever you were going to go somewhere and work as a secretary.

STEPIEN: [00:10:47] Right.

KLEIN: [00:10:47] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:10:48] And that was, that was okay with me because I knew, you know, I knew I could do it.

KLEIN: [00:10:53] Yeah, yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:10:53] You know, um.

KLEIN: [00:10:56] I'm curious, when you, when you first reported to Washington, you got to the hotel. Now there's a group.

STEPIEN: [00:11:01] Yes, there was about, I would say, near 30. Um. Females.

KLEIN: [00:11:08] All women?

STEPIEN: [00:11:09] Women. And we were all, um, most of us had been working as secretaries in a job.

KLEIN: [00:11:16] How did you feel about the group? I mean, now you made this decision to join and all of a sudden you're in the midst of a couple of dozen other people. And I think inevitably you sort of look at, you know, wonder, do I match up? Do you remember your reaction?

STEPIEN: [00:11:33] Oh, I think I did. And everybody was from, you know, all across the United States. And, um, then we were given, um, informed which country they intended for us to go and, um, and so. So we had three months of training.

KLEIN: [00:11:55] And that was all in Washington?

STEPIEN: [00:11:56] Uh huh, George Washington University area.

KLEIN: [00:12:00] Yeah. But you said you stayed at the hotel?

STEPIEN: [00:12:03] Stayed at the hotel. And we had, we had, um, uh, our language training in the hotel also. And they, they had, uh, instructors come in. Native language instructors.

KLEIN: [00:12:18] And now at that point, of the 30 or so, were all going to India?

STEPIEN: [00:12:24] No, there was, um, oh, I think they had slated like 14 different countries.

KLEIN: [00:12:31] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:12:32] Different countries. They had three of us, or at the time four of us, taking five Indian, um, Hindu, um, language classes. They had Africa. Um. Philippines, Thailand.

KLEIN: [00:12:48] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:12:48] Um, just many, many countries.

KLEIN: [00:12:51] So for the language training, you really split into small groups?

STEPIEN: [00:12:53] Yes, we did.

KLEIN: [00:12:54] And was that, in the initial phase of training, was that every day?

STEPIEN: [00:12:59] Every day. Six days a week. Every morning from about 8:00 to 12:00, we had language training.

KLEIN: [00:13:06] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:13:07] And then in the afternoons we had, um, we met as groups and maybe one group and they gave us like general culture, um, culture training information about culture in other countries and.

KLEIN: [00:13:23] Was that general, it wasn't specific to India?

STEPIEN: [00:13:27] Um, I think most of it was, was general and kind of highlighting all the countries then. So everybody got kind of a, a general of different countries.

KLEIN: [00:13:37] So it was the whole group.

STEPIEN: [00:13:38] Yeah, uh huh. And then we had like physical education. We went and had swimming like twice a week or so.

KLEIN: [00:13:48] At George Washington?

STEPIEN: [00:13:50] Yes, uh huh. And those that didn't know how to swim, they learned.

KLEIN: [00:13:55] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:13:56] And, and just, just for some, you know, physical education.

KLEIN: [00:14:00] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:14:01] And, uh.

KLEIN: [00:14:02] Did anyone say, well, in order to go, you need to learn the language, or was it just?

STEPIEN: [00:14:09] It was.

KLEIN: [00:14:10] It would be good if you learned it?

STEPIEN: [00:14:11] Well, they pretty much said when you, uh, you needed to know the language to go to a country.

KLEIN: [00:14:17] Did, did they, in training you did the language. You did the culture studies. In those days, they also were doing something called American Studies World Communism. Do you recall if they?

STEPIEN: [00:14:31] No, I don't recall.

KLEIN: [00:14:32] Any of that? Yeah, they may have dropped it.

STEPIEN: [00:14:34] Yeah. So there was language, cultural studies, and physical education.

STEPIEN: [00:14:40] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:14:40] How about medical training?

STEPIEN: [00:14:43] Medical? Not really. But we were, we were kind of, um, there was a psychologist that came in and visited with each of us.

KLEIN: [00:14:54] So you had separate interviews.

STEPIEN: [00:14:55] Right.

KLEIN: [00:14:56] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:14:56] Uh huh. And, um.

KLEIN: [00:14:58] Do you recall the interview?

STEPIEN: [00:15:01] Sort of, um. And I think he just kind of visited with you on, on, on, uh, background and reaction and potential incidents that may occur. And, and, uh, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:15:17] Did he ask if you were leaving a boyfriend and would you miss him and?

STEPIEN: [00:15:22] He probably did. And family. And he probably did.

KLEIN: [00:15:25] Was, do you know if the FBI was doing the background check while you were?

STEPIEN: [00:15:30] Yes, they did.

KLEIN: [00:15:31] How did you know?

STEPIEN: [00:15:32] Um, I think they told us that we were going to be investigated.

KLEIN: [00:15:35] Yeah. Did anyone from back home say, oh, the FBI came and?

STEPIEN: [00:15:39] Uh. I don't think anybody actually saw anybody.

KLEIN: [00:15:45] Okay. Yeah. And what were you writing back to the family while you were?

STEPIEN: [00:15:51] Oh, I just, you know, I, I wrote letters so they could see what was going on, what we were doing. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:15:58] Uh, and how long was the training?

STEPIEN: [00:16:04] Training was three months. Three.

KLEIN: [00:16:06] And it was just the pattern we talked about. Was there anything else? At any point that they try to teach you Peace Corps procedures or?

STEPIEN: [00:16:15] Yes, they did I think. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:16:18] Did you get a chance to visit Peace Corps headquarters?

STEPIEN: [00:16:21] No, we didn't.

KLEIN: [00:16:22] It was downtown, it was near the White House.

STEPIEN: [00:16:23] I think we had speakers come in, though, and, and, uh. Yeah. And then on our own, you know, we could take, you know, we visited Washington, D.C., we had picnics and, and, um, um. Yeah, we had some free time.

KLEIN: [00:16:40] Yeah, yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:16:41] Yeah. And it was during cherry blossom time, and it was just beautiful.

KLEIN: [00:16:44] Yeah. So you had a chance to see Washington as well?

STEPIEN: [00:16:48] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:16:49] Uh, did anyone from Washington, from Peace Corps staff, come and say, well, your program's a little bit different in the?

STEPIEN: [00:16:56] Yes, they did.

KLEIN: [00:16:57] And what was it they said?

STEPIEN: [00:16:59] They said it was kind of an experimental thing, and the Peace Corps was. There was so many, um, Peace Corps volunteers at that time in the field and, and, and offices were opening up regional offices in countries and they just, they needed, um. They needed quality people in the offices because local people with the customs and everything just couldn't, couldn't produce as we were used to doing it in the States.

KLEIN: [00:17:31] Ah.

STEPIEN: [00:17:31] And, and they just needed some, some good help. And, um, and there was two programs of worldwide secretaries and I was, um, I believe I was the second, second program.

KLEIN: [00:17:44] Right. So your expectation then was that you were going to be going to India but.

STEPIEN: [00:17:51] Working in an office.

KLEIN: [00:17:51] That you'd be working in the Peace Corps, a Peace Corps office.

STEPIEN: [00:17:54] Right, right.

KLEIN: [00:17:55] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:17:55] Mm hmm. And then that was the last of the program. I don't know why they. We were, there was only two programs only.

KLEIN: [00:18:04] Yeah. The sixties, this time was I think when the greatest number of Peace Corps volunteers were overseas, maybe up to 15,000.

And another part of training usually is the selection process. You mentioned that a psychologist had interviewed you. Do you recall people talking about selection as to whether you were going to make it or not?

STEPIEN: [00:18:29] Oh, yes. Everybody was being that they said, you know, they said the language was very important. To me, I, myself, I had, I thought I had a difficult time learning this language because it was a difficult language.

KLEIN: [00:18:45] And what language was it?

STEPIEN: [00:18:46] Hindi.

KLEIN: [00:18:46] Hindi. Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:18:48] And, um, and there was about, about five of us in that class and, and, uh, so we knew it was important that we, we learn. So I, I did my best.

KLEIN: [00:19:02] And usually with training there's a mid selection board and then a final selection board. So somewhere in the middle of training, all of a sudden a few people disappeared.

STEPIEN: [00:19:12] Well, I think in our program, as I recall, it was only final.

KLEIN: [00:19:17] Okay. Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:19:18] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:19:19] And do you recall what happened? I mean, how you were informed?

STEPIEN: [00:19:24] I think, I think they met individually at the end and let us know whether we were accepted or not. In my, in my India class, out of the five of us, only three of us were selected.

KLEIN: [00:19:39] Oh.

STEPIEN: [00:19:41] And I was surprised as to maybe one that was not selected. Of course, I didn't know her background either but.

KLEIN: [00:19:53] Had the five you become sort of friendly?

STEPIEN: [00:19:55] Yes. Oh, yeah. Because we were with each other, you know, all the time, so yeah.

KLEIN: [00:20:00] And you weren't inclined to protest that someone had been deselected.

STEPIEN: [00:20:05] No.

KLEIN: [00:20:05] Yeah. So end of the three months you, final selection.

STEPIEN: [00:20:12] Final selection. Got the, they let us know who and went home and.

KLEIN: [00:20:16] So you had home leave.

STEPIEN: [00:20:17] Yes. Had a home leave and they, of course, we had our little list of what they suggested we take with us.

KLEIN: [00:20:24] Right.

STEPIEN: [00:20:24] And, um, I don't remember how long I was home. Not too long.

KLEIN: [00:20:28] And did anyone from the family sort of say, okay, now, why don't you give it up or?

STEPIEN: [00:20:33] No, no, no.

KLEIN: [00:20:34] Everybody was.

STEPIEN: [00:20:35] They were very excited for me.

KLEIN: [00:20:36] Oh, great.

STEPIEN: [00:20:38] Nervous.

KLEIN: [00:20:39] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:20:39] Probably. And, but, uh, I think they were all excited for me.

KLEIN: [00:20:42] Yeah. Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:20:43] So went home and packed and took care of my, um, affairs and my, my banking and, and, uh, anything else I had to do and. And, uh, flew to New York.

KLEIN: [00:20:59] And what was your feeling as you were leaving heading for India?

STEPIEN: [00:21:03] Excited.

KLEIN: [00:21:04] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:21:05] I was just, I was just ready for anything. I was excited.

KLEIN: [00:21:08] Do you sort of picture that, well, that puts the whole farm thing behind me and I'm now moving into a new, new world.

STEPIEN: [00:21:16] Right.

KLEIN: [00:21:18] So you reported to New York.

STEPIEN: [00:21:21] New York. And of course, they, they sent us. Um, they sent me airline, an airline ticket, of course. And, um, I think most of us or some of us, some of the groups, we went together.

KLEIN: [00:21:36] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:21:36] And, uh, my India group met in New York.

KLEIN: [00:21:40] So it was just three of you?

STEPIEN: [00:21:41] At JFK Airport. Mm hmm. Right. And, um.

KLEIN: [00:21:46] Do you join a group going over or you just flew, the three of you just flew commercial?

STEPIEN: [00:21:51] Oh, it's commercial.

KLEIN: [00:21:52] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:21:52] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:21:53] So just the three of you.

STEPIEN: [00:21:54] Yeah. And, um, and of course, the other, I think at the airport we did see maybe from other groups going to their countries, you know?

KLEIN: [00:22:06] Uh huh, yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:22:06] And uh, so yeah, we all met there and then, and then flew over to New Delhi together. Well, first, first we moved, we. From New York, we flew to London, and um, of course went through the customs and, um, flew to London.

KLEIN: [00:22:26] It all must have seemed so strange to you.

STEPIEN: [00:22:28] It was, but it was exciting.

KLEIN: [00:22:29] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:22:30] I loved it. And then from, uh, London, we went to, um, flew to Moscow.

KLEIN: [00:22:36] Oh, wow.

STEPIEN: [00:22:38] And this was like late in the evening and everything. The airport was outside of the city and, and, and everything was dark and gloomy and, and, uh. So we got off the plane there and went inside the terminal for, for tea, and we were there for a couple of hours I think.

KLEIN: [00:22:58] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:22:59] And then.

KLEIN: [00:23:00] Was there someone who was escorting you or it was just the three of you were on your own?

STEPIEN: [00:23:05] Um, I think someone. I think we were on our own, but, but there was other passengers on the plane.

KLEIN: [00:23:14] Oh, sure.

STEPIEN: [00:23:14] That were taking kind of the same trip maybe.

KLEIN: [00:23:17] Were the other two come from the same kind of background as you?

STEPIEN: [00:23:22] Um, let me see. I think one gal was from Minnesota. Um, I think we all had varied backgrounds.

KLEIN: [00:23:34] Mm hmm. Of the three, who took the lead in saying, well, maybe we should go there to get our visas or maybe we should?

STEPIEN: [00:23:42] I think we just kind of, we kind of went with the flow of the passengers.

KLEIN: [00:23:47] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:23:47] And but, but I was. I think my first time to be really nervous was when we got to Moscow and, and, the, the plane parked out on the runway somewhere. And it was like I said, it was dark and gloomy. And as we exited the plane, they took our passports.

KLEIN: [00:24:06] Yes.

STEPIEN: [00:24:08] That made me nervous. That made me nervous. And then we boarded a bus and the bus took us to the terminal and it was so quiet and no passengers.

KLEIN: [00:24:18] It was early in the morning?

STEPIEN: [00:24:20] I think this was in the evening.

KLEIN: [00:24:21] Oh, okay. Yes.

STEPIEN: [00:24:23] But there wasn't anybody around.

KLEIN: [00:24:24] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:24:25] We sat at this table and we had tea and, and, um, eventually they told us we could get, we could board. So got back on the bus and got back on the plane. And all this time I was thinking, oh my gosh, I hope they're giving me my passport, you know? And, um, finally, once we got back on the plane and took off, they did.

KLEIN: [00:24:49] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:24:50] They did.

KLEIN: [00:24:51] Your identity.

STEPIEN: [00:24:52] Oh, yes, I was, I was Ruth again so. And then from there, we went to New Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:24:59] Okay. Talk about arriving in New Delhi.

STEPIEN: [00:25:02] Oh, it was, I think we arrived like early morning because, um. And, um. Got off the plane and.

KLEIN: [00:25:12] You must have been pretty exhausted because you've been traveling.

STEPIEN: [00:25:15] Well, you know, I don't remember that. When you're 23 years old, I don't think, I don't think you get exhausted.

KLEIN: [00:25:23] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:25:23] I don't so, I wasn't. That, that's not even a, um, I don't remember that.

KLEIN: [00:25:29] But the adrenaline must have been flowing.

STEPIEN: [00:25:31] Right, yeah. Anyway, I think we got a chance to sleep on the plane and a little. And, um, so we got to. And there was the, uh, the office, Peace Corps office in New Delhi met us. And, um, from there. First thing I noticed was it was, it was hot already, and this was in about May.

KLEIN: [00:25:57] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:25:58] About May sometime. And it was pretty warm. Um. And they took us by car to a hotel and we checked in and we stayed at the hotel there for, in New Delhi, for I think about three days. And I remember that we all went down as a group for breakfast and then they.

KLEIN: [00:26:24] It's still the three of you?

STEPIEN: [00:26:25] Three of us. And then, and then they'd come from the office and have breakfast with us. And. And um.

KLEIN: [00:26:32] Do you remember first trying to use your Hindi?

STEPIEN: [00:26:35] See, like in the hotel we didn't need to.

KLEIN: [00:26:37] Okay. Everybody spoke?

STEPIEN: [00:26:39] Yeah. Everybody spoke English.

KLEIN: [00:26:40] Although, you must have taken a while to tune into Indian English cause of the accents?

STEPIEN: [00:26:44] Yeah, yeah. But, uh, but I think, I think when the I, I looked out, the hotel was like maybe five stories high, and that was like maybe on the third or fourth floor, looking down. Pretty much the first, the first look of India. And there was some, some stucco little houses down there with tin roofs and homes.

KLEIN: [00:27:13] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:27:14] And there was like a little, little, tiny, narrow canal in front and they dumped their sewage in it and, and um, and the chattering and the, and the kids playing and, and I thought, okay, this is India.

KLEIN: [00:27:32] Different than Kansas.

STEPIEN: [00:27:34] Yeah, very much, and Missouri.

KLEIN: [00:27:35] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:27:36] So then I, I, uh, then I also remember going, um, for breakfast to the dining room of the hotel.

KLEIN: [00:27:43] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:27:44] Oh my gosh. The, the, uh, fruit they put before us. Mangoes, papayas. I've never tasted anything so good. Of course, at home, we had our fresh peaches off the trees and pears and plums and everything. That was, that was good. But this was just wonderful.

KLEIN: [00:28:03] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:28:04] It was so good.

KLEIN: [00:28:05] Yeah. A nice welcome to the country.

STEPIEN: [00:28:08] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:28:09] So during the three days, did you go to the Peace Corps office or just hang around?

STEPIEN: [00:28:14] Oh, I think they let us rest quite a bit.

KLEIN: [00:28:18] Uh huh.

STEPIEN: [00:28:19] Um, which I can remember doing, pulling the shades and just sleeping and, um. And then they'd come over and, um, you know, I. If they took us to the office, I don't remember. I don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:28:31] That's okay.

STEPIEN: [00:28:32] But yeah.

KLEIN: [00:28:34] And do you remember your first introduction to Indian food? I mean, the breakfast was exotic.

STEPIEN: [00:28:41] Oh, it was. It was wonderful.

KLEIN: [00:28:42] How about, I mean, I picture curries, but, uh.

STEPIEN: [00:28:46] Probably in the dining room. Um. Of course I liked, you know, I liked everything I ate, the curries and the.

KLEIN: [00:28:54] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:28:54] And, uh. Of course, and I think in a nice hotel like that, they tend to serve European type food rather than the local Indian.

KLEIN: [00:29:04] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:29:05] So yeah.

KLEIN: [00:29:07] So after the three days?

STEPIEN: [00:29:09] Three days, we, um, they put me on a plane and I went down to Hyderabad. Another gal went to Bangalore. Another one went to, I believe it was Madras.

KLEIN: [00:29:23] And New Delhi was the main Peace Corps office?

STEPIEN: [00:29:26] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:29:27] And who told you where you were going and what it was?

STEPIEN: [00:29:32] Oh, the director.

KLEIN: [00:29:34] Do you remember who it was?

STEPIEN: [00:29:36] Um, I don't. I'm sorry.

KLEIN: [00:29:38] That's alright.

STEPIEN: [00:29:39] Yeah, I don't.

KLEIN: [00:29:40] But what were you told? You were going to be a secretary in?

STEPIEN: [00:29:45] In the regional office.

KLEIN: [00:29:48] Okay. And what was the region?

STEPIEN: [00:29:50] Region was, um, well, it was like the central. It was Andhra Pradesh, which is a very big state in India. And there were many volunteer, many groups there already.

KLEIN: [00:30:02] And the center was Hyderabad.

STEPIEN: [00:30:05] Right.

KLEIN: [00:30:05] Okay. So you flew, another flight?

STEPIEN: [00:30:08] Yes. Flew to end the course.

KLEIN: [00:30:10] Just by yourself?

STEPIEN: [00:30:10] Yes. Yes. And, and then the office met me. The director met me. I mean, the regional director met me. And I remember her name was Joyce Russell.

KLEIN: [00:30:23] Mm hmm.

STEPIEN: [00:30:24] And the assistant regional. And there was two of them at the time, Tom Ahrens. And the next one was Nick. Oh. I'll remember his name. So two assistant regional directors. And they all met me and.

KLEIN: [00:30:49] All Americans?

STEPIEN: [00:30:50] Yes. And they met me and brought me back to the office. And I think she, um, Joyce had had a home there and, um.

KLEIN: [00:31:03] In Hyderabad?

STEPIEN: [00:31:05] In Hyderabad, and, uh, so I think first we went to her house and, and, and in a couple of weeks, she was gonna be taking a leave back to the States. So she asked me if I'd like to stay there while she was gone.

KLEIN: [00:31:19] Mm hmm.

STEPIEN: [00:31:20] And it was, it was very nice. I mean it's a beautiful, beautiful home, and uh.

KLEIN: [00:31:26] She must have had a few servants.

STEPIEN: [00:31:29] Yes. [tape break] Oh. Um.

KLEIN: [00:31:35] So that must have been a novelty. I mean, I'm sure you would not had a personal cook or.

STEPIEN: [00:31:40] No, and I didn't. And his name was Joseph, and he was wonderful. And, of course, he already knew to fix Joyce her favorite meals and some Indian meals. And I'd never been waited on before, ever.

KLEIN: [00:31:54] Right.

STEPIEN: [00:31:56] And it was a very strange feeling.

KLEIN: [00:31:58] I mean, you, you must have at some point said, I'm supposed to be a Peace Corps volunteer, and here I am, you know, living in the lap of luxury.

STEPIEN: [00:32:06] Right. So, but, but I started off right away going to the office and, and, uh.

KLEIN: [00:32:11] How far was it from the house to the office?

STEPIEN: [00:32:14] Um.

KLEIN: [00:32:14] Well, how'd you get there?

STEPIEN: [00:32:15] I walked. Um. Oh, I would say. I think at first, I think the associate director would maybe come. He had a vehicle assigned to him. And I, I think while I was maybe at his, at Joyce's house, I think he picked me up.

KLEIN: [00:32:31] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:32:32] But, uh, later on in my own place, I walked.

KLEIN: [00:32:35] Right. But let's stay with the first couple of weeks while you're there. You're staying at Joyce's.

STEPIEN: [00:32:41] I think he picked me up. Yeah, because it was further out.

KLEIN: [00:32:44] You weren't nervous walking the streets?

STEPIEN: [00:32:47] No.

KLEIN: [00:32:48] Okay. So you settled into Joyce's.

STEPIEN: [00:32:53] Uh huh. Go to the office and.

KLEIN: [00:32:55] You're at the office, and describe the office.

STEPIEN: [00:32:58] The office was, uh, was a, um, had been like a two story house and they transformed it into, into offices.

KLEIN: [00:33:06] Yeah. And.

STEPIEN: [00:33:09] Um, there already was a volunteer there from the first secretarial program. Her name was Barbara. And um, so she was working for the, mainly for Joyce, the director, regional director. And I assisted the associate directors. [dog barks] And um, and there was two there. So we were on the second floor and uh, and so I got to know the, uh. [tape stops]

KLEIN: [00:33:44] So we're talking about your first few days at work.

STEPIEN: [00:33:48] In the office and, um.

KLEIN: [00:33:50] Now, how many, how many volunteers were in that region, approximately?

STEPIEN: [00:33:56] That region? Oh my. Oh, hundreds. It probably was.

KLEIN: [00:34:01] It was in the hundreds?

STEPIEN: [00:34:02] In India itself, there were 1,500 volunteers.

KLEIN: [00:34:06] Wow.

STEPIEN: [00:34:07] In this region there was, oh, I would say. I would guess four or 500 about.

KLEIN: [00:34:17] And what were they doing?

STEPIEN: [00:34:19] Oh, there were programs, um, health programs. Um, agriculture, like poultry. And um.

KLEIN: [00:34:29] Any teachers?

STEPIEN: [00:34:32] Um, yes, some teachers and, oh, lots of agriculture type programs, gardening type. There were two volunteers in Hyderabad and they were working with, in auto maintenance.

KLEIN: [00:34:55] Huh.

STEPIEN: [00:34:55] And they were working with maybe I think it was privately or government owned maintenance programs. And so they're working with them.

KLEIN: [00:35:10] Training mechanics and?

STEPIEN: [00:35:12] Right.

KLEIN: [00:35:12] Yeah. Mm hmm.

STEPIEN: [00:35:15] And, uh.

KLEIN: [00:35:17] Was there, uh, well, let's talk about the office a little more. So you were secretary to the two assistant directors. And what was the typical workday like?

STEPIEN: [00:35:32] Oh, typical was.

KLEIN: [00:35:33] If there was one.

STEPIEN: [00:35:34] Oh, pretty much. Um, start about probably 8:30 or 9:00, and um, until 5:00 or 6:00 at night. And when it was during busy times, I could be there at 8:00 at night working.

KLEIN: [00:35:53] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:35:54] Because, um, there were so many volunteers and then, then continuously there was volunteers coming into the region. So we had to plan to meet them and hand out materials and um, take care of those volunteers. Usually they were in the city probably a couple days, so we had to arrange for, um, for them to stay at a hotel.

KLEIN: [00:36:22] Were you doing those arrangements or did the assistants?

STEPIEN: [00:36:25] Mostly the assistants, but I kind of helped them.

KLEIN: [00:36:27] The backup, yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:36:29] There's a lot of correspondence then with, with the volunteers in the field, if they had questions, if they had problems or issues, and um, even correspondence with, um, local, um, government people.

KLEIN: [00:36:44] Oh, okay. Now this is all for the most part written and you're working off the typewriter?

STEPIEN: [00:36:52] Oh, yes.

KLEIN: [00:36:53] You're typing up.

STEPIEN: [00:36:54] Oh, yes, the typewriter. Oh my. Of course, they were manual back then. This was 1966.

KLEIN: [00:37:01] It was not, it wasn't an electric?

STEPIEN: [00:37:04] I think the electrics were. I think there were electrics but.

KLEIN: [00:37:08] Back in the U.S. Yeah, not there.

STEPIEN: [00:37:11] No, they were manual typewriters and.

KLEIN: [00:37:14] Carbon paper.

STEPIEN: [00:37:15] Carbon paper. And I, I think, I was used to, you know, fairly nice at my last, at the job I had, uh, in the States, you know, a fairly nice typewriter. But this was some government issue or something. Very, very difficult to type. And, and I, I think I asked for maybe if there was an, eventually, pretty soon I got a nicer typewriter like, like an Underwood or something.

KLEIN: [00:37:47] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:37:48] Which, which was much better than the first issue. But uh, oh yes, everything was typed.

KLEIN: [00:37:54] And the kinds of correspondence you were handling was communications with volunteers.

STEPIEN: [00:38:00] The volunteers, manuals. Um.

KLEIN: [00:38:03] Manuals?

STEPIEN: [00:38:05] For the new volunteers maybe, because I think we, all the groups that came in were like doing something different, like one group of, of, of, uh, nursing, not nursing, but health care. And the next group would be agriculture of some kind. So, so.

KLEIN: [00:38:24] And this was mostly technical, kind of?

STEPIEN: [00:38:27] Technical and.

KLEIN: [00:38:28] How to do the job?

STEPIEN: [00:38:30] Uh, I think suggestions or maybe suggestions? And then other things were, um, maybe how to dealing with maybe the local people. And I believe things like that, that nature.

KLEIN: [00:38:48] Was there a lot of correspondence that you handled with between the office and the main office or directly with Washington?

STEPIEN: [00:38:56] Not with Washington. If it would be any place, it'd probably be the regional office. I mean, I mean, the main office in New Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:39:04] So you didn't get involved with.

STEPIEN: [00:39:07] Not Washington, no.

KLEIN: [00:39:08] Do you recall if you had a security clearance? I mean, there were some documents that were classified.

STEPIEN: [00:39:14] Uh, I don't know.

KLEIN: [00:39:15] Limited official use and.

STEPIEN: [00:39:18] Yeah, I don't remember that.

KLEIN: [00:39:19] Okay, it's possible.

STEPIEN: [00:39:22] And then in the office also, there were some, some, uh, national, Indian national people.

KLEIN: [00:39:28] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:39:29] And I remember one was, his name was Cirrus and he did some typing. And of course, the, uh, and then there was another one. There was a gal, her name was Hydra and she was. She was a, uh, she was a Hindu.

KLEIN: [00:39:49] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:39:49] She came in in her saris and she did some typing. But I, I just remember, though, that I just was a little appalled at how. [dog barks, tape stops] That I remember something I see after I had typed something and, and their work was, of course, culturally so different. I mean, mistakes

and, and, of course, the, the sentence structure and all that was just, it was so different. It was just interesting how different it was.

KLEIN: [00:40:23] And you weren't expected to supervise or correct her work?

STEPIEN: [00:40:27] I, I think occasionally, yes. Yeah. If it was too bad, they just had to do it over. But of course the Indians, even, even the government officials, um, you know, they were used to that, that sort of English, you know, they were. Cause we got letters from them the same way, so we weren't too concerned about it.

KLEIN: [00:40:52] But it wasn't a role that Peace Corps or your staff or the directors said, well, why don't you try to help them?

STEPIEN: [00:41:01] Occasionally I did, yes, yes.

KLEIN: [00:41:03] Oh, okay. Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:41:03] But, uh, yeah, I, I enjoyed, I enjoyed working with them and, and, uh.

KLEIN: [00:41:09] By now, have you had a chance to begin using your Hindi or was it more comfortable to work in English?

STEPIEN: [00:41:15] We were in the office. It, of course, English and we were so busy that, that, you know, I had Sunday off and, and, uh, and that for a while Sunday was just, well, the whole time I was there, Sunday was just, you know, rest as much as you could because we had long, long days and long hours.

KLEIN: [00:41:36] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:41:36] But, uh. But I used Hindi for, um, uh, maybe the, oh, some of the office, maybe the, the. We had some janitors and.

KLEIN: [00:41:50] Were there drivers, Peace Corps drivers?

STEPIEN: [00:41:53] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:41:53] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:41:54] Uh, yeah, we had, we had a driver also. Yeah. So I kind of experimented. Use it here and there.

KLEIN: [00:42:00] So after three or four weeks, did you wake up one morning and say, oh my goodness, I'm in India and I'm a Peace Corps volunteer?

STEPIEN: [00:42:10] No, I think, I think I realized it from the first day I arrived in Delhi, you know, and it was just. And of course, everything was just, you know, something every day was something new and different I'd see and experience. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:42:25] Let's talk now about, initially you stayed at Joyce's house.

STEPIEN: [00:42:30] Right. Right.

KLEIN: [00:42:31] Let's talk about the transition.

STEPIEN: [00:42:33] Okay. And then after she was gone, she was in the States for about a month, she came back and, and so I think I was there for another, um, week or two and, and started looking for my own place.

KLEIN: [00:42:45] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:42:46] And, um, I don't know how I found, I think it's just word of mouth because, um, because of course all the Indians were just, you know, there's, there's foreigners, Americans and, and we just got a lot of, a lot of attention from everybody and, and about. Someone came to the office and asked if anybody was looking for a place to live. And in this neighborhood, they had just finished building a little, a little, little house. And so I went to see it and.

KLEIN: [00:43:22] How far from the office?

STEPIEN: [00:43:24] Um, walking. It was about, about 15 minutes.

KLEIN: [00:43:30] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:43:31] So, um. So I moved there and went.

KLEIN: [00:43:36] Describe the house.

STEPIEN: [00:43:37] Okay. It was kind of a stucco structure. And you walked in the front door, which was out, well, of course, a little court like yard around it and through the gate. And it was front door and off to the left was kind of a, kind of a diamond shaped room. And it was, it was the kitchen area.

KLEIN: [00:43:59] Uh huh.

STEPIEN: [00:44:00] And, um, and that's where I had my meals. And there was a window and, and a couple of windows and they had my meals there. And, uh, and then there was a door. To the back of this room, there was a door out the back with the little, uh, a couple of steps. There was another little door, and that was the restroom.

KLEIN: [00:44:23] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:44:25] Okay. Of course there wasn't. It was just a little walk-in with the hole in the floor.

KLEIN: [00:44:29] Right, right.

STEPIEN: [00:44:30] And, um. And then, uh.

KLEIN: [00:44:34] Did you have electricity?

STEPIEN: [00:44:36] Uh. Yes, I did. Um, but not all day long.

KLEIN: [00:44:42] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:44:43] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:44:43] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:44:44] And, uh. And then. And then from the front door forward, there's like a little, little room. And there was, uh, used as my bedroom. And then there was, uh, uh, another little sitting room. And I just, I put, like, a couch in there.

KLEIN: [00:45:03] Now, Peace Corps was paying the rent?

STEPIEN: [00:45:05] They gave me an allowance. They gave all the volunteers an allowance.

KLEIN: [00:45:09] So you got the same as any other volunteer?

STEPIEN: [00:45:12] I think the volunteers in, in the cities got a little more because there was just, the cost of living was a little bit more. So I got a little bit more than the, the ones out in, uh, in the little villages.

KLEIN: [00:45:24] Did you also get a settling in allowance so you could buy some furniture?

STEPIEN: [00:45:27] Uh, yes, I did. So I got, um, of course, a table and some pots and pans and.

KLEIN: [00:45:35] Did anyone from Peace Corps come out and check the place to see that it was appropriate? Or are they just trust that you?

STEPIEN: [00:45:41] I don't think so, no. I don't remember. I don't think so.

KLEIN: [00:45:46] So this is the end of your second month, third month, is when?

STEPIEN: [00:45:51] Oh, this is probably into the, probably about the third by that time. About the third.

KLEIN: [00:45:58] Did you hire a steward?

STEPIEN: [00:46:00] I hired, um, a cook. Yes.

KLEIN: [00:46:02] A cook. Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:46:03] Uh huh. And, um.

KLEIN: [00:46:04] And the Peace Corps had no problem with that?

STEPIEN: [00:46:09] No.

KLEIN: [00:46:09] They didn't say you should not.

STEPIEN: [00:46:10] And I think, I think the cook I got was recommended by maybe Joyce, the, uh, regional director's cook, Joseph. I think maybe he recommended her as someone he knew. So. So it was easy that way. I didn't have to go and, you know.

KLEIN: [00:46:27] Do you remember her name?

STEPIEN: [00:46:29] Um. I think. No, I don't.

KLEIN: [00:46:34] Okay.

STEPIEN: [00:46:35] But I've got it written down in my journal but.

KLEIN: [00:46:37] That's alright. But she did the shopping and the cooking?

STEPIEN: [00:46:41] Yes, and I didn't have, um, no refrigerator, of course, or anything like that. So every morning, every morning, she'd go out. She'd come in and she'd go out and do the, uh, do the shopping.

KLEIN: [00:46:51] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:46:52] And, um, I think I walked home for lunch and she'd have lunch prepared.

KLEIN: [00:46:57] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:46:58] And then I'd go back to the office and probably take about an hour off for lunch.

KLEIN: [00:47:02] Right.

STEPIEN: [00:47:03] And then I go back to the office and she'd have, um, dinner for me when I came back.

KLEIN: [00:47:09] The houses around you, were Indians were living there?

STEPIEN: [00:47:13] Uh, yes. It was just a typical Indian neighborhood.

KLEIN: [00:47:17] Right.

STEPIEN: [00:47:17] And my landlords lived in the back.

KLEIN: [00:47:21] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:47:23] Kind of you walked from the courtyard, well, not really a courtyard, but not much there. You walk through the front gate and kind of past my house, and they, their family lived right back there. And it was a typical little kind of, uh, old, old stucco, shaggy type thing. And, uh, and that's where they lived. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:47:49] What were your relations with the landlord's family?

STEPIEN: [00:47:52] It was good. It was good. They were very, they had, they had a herd of cows. And they had a little, and I'm just now remembering, I don't know how they managed to build this little new addition on. I really never thought about it and never asked. I'm just now, I don't know how it happened. But, but they had this herd of buffalo and, and, um. Anyway, my, outside my front door, there was a window and they put a little flower box. And I thought, wow, I'm a farm girl. I can grow anything I want. Flowers. I thought flowers would be beautiful. So I put flowers in there and the buffalo would come around and eat my flowers. I never had flowers. They're all eaten down, you know? And, uh. But, um.

KLEIN: [00:48:49] So were you comfortable in living alone in that setting?

STEPIEN: [00:48:52] Yes, I was.

KLEIN: [00:48:54] That's good. I mean, because you're in the midst of.

STEPIEN: [00:48:57] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:48:57] People who are different.

STEPIEN: [00:48:59] Right. And I had a lock on my door and, of course, I used that. And they had, you know, they had children and sons and, and, uh.

KLEIN: [00:49:08] Were you able to become friends with any of the family or?

STEPIEN: [00:49:11] Yes. And one of their sons was, um, he liked to draw. So I remember sitting in the chair one day and he, and I've still got the drawing. He drew my picture. He drew my picture. And, and, of course, they loved American music.

KLEIN: [00:49:30] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:49:30] They had radios and they were listening to American music and, and, uh. So they were curious and we'd talk. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:49:43] Mostly in English?

STEPIEN: [00:49:44] Um, both. And I, mostly in English, yes. Yeah. And, uh, and, you know, they'd try to help me with my Hindu because I wasn't very good and. And in, in a way I could, I could, I could, uh, communicate with, with their parents, my landlords, and, and by words, by gestures, by their little English. So we got along fine.

KLEIN: [00:50:11] Sometimes the most difficult time for a volunteer is the first Thanksgiving and Christmas.

STEPIEN: [00:50:19] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:50:20] And do you recall?

STEPIEN: [00:50:21] Yes, I do. Um, let's see, Thanksgiving. I remember we had. There was a doctor in town, like a.

KLEIN: [00:50:32] Peace Corps doctor?

STEPIEN: [00:50:32] Peace Corps doctor. And I don't know, of course, this is the first Thanksgiving or the second, but. But probably the second. I don't remember the first. We went to, uh. Okay. The first Thanksgiving here is coming back to me. The first Thanksgiving, we went to the regional director's house and, um.

KLEIN: [00:50:55] Joyce.

STEPIEN: [00:50:55] Joyce. And of course, the associate directors had their own places and we all came and, and, uh.

KLEIN: [00:51:02] It was just the staff?

STEPIEN: [00:51:04] Like a potluck thing. And the staff and, and any of the volunteers that were in town or in the area could come too. So there was a full house of volunteers and we had, um, I remember we had, um, turkey probably. Somewhere they got turkey. Yeah. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:51:22] Well, was there was there an American community in Hyderabad?

STEPIEN: [00:51:26] Yes, there was a USAID office.

KLEIN: [00:51:29] And so there was probably a commissary for them.

STEPIEN: [00:51:32] Uh, I.

KLEIN: [00:51:35] Or it wasn't a.

STEPIEN: [00:51:36] I don't think so because I don't recall ever. I don't know that there was.

KLEIN: [00:51:43] Probably there was in New Delhi and it may be that they could get stuff from there.

STEPIEN: [00:51:48] And of course, they said, you know, we were welcome to get, ask our families to send food and whatever. I mean, like dry foods.

KLEIN: [00:51:58] And did you?

STEPIEN: [00:51:59] Yes, I did. Yeah. But, uh, yeah, we had Thanksgiving at the, and then the second year we had Thanksgiving I remember at the, at the doctor's home.

KLEIN: [00:52:10] Do you recall the doctor's name?

STEPIEN: [00:52:12] Uh, Allen Margolis. And he was married and, um, because he wasn't there when I got there, he was, came like a year later.

KLEIN: [00:52:22] In Hyderabad, was there a Peace Corps hostel so that?

STEPIEN: [00:52:27] Um.

KLEIN: [00:52:27] Volunteers coming from upcountry?

STEPIEN: [00:52:29] No, no, I think any volunteers that came in for a while either stayed with other volunteers or maybe I think, I think the Peace Corps had stayed, um, paid for a hotel.

KLEIN: [00:52:39] Oh, but there weren't that many volunteers assigned in the Hyderabad area?

STEPIEN: [00:52:44] No.

KLEIN: [00:52:44] You said just two that you knew.

STEPIEN: [00:52:45] The two mechanics, um, and about two of us in the office and then the directors and no. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:52:55] And so during the first year there were two Peace Corps secretaries?

STEPIEN: [00:53:00] Right. And, well, she left, I think it was just a matter of months and she left.

KLEIN: [00:53:04] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [00:53:05] Yeah. She went back to the States. Well, I was the replacement.

KLEIN: [00:53:09] Okay, so it was just you then?

STEPIEN: [00:53:11] Right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:53:12] And, uh, some Indian staff.

STEPIEN: [00:53:20] Right.

KLEIN: [00:53:21] Again, during the first year would, was there a lot of volunteer traffic through the office? I mean, weekends tend to be?

STEPIEN: [00:53:33] Not so much weekends, but about every, oh, I want to say every six months or so, we'd bring one group in for a little R&R, a little, some conference time and some good time.

KLEIN: [00:53:47] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:53:47] And so then we put them up in a, in a hotel and, and have the meetings and they'd wander in and out of the office and, and use some of our facilities like phones and typing and um.

KLEIN: [00:54:04] Did you become close friends with any of the volunteers more than others?

STEPIEN: [00:54:10] Not really. Didn't have a chance to, um.

KLEIN: [00:54:13] Sounds like you were very busy.

STEPIEN: [00:54:14] Very busy. Really, yeah. But one good thing. Oh, also, while they were in town, um, of course, we'd go out and eat together.

KLEIN: [00:54:23] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:54:25] And there's a couple of night spots and we'd go in there and. And they had, um, of course, American music and these Indian bands, and we'd go out there on the floor and we'd dance like the, the twist in the, in the, in the, all that, all those dances. And the Indians of course they just watched, you know, and they were so fascinated with it. And we just had such a good time. And the Indian beer was so good.

KLEIN: [00:54:57] Uh huh.

STEPIEN: [00:54:58] So good. And it was, uh, it was a darker, heavier beer. And it was wonderful.

KLEIN: [00:55:02] It came in liter bottles, the large size?

STEPIEN: [00:55:05] Yes, the large size. And it was good. And then, um. Of course, also women, Indian women, you'd see them out in the streets once in a while, but, but you'd never see them at the movies. You'd never see them, um, at these nightclubs and restaurants. You'd never, Indian women just didn't go out. Men did, of course.

KLEIN: [00:55:30] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:55:30] And, um, of course, they were fascinated with us women. That's for sure.

KLEIN: [00:55:35] Did any of the Indian men try to date you or did you date?

STEPIEN: [00:55:39] Yes. Yes, there's one. And, um, he was a Sikh. And, um. And I don't know exactly where I met him, but he and a friend would. They'd come over and hang out and.

KLEIN: [00:55:57] Come over to?

STEPIEN: [00:55:58] To my house and he'd bring me little gifts. And one gift was, oh, please take my dog. He'll be company for you. So and so this little, it was a cute little. Oh, I don't know what kind, little, like a Scottie or something like that, but it was just hairy and it'd never been trimmed and.

KLEIN: [00:56:18] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:56:19] And, and, so okay, I, it was a kind of a cute dog and he'd sleep under my bed and next thing I knew, my, my little cot and my, my little mattress was covered with ticks.

KLEIN: [00:56:36] Fleas.

STEPIEN: [00:56:37] Fleas and ticks and crawling little things. And finally I said, please take your dog back because there's bugs everywhere.

KLEIN: [00:56:46] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:56:47] And then I had to clean my place up. So he took that back and he gave me, he gave me, um, shoes, high heeled shoes. And, um, he took me to visit his, I think an aunt lived in town, and he and his friend took me over there and we had tea and I visited with her and it was very interesting. And they had, apparently they're pretty wealthy. She had a nice place. Nice place.

KLEIN: [00:57:17] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:57:18] And then every once in a while he'd take me out to, um, oh, he'd come by and we'd have lunch. We'd go to a hotel and the dining

room. And I remember sitting there and these, well, we had maybe a drink. Huge, huge cashews.

KLEIN: [00:57:35] Oh.

STEPIEN: [00:57:36] They were wonderful. We'd go in the dining room and have this wonderful big meal. And then I had to go back to work and work on a full stomach. And I remember, oh, it was just a little bit too much, you know.

KLEIN: [00:57:49] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:57:49] But so we did every once in a while and then, um, but uh. One nice thing about it, though, he, he, uh, he wanted to be friends, but he didn't want to be, um, no romance, which was a relief for me because I didn't have to deal with that. And then somebody said later on that he was married but.

KLEIN: [00:58:13] Yeah, yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:58:14] But, but, but he was just, we were just friends.

KLEIN: [00:58:16] It was just companionship.

STEPIEN: [00:58:18] Right. And I think he was very curious as to, as to American women. And so.

KLEIN: [00:58:25] And he spoke obviously English.

STEPIEN: [00:58:26] He spoke good English, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:58:27] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:58:28] But he'd been educated well, and yeah. But, uh, and then he took me on a, on a safari.

KLEIN: [00:58:34] Oh.

STEPIEN: [00:58:35] And they call them *shikars*. *Shikars*.

KLEIN: [00:58:37] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:58:37] So he and his friend and, um, in a jeep, a driver. And we went out, it was just supposed to be like a weekend over one night, overnight thing. Ended up almost three days, just incident after incident with the drivers and, oh my, but, uh, it was interesting. It was, it was kind of fun.

KLEIN: [00:59:03] Was it in an area that was particularly beautiful or wild animals or just?

STEPIEN: [00:59:09] Well, we went to look for wild animals and then so it was the two of them. It was me. It was a driver. And then a couple other men that had, had the guns. And, and I don't know if the other two men just wanted to go along or they were kind of like, probably like guides.

KLEIN: [00:59:27] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [00:59:28] And so we traveled and traveled in a jeep, and it wasn't all that comfortable, you know?

KLEIN: [00:59:33] Right.

STEPIEN: [00:59:34] And, uh, then we'd stop and eat. And, um, I remember the first night we stayed in a little hostel someplace. Yeah. And, uh, and then.

KLEIN: [00:59:46] Were you on leave from, taking vacation from work?

STEPIEN: [00:59:48] Like I said, it was just, it was supposed to be just a little weekend trip. Like a Saturday and a Sunday maybe. I took like one day off, and, um. And then we didn't see any animals. We'd even be driving at night in the, in the brush and the, kind of like the, like we were talking about in Tucson and Phoenix area, kind of the scrubby, scrubby country. And, and we never saw one animal. Not one.

KLEIN: [01:00:19] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:00:20] And then these, these other two guides whatever they were, complaining the whole entire time because they wanted a nice. They wanted like to spend more time out there. And we went to visit some, it was a little grass hut.

KLEIN: [01:00:40] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:00:40] Clear out in the country somewhere. And, and apparently the, the, the guides knew, knew the family. And so we went there and we visited for a while and then we took off again and we were like hours away. All of a sudden these guys realized, oh, they left their guns at the hut. That's when we, that's when we found that little hostel, I guess.

KLEIN: [01:01:04] Yeah. Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:01:05] They were gone, oh, they were gone over half a day.

KLEIN: [01:01:09] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:01:10] Almost a day they were gone, going back after their, after their guns and. And we just figured they did it on purpose, you know, but we stayed at this hostel and slept and ate and.

KLEIN: [01:01:23] No one had cell phones.

STEPIEN: [01:01:25] Nothing, nothing. Finally they came back and we went out again and. And, you know, I was, they delivered me back to Hyderabad like a whole day later, later than I was supposed to have been.

KLEIN: [01:01:40] And people in the office worried about you or?

STEPIEN: [01:01:43] They were concerned.

KLEIN: [01:01:43] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:01:44] They were concerned but, uh.

KLEIN: [01:01:47] Nothing they could do.

STEPIEN: [01:01:48] Nothing they could do. And of course, you know, being it was India after I got back and told my story, they understood. So yeah.

KLEIN: [01:01:57] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:01:57] So that that was kind of, yeah, it was fun.

KLEIN: [01:02:01] And the first Christmas?

STEPIEN: [01:02:02] First Christmas I was, I was, uh, raised Catholic and the two, I got to, I got to know pretty good the two volunteers, mechanic volunteers, in Hyderabad.

KLEIN: [01:02:16] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:02:16] And they both had motorcycles.

KLEIN: [01:02:19] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:02:20] And sometimes in the evening on weekends we, we'd spend a lot of time together, we'd go to movies. We'd, um, go out to eat, we'd hang out at their house, my house. Go sightseeing around the city. And, uh. So the first Christmas I remember we went to, uh, we went to. I think one of the other volunteers was Catholic and we went to church. Well, I was like going to church every Sunday anyway.

KLEIN: [01:02:55] Oh, you were?

STEPIEN: [01:02:56] I did. At that time I did. I'd get up and, and we, then we'd go together and sometimes I'd go by myself.

KLEIN: [01:03:02] Were you the only European in the church?

STEPIEN: [01:03:05] I think there was others. I think. [tape break]

KLEIN: [01:03:11] Okay. So you went to.

STEPIEN: [01:03:13] Went to church and I was going every Sunday and I remember going to like midnight mass and I remember there being a lot of candles and kind of like a procession, and they made a really big deal out of it. There was quite a few Christians Indians there. Um, so, um. Did that and then I don't remember. Oh, okay. So, um, I remember decorating my little house. The good old high school days of floats, homecoming floats, you know, and parades and everything. So. So I got this, I found this chicken wire, made probably a two foot cone shape out of a chicken wire. Then I found some, some red and green crepe paper, stuffed it in the chicken wire. And that was my Christmas tree.

KLEIN: [01:04:09] Great, great.

STEPIEN: [01:04:09] And I put little, somehow, I don't know what kind of ornaments on it. And of course, my neighbors, my landlady and my land people, they, landlords loved it. And, you know, and that was new to them, too, you know.

KLEIN: [01:04:24] Right. Did, had you bought gifts and sent home, you know?

STEPIEN: [01:04:29] No. At that time I found that that the, there's a lot of corruption in the post office.

KLEIN: [01:04:37] Ah.

STEPIEN: [01:04:37] Because while I was there, um, the, the Indian woman national that was there, she was. She was going to get married soon. And of course, the brides have their, the big rings for their wedding. The big rings in their nose.

KLEIN: [01:04:56] Right.

STEPIEN: [01:04:56] And so she was going to go and get her nose pierced.

KLEIN: [01:05:00] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:05:00] And so, so one day she and I. Her cousin was a doctor in the hospital. So she and I, she and I went to the hospital and she got her nose pierced and I got my ears pierced and.

KLEIN: [01:05:17] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:05:17] And so then I, I asked my family, I said, no, when you're, when you're sending like dried milk to me or cake mixes or, um. I said. I said, you know, some people find items missing, you know. I said, kind of open a box maybe of powdered milk and hide some earrings in the box. Well, I still, that way I still didn't get everything, you know, the Indians would open and take what they wanted. So I got most of the food, I think, but not. So after a while, I said, you know, I can buy earrings here.

KLEIN: [01:05:57] Yeah. Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:05:58] But, um.

KLEIN: [01:06:01] So you didn't exchange presents, I mean.

STEPIEN: [01:06:04] I didn't, no. So I didn't send anything home and I just collected. And then when I got home after two years, then they got their, everybody got something.

KLEIN: [01:06:12] Right. Right.

STEPIEN: [01:06:13] Souvenirs and things, you know.

KLEIN: [01:06:16] But spending the first Christmas away from home wasn't a problem?

STEPIEN: [01:06:20] Oh, no.

KLEIN: [01:06:20] You were involved with lots of things.

STEPIEN: [01:06:22] Oh, sure.

KLEIN: [01:06:23] Was there much of an American community in Hyderabad?

STEPIEN: [01:06:28] Um, and like I said, USAID, there was an office there. But we didn't, um. I remember 4th of July, we had a big, the first 4th of July I was there. Um. The AID office was in a separate little compound. And, and I remember going there for 4th of July, having a honest to goodness picnic.

KLEIN: [01:06:53] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:06:53] And fireworks and it's just a big celebration. And any volunteers that were not too far out of the city, they'd come in and, and, uh.

KLEIN: [01:07:05] But the Americans who were with AID, they didn't try to socialize with, pull you into their circle?

STEPIEN: [01:07:12] Not very much, no. I was there for the 4th of July but.

KLEIN: [01:07:16] Was there a conscious policy of, you know, staying separate?

STEPIEN: [01:07:20] No, I don't think so. There was a, I think it was very, it was probably like, like maybe a couple of people in one little office. But other than that, there wasn't, there wasn't too many others. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:07:35] So during the first year, you also get some leave time. I gather you went off hunting with the Sikh.

STEPIEN: [01:07:42] Oh yeah. Yes. Yes. And then, um, I mean my one vacation, one of the volunteers, one of the mechanics, then, then we, um. He and I went to Bombay.

KLEIN: [01:07:55] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [01:07:56] We took a, we, uh, took a train to Bombay, and I think we spent like a week there so. And, uh. Oh, gosh, we had. I remember, I remember

going to a restaurant and having a Coke, an honest to goodness Coke, and steak.

KLEIN: [01:08:18] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:08:19] And it was so good.

KLEIN: [01:08:20] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:08:21] And then did some shopping and I got earrings, and I'm still wearing my earrings. I still have them.

KLEIN: [01:08:29] That's great.

STEPIEN: [01:08:29] I got earrings. I got a, I think I got a sari there. I got, uh.

KLEIN: [01:08:34] Did, uh, just since you mentioned it. Did you ever wear saris?

STEPIEN: [01:08:39] I did, yeah. Not right away, but after a while. Oh, I did wear their little, um, *shalwar kameez*, um, the, like the, like the loose. Well, at that time it wasn't loose. And they still wear them. They still wear them today like the.

KLEIN: [01:08:56] The big over blouse.

STEPIEN: [01:08:57] Form fitting, the over blouse thing with the, with the, uh, with the pants that are, they're very full at the hips and come down skinny and narrow at the, at the ankle. And I had, and I still have those, I had several of those made.

KLEIN: [01:09:12] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:09:12] And I went to a tailor and they made those for me and I picked out my fabric and. At that time though, at that time it was a very form fitting like, like at the waist. And like a, like a form fitting top. It came down to like above the knees, just above the knees. And but now, of course, they're wearing them very loose.

KLEIN: [01:09:36] Where would you wear the?

STEPIEN: [01:09:38] I wore them all the time. I wore them to work. I wore them.

KLEIN: [01:09:40] Oh, okay.

STEPIEN: [01:09:42] Yeah, uh huh. I didn't, uh, every once in a while, I wore my American clothes. But, but, uh, it was just. I wore these most of the time.

KLEIN: [01:09:50] Was your family happy to see you in Indian dress? I mean, the landlord's family.

STEPIEN: [01:09:57] Yes, yes. I had all different. I probably had a trunk down there, probably, oh, probably about six or seven different outfits. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:10:12] Were there any restrictions on travel or, I mean, were you expected to stay within India?

STEPIEN: [01:10:17] No, not really. But India was so big. And then another time we had took the Bombay trip. Another time we went down to Madras.

KLEIN: [01:10:25] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:10:25] And there was a couple of volunteers down there that my, my friend knew and went down there and visited them. But another thing which was very nice for both of us in the office, and two of us at first. The associate directors took trips out in the areas to visit the volunteers.

KLEIN: [01:10:48] Right.

STEPIEN: [01:10:49] And so every once in a while, they'd take us along.

KLEIN: [01:10:52] Oh, great.

STEPIEN: [01:10:53] Which to me was just fantastic because we got, we got to know more volunteers. We got to see what they were doing, how they lived.

KLEIN: [01:11:01] Good.

STEPIEN: [01:11:01] And it was just great.

KLEIN: [01:11:03] Yeah, it sounds like it was a very enlightened office.

STEPIEN: [01:11:06] Yeah. So we had a driver, and we just traveled by, by, um, by vehicle.

KLEIN: [01:11:13] What were some of the problems that existed in, from your perspective, sitting in the office?

STEPIEN: [01:11:21] Oh, oh, um. I think it was maybe cooperation from local, maybe local government people or. And of course, everybody had, I mean, just the time delays and, you know, there's.

KLEIN: [01:11:38] Some corruption.

STEPIEN: [01:11:39] Some corruption and just, you know, Americans, you know, are used to getting things done right away. Well, weeks and weeks of waiting until things could, they could get cooperation from government and getting started and, and, uh.

KLEIN: [01:11:54] Would volunteers come into the office and sort of vent and?

STEPIEN: [01:12:00] They did, they did.

KLEIN: [01:12:00] To you or to the assistant or to whoever was listening?

STEPIEN: [01:12:04] Yes. Yes.

KLEIN: [01:12:05] So you were aware of that?

STEPIEN: [01:12:06] Yeah. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:12:08] How about volunteer behavior, I mean, or misbehavior?

STEPIEN: [01:12:12] Misbehavior.

KLEIN: [01:12:14] Were any volunteers sent home while you were?

STEPIEN: [01:12:17] No, I don't recall any. There could have been some, but I don't recall any.

KLEIN: [01:12:20] Okay. Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:12:21] Yeah, but, uh, I don't recall anybody.

KLEIN: [01:12:25] All right. As you came to the end of the first year, uh, it sounds to me like you were thoroughly settled into the job.

STEPIEN: [01:12:38] Oh, I was, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:12:39] And your living conditions were good.

STEPIEN: [01:12:41] They were good.

KLEIN: [01:12:42] And you could, at that point, you sort of can look ahead and say, well, within ten months, whatever, I'm going to be going home.

STEPIEN: [01:12:50] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:12:52] Do you recall if you reflected back and forward? I mean, well, before I leave, I'd like to accomplish this or see this or do this.

STEPIEN: [01:13:00] Well, um. Probably so.

KLEIN: [01:13:08] Don't let me put words.

STEPIEN: [01:13:09] Yeah, I, uh, of course did some traveling then, but, um. I think when the time came. I don't know, for some reason, I just, I just pretty much went directly, directly home.

KLEIN: [01:13:29] Okay.

STEPIEN: [01:13:29] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:13:31] Let's take the second year. Was the second year at all different than the first?

STEPIEN: [01:13:35] I don't think so. I think I'm just more comfortable with the people and.

KLEIN: [01:13:39] Did new staff come in?

STEPIEN: [01:13:42] Well, you know, I just remembered there was a girl. There was a girl that came in. Um. You know, that's why I'm thinking. Let's see, I wasn't sure if I was in the first group of secretaries or the second. And there's like, like three different. I'm sure they wouldn't want two. Anyway, there was a gal that came in, um, I was into my, my second year and she came in to help out in the office. Um, I don't know much about that, but I'm thinking she maybe was with another secretarial group.

KLEIN: [01:14:24] Mm hmm.

STEPIEN: [01:14:25] She didn't spend very much time in the office at all, and she lived with me.

KLEIN: [01:14:30] Oh.

STEPIEN: [01:14:30] I had a room, and she stayed with me.

KLEIN: [01:14:32] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:14:33] Just fine. Um. She didn't spend much time in the office working and she decided she really didn't like it. So she found herself a teaching job in a school in Hyderabad.

KLEIN: [01:14:49] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:14:49] And she was teaching.

KLEIN: [01:14:52] Nobody objected?

STEPIEN: [01:14:55] No. No. And she got permission, of course, from the, the director. And then they of course, New Delhi okayed it and everything. So everything was, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:15:06] Yeah. So your workload was heavy, but not impossible.

STEPIEN: [01:15:13] Well, impossible took me into 8:00 at night and every once in a while 10:00 at night on really, really deadline, you know, projects. But yeah, we just, if there was work just stayed and worked.

KLEIN: [01:15:28] And there was always, I mean, the flow was constant.

STEPIEN: [01:15:32] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:15:34] Do you recall, did groups that were finished have their, they used to call it a termination conference?

STEPIEN: [01:15:40] They came into town. They came into Hyderabad and had, as a group, and had the little conference and, um, and then left.

KLEIN: [01:15:49] Did you sit in on those or not?

STEPIEN: [01:15:51] Um, yeah, I think I did. I think I, I helped out maybe with materials. And I did, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:15:59] Uh, so through the second year, was second year not much different than the first?

STEPIEN: [01:16:09] Not a whole lot.

KLEIN: [01:16:10] Additional travel?

STEPIEN: [01:16:11] Like I said, there were so many volunteers coming and going and conferences through there every six months or so. So there was always it seemed like groups coming and going.

KLEIN: [01:16:21] Yeah, yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:16:21] And then we, the new groups would of course be going to the airport or meet them at the train station or wherever. And, and um. Yeah. Always something going on.

KLEIN: [01:16:34] Right. Were you satisfied that you had, you know, met Indians and become somewhat involved? I mean, you were going to church, which puts you in the.

STEPIEN: [01:16:46] Yeah. Yeah. Um.

KLEIN: [01:16:48] Or did you feel that there was a lot of India that you were kind of missing or?

STEPIEN: [01:16:53] Well, I think, I think once I got home, I probably thought, well, you know, I probably should have traveled more afterwards or, um. But, um.

KLEIN: [01:17:05] But not while you were there. While you were there, you were busy and you felt your life was.

STEPIEN: [01:17:10] And at the time probably, um, being that I was there by myself as a volunteer, which meant I lived by myself and, and maybe, maybe at the time, I didn't feel comfortable about just going off and traveling by myself.

KLEIN: [01:17:27] Alone, sure, sure.

STEPIEN: [01:17:28] Yeah. Yeah. That's probably the main reason that I didn't try to.

KLEIN: [01:17:34] During the two years, do you recall thinking to yourself at all, well, I joined the Peace Corps, and I think, you know, it's been the experience I wanted?

STEPIEN: [01:17:43] I think so.

KLEIN: [01:17:44] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:17:44] Because I, I knew, I knew from the beginning I wasn't, I wasn't a teacher. And I knew that, I didn't have the personality to be a teacher. And so I think I was, I was totally satisfied with, with what I did. And, uh, yeah, I was.

KLEIN: [01:18:02] And as you're coming near the end of the second year, uh, any regrets? Any, well, are you ready to wrap it up?

STEPIEN: [01:18:13] Oh, I think so.

KLEIN: [01:18:16] Were you being replaced?

STEPIEN: [01:18:18] Um. Yeah. We didn't get any new volunteers in the office. And by then, by then, I think that's like two years.

KLEIN: [01:18:31] Well, it's '68.

STEPIEN: [01:18:32] Yeah, '68. So they were still coming and going. Um. And I remember one of the associate directors had left. He went back to the States to I think go back to college or something.

KLEIN: [01:18:43] Yeah. This period is the height of the anti-Vietnam War movement.

STEPIEN: [01:18:52] Right.

KLEIN: [01:18:52] Do you recall it spilling over at all into the office?

STEPIEN: [01:18:57] Not really.

KLEIN: [01:18:57] Or discussions with volunteers?

STEPIEN: [01:18:59] Not really. It seems like I almost lost two years. I didn't lose, but I kind of missed out on two years of kind of what was going on in Vietnam. We kind of, you know, we had newspapers and BBC once in a while. But, but, but I don't regret missing out too much. Well, I just know we did kind of miss out on that and maybe the music scene in the States and the, and some of that. But, um. But no really regrets.

KLEIN: [01:19:35] Do you recall volunteers who had any trouble with the draft?

STEPIEN: [01:19:39] No, I didn't.

KLEIN: [01:19:40] Okay. All right.

STEPIEN: [01:19:42] And we had, we had, you know, single volunteers that we have, um, I think in all groups we had couples also serving.

KLEIN: [01:19:53] Any, through the two years, your health was generally good?

STEPIEN: [01:19:58] Yes, I think so. I think I had a couple of bouts of dysentery at first. Um, got straightened out there. Avoided, you know, the water, boiled the water and.

KLEIN: [01:20:10] Was malaria a problem?

STEPIEN: [01:20:11] No.

KLEIN: [01:20:11] Were you taking?

STEPIEN: [01:20:11] No, no.

KLEIN: [01:20:14] Okay, wasn't a malarial area.

STEPIEN: [01:20:15] Of course before we left we had, you know, every week in training we had go to some health office and we had shots like every, every week.

KLEIN: [01:20:25] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:20:26] For this and that, just about everything.

KLEIN: [01:20:28] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:20:28] But, uh, I don't recall people getting really sick except with maybe dysentery.

KLEIN: [01:20:36] Okay, as you finish your tour and what are your plans at that point?

STEPIEN: [01:20:44] Plans? I came home and, and, um.

KLEIN: [01:20:50] Talk about the reentry to the U.S. Now, you've been in a very exotic place for two years.

STEPIEN: [01:20:55] Yes, yes.

KLEIN: [01:20:56] And you're returning to Missouri.

STEPIEN: [01:20:59] Returning to Missouri. And, and, um.

KLEIN: [01:21:02] What did people make of you?

STEPIEN: [01:21:04] Well, they just thought it was, it was. Of course, at that time in a small community, like my hometown of Trenton at that time was maybe 8,000 people. And, yes, it was a big thing that somebody went off to India. And, of course, before I left, they had an article about me in the paper and my picture. And then when I returned, I think, I think, I think there was another article when I was home and the story. And I remember speaking at a few groups. And my mother was involved like in a homemakers

group. And, and, of course, the, I think the 4-H group was still going. My brother was in that.

KLEIN: [01:21:51] Did you put on your Indian dress and you went to speak?

STEPIEN: [01:21:54] Oh, yes, I sure did. And then I did, I brought some, some items that I brought with me, some fabric silks and that kind of thing. And some little dolls and souvenirs. Yes. Jewelry. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:22:09] So the readjustment was relatively easy for you.

STEPIEN: [01:22:13] It really was. It really was. Probably if I, it was not as much. I think, I think the ones that lived in the villages for two years and had very limited access to fruit and vegetables and, it was, I'm sure it was a lot more difficult. But I could go to, to any store in Hyderabad. And, and, um, I think I even found toilet paper.

KLEIN: [01:22:42] At the end of the, as you came to the end of the second year, were you at all tempted to extend your tour?

STEPIEN: [01:22:51] Um.

KLEIN: [01:22:51] Because sometimes that was an option.

STEPIEN: [01:22:53] I wasn't. I wasn't. And, uh, I don't know if I didn't, I probably didn't even think about it. I don't know. I don't remember that.

KLEIN: [01:23:02] Uh. So let's talk now about, you've made the shift, you've readjusted to being back in the U.S. How do you think your, what effect did the Peace Corps service have on your life?

STEPIEN: [01:23:17] Oh, I think it's just such wonderful memories and it just, I think it just opened my, opened my whole view of there's something out there besides, besides North Dakota and north Missouri and Kansas City.

KLEIN: [01:23:31] Right.

STEPIEN: [01:23:32] Um, that's just. I don't know, it just very, very, just opened up my world and my thinking.

KLEIN: [01:23:42] Another of the Peace Corps goals is that you come back and sort of help other Americans understand about the third world.

STEPIEN: [01:23:53] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:23:53] Do you recall consciously trying to do anything like that?

STEPIEN: [01:23:58] I've always been, I've always been interested. Well, after that, I guess, I guess I did a lot of volunteering after that, and I still do.

KLEIN: [01:24:07] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:24:07] I mean, since then. I mean, I. Of course, I got a job within pretty quick and, uh.

KLEIN: [01:24:17] Back at secretarial work?

STEPIEN: [01:24:20] Yes, I did. And not the same place, but I got another job and.

KLEIN: [01:24:24] Were you at all tempted to go on for a degree when you came back?

STEPIEN: [01:24:29] No, I don't think so. Um, I went to, I took some classes at, um, like the junior college.

KLEIN: [01:24:38] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:24:38] And just here and there, not for a degree, but just, because I was, I took biology I remember. I took, um, not biology. I took sociology.

KLEIN: [01:24:46] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:24:50] And I'm just still interested in learning more. And that was interesting but.

KLEIN: [01:24:55] Were we able to maintain any kind of contact with people you knew in India?

STEPIEN: [01:25:01] For a while. For a while. But then that kind of it seems like it didn't last. And I started my own life and moving and traveling and family and.

KLEIN: [01:25:12] Married with children.

STEPIEN: [01:25:13] Yeah, so, so, no, that's, that's what I regret, that I didn't. I didn't stay in touch more with, with, uh, like long term with the, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:25:30] And through the years, you've not gone back to India?

STEPIEN: [01:25:34] No, I haven't. And I'd still like to. I'd still like to, but, but I know going back, I could. I'm sure the place, Hyderabad's changed like every other place.

KLEIN: [01:25:46] Right.

STEPIEN: [01:25:46] Um, you know, I would have no idea how to even get over or get around to where locations are.

KLEIN: [01:25:54] When you came back, did you find that old friends who would not been in the Peace Corps, there was kind of a dissonance that now you were the world traveler and had been in these exotic places and they were still in Missouri, you know?

STEPIEN: [01:26:09] Missouri, and yeah, of course, a lot of my friends had gone to college and having their own out of town experiences. Um, yes, everybody was very interested at first, of course. Everybody finds, um, interested in what you're doing and family is interested and, and then, and then after a while it's not so much.

KLEIN: [01:26:30] Yeah. Very quickly.

STEPIEN: [01:26:32] And that's why I've very much enjoyed getting together with the local returned Peace Corps volunteer group.

KLEIN: [01:26:41] So now, I mean, for the last several years you've been very active in the?

STEPIEN: [01:26:45] About I'd say probably ten or 12 years now, very active in the group.

KLEIN: [01:26:53] The Kansas City returned volunteer group?

STEPIEN: [01:26:54] Yes. And, and I just enjoy very much, um, getting together and, and then we can, you know, everybody's interested in what everybody else is doing.

KLEIN: [01:27:03] If someone came to you and said, well, do you think I should join the Peace Corps?

STEPIEN: [01:27:08] Oh, I'd say definitely. Definitely. Yes.

KLEIN: [01:27:11] Did either of your children express interest or did their lives go in other directions?

STEPIEN: [01:27:16] No, they didn't.

KLEIN: [01:27:18] They knew their mother had been in the Peace Corps.

STEPIEN: [01:27:20] I suggested. Yes. And I suggested especially my youngest daughter, she's traveled a lot. And, and, and, but. But I guess she found that, um. I don't know. It wasn't for her, but I tried. I sure tried that. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:27:37] Yeah. Anything else you'd like to say for the National Archives?

STEPIEN: [01:27:41] Right. Um. It was just a wonderful experience. I have no regrets whatsoever.

KLEIN: [01:27:47] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:27:48] And since then people I meet, um, I've made a lot of good returned Peace Corps friends and, um. Of course, of course, when you, when you meet new people that are not Peace Corps, they're still, I think a lot of them are still kind of surprised that you've done something like that, and um.

KLEIN: [01:28:10] When you've gone on job interviews, do you usually mention you've been in the Peace Corps?

STEPIEN: [01:28:16] Yes, I do, definitely.

KLEIN: [01:28:17] And what do people make of it?

STEPIEN: [01:28:19] Oh, you have?

KLEIN: [01:28:20] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:28:20] Okay. But, but, um. And some of them ask you a few questions and they're interested for a little while, yeah. And but kids, younger people these days, they, they don't know anything about Peace Corps. A lot of them don't. I figured college kids probably know more than, than others. And, um, but, but, yeah, I find there's some people that just, you know, don't know too much about it.

KLEIN: [01:28:57] Yeah.

STEPIEN: [01:28:58] But other students do, so.

KLEIN: [01:28:59] Yeah. Well, good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]