

Glenn Blumhorst Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Glenn Blumhorst
Interviewer: Evelyn Ganzglass
Date of Interview: November 30, 2016
Location of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 37 pages

Biographical Note

Glenn Blumhorst served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala from 1988 to 1991 on a crop diversification project.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed December 21, 2016, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

Copyright

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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

Technical Note

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

Suggested Citation

Glenn Blumhorst, recorded interview by Evelyn Ganzglass, November 30, 2016, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

DISCLAIMER

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

Oral History Interview

with

Glenn Blumhorst

November 30, 2016
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:02] This is Evelyn Ganzglass. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968. And I'm interviewing Glenn Blumhorst, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala from 1988 to 1991. He was part of a crop diversification program. And I'm going to switch my first question and just ask you, what is crop diversification in Guatemala? What was it at the time?

BLUMHORST: [00:00:32] Sure. Well, thank you, Evelyn. Crop diversification was a new program. I was the first volunteer in the program, and it was designed to work with the Ministry of Agriculture to help farmers move from cropping just corn and beans, basically, which were their staples, to diversify into production of cash crops such as citrus fruits and other fruits and even coffee and cacao, depending on where we were in the country. So the idea was to help farmers groups set up nurseries, and in those nurseries maybe have two or three or four different varieties of fruit trees. And move those fruit trees through the process of planting,

grafting, and then transplanting out to plantations and having a little bit of fruit, either for consumption or ideally for the market in addition to their corn and beans for consumption.

BLUMHORST: [00:01:37] So that was really the objective, is to really just help them diversify their production on the usually about one acre of land or so that they might have. And generally they didn't own that land. They were crop sharing or renting it from someone. So a lot of times there was a bit of an issue in terms of the land availability for that. And the farmers would tend to simply maybe just plant three or four trees around their houses, around their households, which also worked well because then they had a small little plantation maybe right around the house. So that's what it was about.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:15] So how did you learn to help them with crop diversification? Are you a farm boy?

BLUMHORST: [00:02:21] Yes, I am a farm boy.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:23] Ah.

BLUMHORST: [00:02:23] I grew up on a small farm in Missouri, not much more than just a couple of acres with some hogs and some trees. No tropical fruit trees, though, if you can imagine. We did have some apple trees and apricot, I believe. But so in the Peace Corps, I really did have to learn a lot about tropical fruits, even though I had grown up on a farm and had a degree actually in agriculture as well. So it was quite different. And something that we learned was to graft trees, citrus trees in particular. So that was something new for me as well.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:58] So what kind of Peace Corps training did you have? Where was it and what was the training like?

BLUMHORST: [00:03:04] Right, so our training was in-country, the three months of training, at a little town called Jocotenango on the outskirts of Antigua, Guatemala, which is a colonial city well known for its quaintness and just beautiful architecture and the ruins there, and somewhat of a

touristy town. So we had a training center just outside of town there, and we did, in the compound we did some training. But then we also traveled out to different, generally Ministry of Agriculture places, where they had farms and training centers and other things that we could actually do, practice on the grafting techniques and planting and doing the *charlas* about how to move into more crop diversification. So it was, it was a very good technical training, certainly building on my background in agriculture.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:00] Were the other volunteers in your group also agriculturalists?

BLUMHORST: [00:04:03] So there were only two other people in my group, in my training program. There were, our training program was about 35 persons, including my wife. We served together in Peace Corps. And so there was a large group of nurses in the health program and then three of us who were the crop diversification individuals. And I think I was the only one that had an agricultural background. One other one was pretty much learning everything as she went and the other person actually left during training. So it ended up being just the two of us in that program.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:40] And do you know or has that, the diversification, taken off since you were there or has it remained pretty small around the house to supplement their own?

BLUMHORST: [00:04:55] So, yes. What I can say is that we did do quite a few nurseries, I would guess probably ten or 12 in total in the communities where I was working. And each of those nurseries probably had anywhere from 10 to 20 farmers involved as a group. And so we were probably planning between five and six or 700 trees. So it was a pretty, pretty large extension. And I think I had the good fortune to be able to continue to live in Guatemala for several years after my Peace Corps service and go back and visit the farmers and others. And was able to actually affirm that, yes, they had actually taken those trees and planted them and they'd taken good care of them. And for the most part, they were being productive, I think. So it did have some impact.

BLUMHORST: [00:05:44] I think the concern I would have probably is, for example, citrus fruit, oranges and others, typically didn't have a very good market. So while the concept of diversifying production was good, I don't think it was necessarily market driven. And so I think most of the time they ended up simply just bringing their citrus into the local market and selling it. And often times there's quite an overabundance of production. So prices were really low.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:16] So in fact, it should have been a broader kind of strategy with Peace Corps linking perhaps to other things as well?

BLUMHORST: [00:06:23] It was my first real lesson in market driven economics, which I had studied in school, of course, but it sounded like a great idea to produce lots of new fruits for the market. But the fact was that there wasn't really a market there. And I don't think anybody had really studied the market to understand whether or not that would be feasible. So there's a lot of production that maybe didn't find a market. Nonetheless, I think families would generally eat some of the produce that they had, the fruits that they produced, particularly we even got into papaya, which is very nutritious. And we also did some coffee at higher elevations where the coffee was adaptable. Guatemala does have a pretty good coffee production.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:14] Yeah.

BLUMHORST: [00:07:14] So they were able to integrate into the market pretty well there. And at the lower altitudes, I worked with cacao, cacao for chocolate, so that also had somewhat of a market.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:25] Has that changed in Peace Corps now, do you think? Are there more market driven approaches introduced?

BLUMHORST: [00:07:33] I think so. I hope so. And I think so. I think that's one thing that just gets better about Peace Corps is the programing. I think it certainly for me was, like I said, a practical lesson in you have to look at the value chain from the beginning, production all the way through to

the final consumer, and make sure that what you're doing is going to be supported by a demand system there so.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:02] Did you work at all with AID or with other development agencies when you were there?

BLUMHORST: [00:08:07] No, not with AID. There was a German development organization, Hetasetta, that was working in the area. This actually presented a little bit of a challenge because this organization, GTC I think, or GTZ, provided food for work, meaning they were also trying to work with farmers in moving them toward crop diversification. But they would provide as an incentive foodstuffs like rice and even beans and other things for their daily consumption based on the amount of time that they would work in their nurseries and other things. So while I was working to try to get farmers to work just out of their, out of their own incentive and their own interest, there was a bit of a conflict there with another organization that was actually incentivizing their farmers to do the same things.

BLUMHORST: [00:09:04] And so there was often a time where we would, the farmers would say, well, we're not going to work with you because we can go work with the other organization. And they will, they will give us food for our work. And which was a bit paternalistic in my opinion. Nonetheless, the successful ones that I worked with were the groups that were willing and able to work just for the sake of being able to diversify their products. And so, uh.

BLUMHORST: [00:09:32] I ended up also working with a lot of women's groups because the community I was in for the longer term was primarily women and orphans because of the civil war that had occurred there. And so there were actually not very many men available that were willing to farm and to go into these projects. So the women were actually quite, um, I would say, innovative is what we would say now. They were quite willing to try new things and they recognized the value of nutrition and they recognized even the market, because most of them spent their time in the market and could see what was selling and what wasn't selling. And they knew who the middlemen were and

others that came and picked up produce. And so we actually found it quite opportune to work with women and who, in my opinion, actually more knowledgeable of the value chain itself.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:32] Hmm. Interesting. So, did you speak Spanish before you went in the Peace Corps? Did you learn Spanish in training?

BLUMHORST: [00:10:40] I spoke three words of Spanish maybe. *Adios, buenos dias,* and *hola*, I think probably. And so I had to learn Spanish in training. Of course, Peace Corps' language training is excellent. It's a repetitive process in small groups. And I wasn't familiar with that. And it was, it was challenging at first, but it quickly became something that I picked up well. And though I was certainly, in the training process, concerned about whether I would hit the minimal level to be in the Peace Corps, that was a bit stressful, I did. And then, of course, once you get out into the field and start using it, it becomes much easier to learn and refine. So I finished training with a decent level of Spanish and then was able to improve it over time.

BLUMHORST: [00:11:33] But at the same time, the community I was living in was an indigenous community. So they spoke a dialect called Rabinal Achi. And so I felt it was important to be able to work with individuals in their own language, at least in a minimal basis. And particularly the women generally did not speak Spanish. So I also learned Achi. I found myself a local instructor who I met with pretty occasionally and some missionaries who had some books on the language and ended up learning Achi pretty well. So enough to get by as well.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:14] And what town? You said you were in two towns. Where were you? Where were you stationed? So you spoke Achi?

BLUMHORST: [00:12:21] The first site that I was in only for about nine months before we had a site change was called Morales Izabal on the eastern coast of Guatemala. And there neither the work that I was doing or that of my wife was going very well. Um, we simply could not get groups to want to work with what we were doing. And the Ministry of Agriculture, in my case, the Ministry of Health in her case, just didn't seem interested in

working with Peace Corps volunteers. And so we asked for a site change and were moved to an Indian village called San Miguel Chicaj in the department of Baja Verapaz, which is in the central highlands of Guatemala. A lot of people who traveled to Guatemala are familiar with the western highlands, which is the very scenic mountainous area where the lakes and volcanoes are.

BLUMHORST: [00:13:12] San Miguel is a relatively dry arid area valley at about 3,000 feet in the valley, up to about 4,000 feet maybe in the hills. And so this was a small group of the linguistic group of Achi, which is just that valley, and then very specifically Rabinal Achi was only spoken in pretty much two communities, two municipalities, which was Rabinal and San Miguel Chicaj, where I lived. So the total population that speaks that language is, I would guess, 25 to 30,000 people. And once in a while I'll run into somebody here in Washington, D.C., that I can recognize. And in some cases by the way they're dressed, if they're still using traditional dress, and can ask them where they're going and what they're up to and say hello to them and greet them.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:11] They must be totally surprised.

BLUMHORST: [00:14:13] Very much so. Yeah. Would never expect that to come from me, particularly a local dialect like that.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:18] Yeah. So, uh, let's back up a little bit. You and your wife joined the Peace Corps together. Why did you join the Peace Corps?

BLUMHORST: [00:14:30] So, um, I grew up in relatively modest surroundings, a very humble family, blue collar workers. My mother was the janitor at my high school, and my father worked construction in town. And I learned, I think, from an early age that it's not so important what you have, but what you can be and do and help others be in your life. And it's more about the way that you impact people's lives along your course of life. And I also had, I think a, just a desire to see the world. I, on a whim, almost decided to go to college at the University of Missouri. A good friend of mine who was my college roommate insisted that I go to

school, go to college and get a degree. And so I did. And thanks to his incentive.

BLUMHORST: [00:15:29] And in college, I was involved in a local church where there was a mission trip, and we traveled to Mexico for about a week. And part of that, of course, was full immersion into the local economy, including a visit to the garbage dump and visits with families and others who were telling their stories of their situations. And it was my first time out of the United States, and I was just really shocked at what I saw so close to where I was from. And decided at that point that I felt my calling was to try to do something about it. And I think that's in large part what we all feel, is a calling to make a change in the world. So that was my primary motivation. You know, I knew, for example, Mark Twain had written that travel will have a positive impact on racism and bigotry and other things, and that we need to get out of our, out of our comfort zones and see the world.

BLUMHORST: [00:16:29] And, you know, there was for me also just the need to, to do something that used my skills to contribute to helping others. And so I didn't know how to do that because I had never done anything like that before. But I figured there's got to be a way to do it. And one day, one of my college professors who was teaching a course on international development 101 and I decided to take that course. And through that introduction, I became familiar a little bit with what international development was. And this particular professor said, you need to join the Peace Corps basically. He said, from what you're telling me and what I see in you, he said, the place you need to be is in the Peace Corps. He said, you're going to fit in very well there. And so I didn't really know much about it. I contacted a recruiter and came home one day and told my wife, we're going to join the Peace Corps.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:26] And what was her reaction to that? You're crazy.

BLUMHORST: [00:17:30] Probably so. I think there was a long pause there. And but she's a pretty adventurous person herself, grew up on a farm also in Minnesota. And was also a very altruistic person, I think, and had chosen a health profession, health care profession.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:49] So she was a nurse to start out.

BLUMHORST: [00:17:51] She was a nurse, getting a nursing degree. So I think it was born out of a spirit of adventurism, a sense of wanting to do something that made a difference in the world. And the fact that I had some skills that I thought could be useful. And I said, if I can, if I can see one or two countries out of joining the Peace Corps, that's a good start. And if I can start making a difference in a small way, that's, you know, that's a great start too. Little did I know what it would lead to at the time though.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:18] So we'll get to that later. So you applied for the Peace Corps. Did they immediately offer you Guatemala or was there another assignment you turned down? I didn't realize people turned down assignments. We just took the one we got.

BLUMHORST: [00:18:32] Right.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:33] Apparently people turned down assignments.

BLUMHORST: [00:18:36] No, I did not have the chance to turn down an assignment. I don't think I would have, but I think our experience was unique, but probably not that unique to others at the time. I think for us we had about a 28 page application maybe, and lots of forms that had to be filled out and a series of interviews. And at one time I think we were almost ready to throw in the towel and say, OK, well, this isn't going to work. Because we had about four or five different recruiters as they transitioned in and out and just really couldn't seem to make any progress. But I think the persistence is one thing that obviously we need to have in the Peace Corps. So we continued to be persistent and insistent and really just put our minds to it. And the first nomination was for Lesotho for me to teach at a university, and then they said, we'll find an assignment for Kathy, your wife. And so we said, that sounds good. And I accepted. And meanwhile we graduated from our program.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:42] So you were still in college?

BLUMHORST: [00:19:44] While we were in college, but I was doing my master's degree in public administration then, and my wife had transferred from Minnesota. So we had to, she had to sit out a year or two and was finishing her nursing degree. So we had a health volunteer and an ag volunteer, if you will. And so they placed me as the ag volunteer first in Lesotho and so I said, that's great. Well, this was probably March or April of '87, and we'll depart in October of that year. So we came to Washington, D.C. I had an internship at the time with USAID to work in their offices here. And my wife worked in a hospital with her first job as a nurse. And we went through that really interesting experience. I learned in that time at USAID that I really was not cut out for office work and sitting in a cubicle here in Washington, D.C.

BLUMHORST: [00:20:39] But I felt like I really need to get my hands dirty and get out into the economy and into where it actually is happening. So we gave our resignations at those opportunities. USAID had offered me the opportunity to stay and work with the organization there as well. My wife was working, but we said, no, we're going to join the Peace Corps. And I'd also taken a leave of absence from a job I had back in Missouri, which was with UPS. And they'd offered me a management position full time with UPS, and I knew that could be a very interesting and lucrative career. So but I just, we just decided, no, this was what we wanted to do. So we both finished our interns and our jobs and we decided to take the long way back to Minnesota and Missouri. So we just drove up through northeastern United States.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:29] See the country.

BLUMHORST: [00:21:30] Seeing the country. And about halfway there we called in to see how things were doing and they said, oh, by the way, your program was canceled.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:35] Ah.

BLUMHORST: [00:21:35] And so we pretty much started over then on the placement process and a few weeks later they called. Back then you had to call them or they called you and there were no cell phones or emails or anything. So we were then offered two options that they said they'll do everything they can to make sure we can both get in the program, though they only had a placement for one of us. And one was The Gambia and one was Guatemala, and we knew nothing about either of them. So we quickly again whipped out our encyclopedias at the time and anything else we could find and started reading up on whether we wanted to go swim with hippos or go in the jungles with the guerillas that are carrying guns down in Guatemala.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:21] Oh, I was going to ask about that.

BLUMHORST: [00:22:23] There was a civil war going on in Guatemala at the time. And the guerrilla conflict throughout, particularly the central highlands and the western highlands was pretty intense. Nonetheless, it seemed like a fascinating place, a fascinating culture, and opportunity to learn, learn a language in Spanish. And we really didn't struggle much over it, but we opted for Guatemala and it turned out to be a great choice.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:51] So did the war affect you when you were there?

BLUMHORST: [00:22:56] Not directly, I would say. I would say the fact is the conflict at the time had receded from our area. And so what we saw was the effect of the conflict. Like I said, a lot of orphans and a lot of widows. There were two huge orphanages in our community run by missionaries, and each of them probably had three or 400 kids in them. So out of a very small village, to have that number of orphans is significant. And the stories that people were telling us were pretty intense in terms of even just a couple, three years before that, there had been a massacre in the community at the local fair. There apparently was a confrontation between the guerrillas and the army. And just a bunch of, just a bunch of people just got shot really badly and killed. And there were still mass graves in that area, and they're still discovering mass graves in that area to this day.

BLUMHORST: [00:23:57] So it was a pretty difficult time as a newcomer to that community to integrate into the community, because there was just simply a lot of fear and a lot of, uh, a lot of suspicion of anyone really that was there. And so it took, I think, a lot longer for us to gain the confidence of even our neighbors and then the farmers and others. And villages that were further away up into the hills, almost sometimes impossible to even to be able to get entry into the villages.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:27] So you were in the eastern highlands?

BLUMHORST: [00:24:30] Central highlands.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:31] Central highlands, and that's where the war had really been?

BLUMHORST: [00:24:34] Right. So the war was still going on in other parts of the country and it would continue even for several years after we were there. But it had receded in this area. But nonetheless, every so often we would see movements and we would see, we actually were stopped once by the guerrillas. And of course, the military was very, very prevalent around this area. And but I would say I don't think we ever felt insecure. I don't think that we ever felt that our lives were in danger. You know, it's a part of the approach, of course, is community acceptance. And we were well accepted by our community. And if there were any, you know, potential threats, I think our community was there to take care of us and make sure nothing happened to us and looking out for us. Even though at the same time, I think a lot of times they were kind of wondering, you know, who's, where are these guys coming from and who are they? And do they actually eat children? That sort of a thing, you know, that was kind of a common myth.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:31] So was that because you were just from the outside or because you were American?

BLUMHORST: [00:25:35] Just because we were outsiders.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:37] So there wasn't anti Americanism because of the war?

BLUMHORST: [00:25:40] No, not at all. To the contrary, I think there was a fondness for America there in particular, because in most communities in Guatemala and most families in Guatemala, a large part of them have migrated to the U.S. and worked here, and some of them have returned and some have remained here. So I think they feel a very strong affinity with the United States and, no, not a, not necessarily a fear of us in particular, but just a general, just a general sense of precaution, I would say. Because of, I think, you know, they had been oppressed for so long and had not been able to speak out or speak up. And so to talk to us about the war and about their own personal opinions and politics, of course, or anything like that, was really taboo. And they considered probably dangerous at the time.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:31] What did they think of the guerillas?

BLUMHORST: [00:26:34] You know, that was a conversation where sometimes you just wouldn't go. But I think that that was part of the issue, is that sometimes there's certainly a sensitivity to and a bit of a understanding of why there was a guerrilla conflict going on. Because, again, this the Indian population had been oppressed for so long and the guerrilla movement was about the rights of these individuals. At the same time, it was a conflict that just went on and on for years, over 30 years. And so I think there was just a fatigue from war, fatigue from the conflict. And when it was all over, I think it was certainly something that was celebrated. But at the same time, did the condition and the plight and the situation of those individuals improve at all? And from a political and economic perspective, and I think they would, they would say probably not too much.

BLUMHORST: [00:27:34] So the only thing that happened is I think there were probably three or four maybe attempted coups while we were in country. One of them was successful, if I remember correctly. And during the coups, so the way you'd know there was a coup going on is the radios, which you could hear in the houses around the village that we lived in, were tuned into radio of whatever they wanted to listen to, and you could generally walk by a house and hear it, but the radios

would go to marimba music when there's a coup. So if you heard marimba music in all the houses coming from the radios, you knew there was something going on. And then, and one of the coups, actually, a military army tank, pulled up and parked itself right in front of our little house, our mud house that we lived in. And it happened to be on a strategic vantage point in the street. So I think that's why they were there. But we adopted the soldiers in the tank and cooked food for them and took care of them and they took care of us I guess.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:35] Those are the guerrilla?

BLUMHORST: [00:28:36] They were army.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:37] They were army?

BLUMHORST: [00:28:38] Yeah. But like I said, we would occasionally cross paths with a guerrilla in the other villages. And one time they stopped a bus that we were on and collected a tax from us. But otherwise it was more just something that you did not generally see them. The conflict was far enough away from our area that there was no fighting going on there.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:03] So I'm just amazed to hear that Peace Corps Washington had people in Guatemala during a war.

BLUMHORST: [00:29:12] Yeah, in retrospect, I'm kind of thinking that too, you know, because there was a very active conflict going on. Nonetheless, the areas of conflict were off-limits to us. Of course, our village happened to be, I think, on the margin of that. So I think probably they felt that, certainly at the time they felt it was safe. And again, like I said, we felt it was as well. So it was just on the, you know, was on the heels of some pretty serious conflict there. So again, the, never felt threatened from that myself but from, more from the common, uh, the common delinquency. It's really what I think we would have been afraid of. I did get actually held up at gunpoint once on a bus in the city and that sort of thing was actually quite common, getting your pocket picked in town, even one of the smaller towns, that wouldn't be unheard of.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:21] Why was that going on? Because of the war?

BLUMHORST: [00:30:23] Just because the economy was so bad, there was so much poverty and people were willing to do whatever. So delinquency was very common, I would say.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:39] So talk a little bit more about the town, the first town, as well as the second town you stayed in. What were, how big were these towns? What was going on there besides delinquency?

BLUMHORST: [00:30:53] So the two towns were very distinct, and I tend to focus more on the second one where we were the longest, than the first one. But the first one, Morales Izabal on the eastern coast, was actually two towns. It was Morales and Bananera. And Bananera meaning the banana place basically. And this was where Del Monte had established huge plantations of banana production. And so an interesting place. The interesting thing about this was there was a relatively thriving economy because individuals there had been able to work on the banana farms and make relatively decent wages and have good Social Security programs and the like. And so there was a pretty thriving community there. This was a relatively large community between Morales and Bananera, I would guess probably around 20,000 people.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:49] Oh, that is big.

BLUMHORST: [00:31:50] So I found myself really getting far, far away from those areas as I could and hopping on a bus and going 20, 30 minutes, sometimes even an hour away, to work in villages further away where they weren't part of the plantation, and maybe that they weren't directly benefiting from it. So but life there was interesting because there was a huge walled compound with nice houses and swimming pools and everything else behind it where all the executives came and lived. And there was a nice little airport there that they flew in on.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:27] The executives being Americans or Guatemalans?

BLUMHORST: [00:32:29] Mostly Americans. Yeah. So and then this was a very Latino culture and what we would say the Oriente of the Guatemala is very distinct from the Occidental. And so on the eastern part of the country, you have a kind of a Wild West culture. Lots of guns, lots of machetes, lots of fights, lots of people killing each other and robbing each other. It was, it was in that sense kind of dangerous. I think the first week I was in my site, we decided with some other Peace Corps volunteers. There were about six or seven of us in that town, and we decided to go spelunking in a cave that was accessible by walking. So we went out to this cave and got off the bus and walked about a mile up into the hills. And we started organizing ourselves and we started going a little ways in. We had a flashlight, I think a little flashlight.

BLUMHORST: [00:33:32] And then somebody said, well, look, here's some money and stuff and beer cans or beer bottles laying around on the ground. Went a little bit further and we found a big rock and it had just a huge pool of blood. And the blood was kind of dripping down the sides of it and a little bit further. And then somebody said, well, where are we going to tie the string onto so we can find our way back? Because we had a huge ball of string, and somebody said, well, how about on this body here? And shined a light down here and sure enough, here is this corpse laying there just with his head all bashed in and everything else. And it was like my first introduction to the violence of that part of the country, which is very much a common. And we got out of that cave right away. Went back and reported it to the police. But in the time that we lived in that community, I think I probably saw four or five people macheted to death or shot to death.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:24] Just among? Fights?

BLUMHORST: [00:34:26] Yeah, just generally it would be drunken brawls and people would get drunk.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:31] And there the economy was decent.

BLUMHORST: [00:34:34] And pull out their machetes and just start cutting each other up. It was, it was so much almost kind of part of the culture that it was,

it wasn't really even scary. But nonetheless, uh, and a large part of the population there kind of were like cowboys. They maybe even had, you know, cattle ranches and the like. And so they carried guns. And, you know, again, if they had too much to drink, they became dangerous. So that, that was interesting. And actually, I think there were volunteers who actually were at one time, I know one for sure, that was shot, another that was macheted pretty bad. But generally we were able to steer clear of that sort of a confrontation. So

GANZGLASS: [00:35:23] So that was the first town.

BLUMHORST: [00:35:24] That was the first site. And my wife didn't really like it there because the machismo too, everywhere you went, even with me. Hey, baby, how are you doing? You know, and so it was, uh, it was challenging, but we have good friends still from there. And we really bonded with some locals and including basically an adopted little girl that kind of is still part of our lives really to this day that was our neighbor. And so that was very positive in that sense. But because neither of the ministries that we worked with really wanted us there and just they pretty much told us that, we just decided that it was best to go somewhere where we could actually be productive in our work.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:05] But it was you, not the Peace Corps, that decided?

BLUMHORST: [00:36:07] We asked for the, yeah, we asked for the transfer. And so they picked this new site which our APCD told us, look, nobody's been here since the war.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:16] What's APCD?

BLUMHORST: [00:36:16] Associate Peace Corps Director.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:17] Oh.

BLUMHORST: [00:36:18] He chose this site and said it's got good potential for our program. But no volunteers have been here for years and you'll be the first ones in there. And so it, it was very quaint, very dry, as opposed to

the tropical area we'd been in. Had a rainy season of about three or four months where there was a cultivation period. Nice, beautiful valley with mountains around on all sides. And the indigenous culture there of Achi, which is the typical dress there, the women wear a woven fabric that is very distinct from any other place in the country and.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:00] So when you see the Guatemalan embroidery, is that from there?

BLUMHORST: [00:37:04] Yeah, I would recognize somebody from that village very clearly. Some of the other villages, too, I could recognize around the country. But our village was very, very specifically a distinct design that's from that area. So it was very different in terms of the culture, of course, being almost an entirely indigenous culture. The four or five wealthy families in the village were all Latinos, um, mestizos, I guess they would say. And they ran the businesses basically and had the larger farms. And we were about ten or 12 kilometers from Salama, which is a larger, a larger city where there was a nice little donut shop that we could go and meet up with other volunteers and enjoy, you know, a nice tea and coffee or donuts and get some newspapers, English language newspapers even.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:02] Wow.

BLUMHORST: [00:38:02] So that was our refuge, I guess you'd say. But the community itself was very nice. We lived in a little mud hut that had actually at one time been the house for the generator for the missionaries across the street. So they had had their huge generator engine in this building. And it had.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:21] So there was electricity?

BLUMHORST: [00:38:24] There wasn't. Yeah, at that time. Yeah. Before there had not been, that's why they had the generator and once the electricity came to the town, then they moved the generator out.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:35] And you moved in.

BLUMHORST: [00:38:37] It then belonged to a woman, a local woman living in town. Had a dirt floor, fortunately had an indoor bathroom with a flush toilet.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:47] Wow.

BLUMHORST: [00:38:47] And but it was, that was, it was comfortable.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:52] So a much, much better environment to do.

BLUMHORST: [00:38:56] Much better environment. And I think we felt much more comfortable there because the people really readily accepted us and welcomed us and invited us to their events. And we just started making great friends. And it was, uh, it was. It was.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:10] Were they as traumatized by war as the other? Oh, you talked about that.

BLUMHORST: [00:39:15] They were, yeah. They were.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:17] So it's just a different culture.

BLUMHORST: [00:39:17] It was still something that was part of their lives almost. And they still, you know, they were still wary of even though the conflict had moved out of that area. But it did affect them still very much. And of course, like I said, lots of widows and orphans there in town.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:34] So when while you were in the Peace Corps, did you travel in Guatemala to other places or in Central America as well?

BLUMHORST: [00:39:43] Sure. I remember.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:44] Was there vacation time?

BLUMHORST: [00:39:44] No, remember, I did want to see the world. And once I got to Guatemala, I realized that there were some other countries pretty close by. First, we did travel quite a bit on our vacation time around the

country. So we saw most of the country, which is just, takes a long time to see such a beautiful place like Guatemala has so many different things from the lakes on the western side of the country. Lake Atitlán, of course, nestled in among those volcanoes and then visiting each of those villages in itself is so fascinating.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:14] The all of the ruins.

BLUMHORST: [00:40:15] The ruins up north in Petén, the eastern coast and Rio Dulce. And there's just, there's so much to see there. And so though we were what we would call site rats, we spent most of our time in the site and only really came into Guatemala City when we needed to. We did travel to visit other volunteers in our group. And then a couple of times we traveled outside of the country. We did a whole circuit of the Mayan ruins through the Yucatan of, uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:50] Mexico?

BLUMHORST: [00:40:51] Mexico, through Guatemala. So what they call the Ruta Maya, the Mayan route, which was about a four or five day trip on bus to see all the ruins that are part of that circuit. Ended up in Belize and spending four or five days there in Belize just on the beaches, yeah, on the cayes. Another trip then we went to Costa Rica and Honduras and I think we did El Salvador. At the time it was off limits to Peace Corps volunteers. But I think we went there just very briefly to get a taste of that as well. So then we had the opportunity to travel enough around Central America to see a good part of the area.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:35] So talk a little bit about what happened when you came back. What was reentry like?

BLUMHORST: [00:41:40] So reentry was, I would say, kind of gradual for us because we had the opportunity to stay in Guatemala after our Peace Corps service.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:50] Oh, to do what?

BLUMHORST: [00:41:51] First of all, we extended for that third year after the transition to the new site. And things actually went very well in terms of getting some work done. We had some relatively significant projects we were working on besides the basic projects that we were doing. And we were helping a community, the community build a new school. And then I was approached by one community in particular, Dolores, that I had worked in quite a bit over the last two years in the nurseries and other things. And this community was very close to San Miguel, which was where we lived, probably about five or six kilometers, yet they were one of few villages that didn't have electricity. And in my last year there they approached me and said, we want to do an electrical project here. And I said, well, I'm just a Peace Corps volunteer. We don't, we don't help with that. We can't help with that. And we don't have resources, nor do I have the technical knowledge of that.

BLUMHORST: [00:42:51] And they said, well, you know how to open doors, you know how to help us. You've got what we don't have. And they said, we have for a \$300,000 project, they said, we have \$100,000 already raised in the community and in the bank. And I said, well, that's interesting. And they said, we know that connecting, the study has already been done. This is connecting from San Miguel, the village where you live to us is going to be relatively easy. And we only have about 60 houses here in our village.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:19] Reconnecting the electricity.

BLUMHORST: [00:43:21] Yeah. So it would not be a complicated, if you will, project and they've already done all their work and everything. And they said, well, will you help us devise a proposal and go with us to help pitch this proposal to the right people? And I said certainly, so when they said they had already raised basically a third of the cost in cash for the project and were willing to put in additional labor and other things as well. Then I said, I think you've got something going.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:49] Yeah, definitely.

BLUMHORST: [00:43:49] And I said, this is something that obviously you worked on for years and tried to, they'd been raising funds for ten years or so, 20 years maybe, quite a while.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:57] And where did that come from? From the mayor or just the community?

BLUMHORST: [00:44:01] This was their own money. They had raised it.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:02] No, but who organized this, the mayor or?

BLUMHORST: [00:44:05] The, no, this community didn't even have a mayor. They had like a sub-mayor maybe. And so there was a group that had formed called like the Committee on Electrification or something.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:14] Yeah.

BLUMHORST: [00:44:14] And so we went into the capital together a number of times, probably all told 15, 20 times, and met with a number of people. And we finally found a receptive person at the Ministry of, uh, in Guatemala City that was responsible for electrification. And he said, well, if you can find other resources, we'll put in \$100,000 worth of our contribution, which is basically coming out and helping do the work and putting up the poles and stringing the cables and everything and putting in the transformers. We said, OK, so we've got \$100,000 here and we've got \$100,000 here. So I went to USAID and I said, I've got a great project and I've got two thirds of the resources already available. The community has done their work. The government is willing to do their effort. Would you be willing to put in a third?

BLUMHORST: [00:45:11] And for USAID, and I didn't know this at the time, but that's slush fund money, \$100,000. And so they basically didn't even have to put any money into it. They simply agreed to ask one of their implementers, which was the National Rural Electric Cooperative, to put that into it. And so it was a very small grant that they made to us. And so we formed essentially a public private partnership, which I

didn't know what that meant at the time, but that's what it became. And I had a great project that brought electricity to about 40 families.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:49] Fantastic.

BLUMHORST: [00:45:49] Probably around 200 or 300 persons, and really vitalize that community from that point on and uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:56] Did they pay you?

BLUMHORST: [00:45:59] No, no, no.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:00] So this was all volunteer?

BLUMHORST: [00:46:02] It was all volunteer.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:03] This is in your third year?

BLUMHORST: [00:46:04] This is in my third year of being in Peace Corps.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:05] Oh, this is in your third year.

BLUMHORST: [00:46:06] This is my third year of being a Peace Corps volunteer. And so really, it was kind of a I guess you would say, the culmination of my time there.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:18] Fantastic.

BLUMHORST: [00:46:18] And we had the inauguration and I think I COSed [close of service] probably a month after that. So.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:25] And your wife continued being a nurse?

BLUMHORST: [00:46:28] She continued in the health program there, which had gone very well for her as well too. So we had a very positive experience in the Peace Corps.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:34] And then you stayed after Peace Corps as well?

BLUMHORST: [00:46:36] Right. So that's another story in itself.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:38] OK, so what did you do after Peace Corps?

BLUMHORST: [00:46:40] So I want to mention, though, once I came back to the village, because we kept coming back to our village to visit. And one of the next volunteers came through town and he said, oh you're Glen? He said, Don Glen de las Luces. And I said, well, I guess. He said, around here they call you Don Glen de las Luces, which means Mr. Glen of the Lights.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:04] Oh.

BLUMHORST: [00:47:04] He said, because you brought lights to Santa Dolores, this community out there. So I said, OK, that's funny. He said, you set the bar pretty high for the rest of us.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:14] Yeah.

BLUMHORST: [00:47:15] Which is true.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:15] It's probably the best title you've had.

BLUMHORST: [00:47:17] Right, right. So yeah, it was a very untypical, I think, atypical project for a Peace Corps volunteer, but just happened to be in a serendipitous way I happened to be in the right place at the right time to bring the right people together. And I think that's a great example of what we are in the Peace Corps, is we don't do things, we don't give out resources. We don't necessarily tell them what they're going to do. But the demand from the community was there, the energy from them was there, the capacity was there. They just needed somebody to help kind of connect the dots and bring it all together. And so I think that was a really positive experience in itself.

BLUMHORST: [00:47:52] So onto where we went after Peace Corps. In college I'd learned to fly, so I'm a private pilot and had always, uh, the second thing I loved the most short of Peace Corps is flying, or it kind of ties with the Peace Corps there, is I love to fly, but I never had my own airplane, never had enough money really to fly. So particularly as a Peace Corps volunteer, you don't even think about being able to fly. But I managed to make friends with an American who was heading up an organization in Guatemala who happened to be a pilot as well. And as I got to know him, he said, well, we have assumed responsibility for a pretty big hospital down the road from you, which was started by Wycliffe missionaries as a small clinic in their house and grew to be this huge hospital. And he said, they're retiring and they want us to take it over.

BLUMHORST: [00:48:47] And so, you know, we're going to work on dramatically improving it and start bringing in medical doctors from Guatemala City and medical doctors from the U.S. to do surgeries and these sort of things. And he said, we're going to make a very nice project out here out of this. And he said, so we bought a piece of land outside of town and we put an airstrip along one side of it, along the length of one side. And he said, we've got all this land that we need to do something with. And he said, can you come make something of it, like a teaching farm, he said, or something like that. And I said, well, that sounds interesting. And he said, well, if you do, he said, I'll make sure we base an airplane out here and you can have an airplane to fly. And that was enough for me.

BLUMHORST: [00:49:35] So the deal was that four days a week, four and a half days a week, I would work on this, setting up this model farm basically, and the Friday afternoons I would hop in the plane and pick up the doctors from the hospital.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:49] Oh cool.

BLUMHORST: [00:49:49] Take them to their homes, one in Guatemala City, or one stop in Quetzaltenango on the other side of the country, one in Guatemala City, and make a kind of roundabout.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:58] So you had a shuttle bus.

BLUMHORST: [00:49:59] And then, yeah, then we started getting a lot of surgeons from the U.S. and dentists and others coming in and on short term. And so I would go in and pick them up and bring them out of medical supplies. So it was a six hour or seven hour drive or a 40 minute flight, basically. So that was, that was a highlight for me because then I did actually do a little bit more flying and was able to take what I learned in the Peace Corps, which is pretty much everything I knew, was learned in the Peace Corps. And I said, well, we're just going to do it here. And so we started setting up a model farm with soil conservation techniques, live and dead barriers, and intercropping and the things that I'd learned in, green manures and all these techniques that were being promoted in the Peace Corps. And then we brought in some appropriate technologies like hand pumps.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:51] Mm hmm.

BLUMHORST: [00:50:52] And fuel efficient woodstoves and a number of different things. And we just pretty much created a teaching farm, a model teaching farm there. And the farmers would come in on a crop share basis, which was very common in the area. And in return for them adapting one of the technologies that we were promoting, like green manures.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:13] What is green?

BLUMHORST: [00:51:14] Green manure is where you use cover crop, basically, which is a nitrogen fixating bean generally is what it would be, legume, to either cover the ground and control the weeds and then you incorporate it into the soil and it provides nitrogen back into the soil.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:33] OK.

BLUMHORST: [00:51:33] And organic matter, because most farmers just farm corn and corn and corn and corn. Maybe some beans.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:39] Don't put the nitrogen back in.

BLUMHORST: [00:51:41] Yeah, did not. So it was nitrogen depleted. And so and then it was eroding also. So the legumes that we were working with fixated nitrogen and then also helped control erosion. So they would adapt that technology and in return they would get their crop, all of it rather than split it, which is the normal way that you would crop share there. They would get it. So that was the condition of them farming on the land was to adopt a technology and then teach other farmers about it. And so they would have their own demonstrations and they would bring farmers in from their villages and say, here's what we're doing here, we should try this in our own villages. And it worked out very well. We had, I hired a very young staff of young, enthusiastic extension agents. And it had when I left, I think about 30 people working there and all just taking all these things and bringing in people. We had huge field days and activities to teach these new techniques that were very well accepted. So they went over very well.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:43] How long did you do that?

BLUMHORST: [00:52:44] That was three years.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:45] Another three years?

BLUMHORST: [00:52:46] Another three years.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:47] So six years in Guatemala?

BLUMHORST: [00:52:48] Well, actually, it was three and a half years and Peace Corps was three and a half years.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:52] So seven.

BLUMHORST: [00:52:52] So we were in Guatemala seven years total. And during that time my son was born in Guatemala, about the second year of our work there in this organization. That was a relatively very traumatic

experience actually. The issue very briefly was that we were in a small hospital in Guatemala City and that evening there was a conflict in Guatemala City between the guerrilla and the military units. And somewhere out just outside of the city, the major electrical link or transformer or something for the city was destroyed. And so electricity was knocked out in the entire city. And this happened about 3 minutes after my son was delivered by Caesarean section.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:42] Wow.

BLUMHORST: [00:53:43] And so he was fortunately okay, no need for any incubators, because the hospital had no backup generator, nothing at all. And so it was pitch dark and somebody had a penlight in their pocket like this and pulled it out. And that's what they used to finish the process and clean up and sew up and go into recovery. And all of this in the dark basically. And so it was not the type of experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:09] You were really lucky.

BLUMHORST: [00:54:10] Yes, not the type of experience we wanted to repeat. So we decided it was probably time to get back to the U.S. if we're going to continue having a family where my daughter was born then a year later in.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:20] In the States.

BLUMHORST: [00:54:21] In the States, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:23] Wow. So that's quite a, seven years in country. And you are now director of the National Peace Corps Association. So what happened between seven years in Guatemala to becoming director of the Peace Corps Association? Did you stay in international development activities and how did you end up?

BLUMHORST: [00:54:47] Yeah, in brief, it was, it was just a very rewarding and exciting career in international development, most of it overseas. I think that experience, of course, told me the place I want to be is out in the

field and doing things with the farmers and others that I could work with. And so after moving back to the U.S. and being in the United States for a couple of years, at which time I started working with an NGO based in Washington, D.C., that again very. I would say along the way through my career, just I've been very blessed to have opportunities that I didn't expect and doors open to me that I wasn't even really looking for. And they just happened to open themselves and I was visiting my parents and happened to open up the newspaper and saw a job. I said, that sounds great. Recruiting volunteers to go overseas on international assignments and based right in Missouri.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:48] For Peace Corps?

BLUMHORST: [00:55:48] No, this was for, uh, this organization, an NGO called, at the time it was called VOCA, Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance. And they recruited volunteers from all over the United States for short term work, generally about a month, and primarily for a program they called Formative Farmer. So even more so, it was just right up my alley. It was agricultural work on USAID projects overseas. And so I started recruiting volunteers and that was for me a great way to meet people because I was recruiting co-operative managers and business owners and extension agents.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:23] And you actually knew all of that by then.

BLUMHORST: [00:56:25] A lot of them I knew. And of course, I had a, I really looked for returned Peace Corps volunteers because I knew that they would make great volunteers on these types of assignments. And so a lot of the universities had in their extension service programs and in their faculty had RPCVs. So I was able to recruit a number of volunteers there. And so we recruited for a couple of years and then eventually moved out to California. They offered me the opportunity to become the manager of the West Coast office in California, which is kind of a satellite to the Washington office. And so we went out there and then the opportunity came to travel a little bit to Bolivia and Brazil and Asia as well, and did some work there. But when the office in Bolivia had a

vacancy for the country director, I was offered that position. So I had, again I had not looked for it.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:19] Back out again.

BLUMHORST: [00:57:21] So I like, well, yeah, I do definitely want to get back out into the overseas environment. So I picked up the two kids and the family and we moved to Bolivia on what at the time seemed was going to be a one year contract because the funding for that program was only one year. And they said, well, we'll close the office down then and you'll be done. And I said, nonetheless, it sounds like a great opportunity. I was, I think, 30 years old at the time, and to be the country director for a relatively major organization there was a unique opportunity. So I went down and we lived in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. During that one year time where we had funding, I started finding funding from other sources, foundations and even the Bolivian government had a little bit of money that they put into the program. Kind of stretched the program out to two, two years, three years, and then started really networking with USAID and getting to know their priorities and their programs and was able to position ourselves for USAID funding.

BLUMHORST: [00:58:23] And long story short is when that I went to Bolivia, we had a staff of five people, including myself, and a budget of about \$100,000, maybe \$150,000 for a very modest volunteer program. Ten years later, when I finally left to Bolivia, we had over 200 employees and a \$8 million a year budget.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:44] Wow.

BLUMHORST: [00:58:45] And it was just simply because we built on our history of being in the country for over 35 years and the fact that there was opportunity for us to play a major role in USAID's priorities there. And so we were able to be part of some pretty large projects that they were implementing in different parts of the country. So ultimately, I had to move from Santa Cruz to La Paz, which was great. I enjoyed La Paz as well. So four years in Santa Cruz in the eastern part and then six years in La Paz.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:21] So your kids grew up in Bolivia.

BLUMHORST: [00:59:23] So my kids pretty much grew up in Bolivia between those two places, yeah. And they speak fluent Spanish, a little bit of local dialect as well. And in many ways consider that their home. Um, so that was all primarily agricultural work early on in the farmer to farmer program and in the work we were doing with volunteers. Then it moved more to be community development because we were doing social and productive infrastructure with USAID in this one particular area, which is a very fascinating area of Bolivia, where they have the coca production that's the legal produced coke, coca.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:08] For cocaine?

BLUMHORST: [01:00:09] For cocaine. But it also is where the world's most dangerous road is. I don't know if you've heard of this in Bolivia, but it is a harrowing drive down and back into this valley. At the time it was, there's a new road now, but it involved driving on roads that were just barely wide enough for one vehicle.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:27] And you met another one coming.

BLUMHORST: [01:00:29] And every so often wide enough for two vehicles to pass. And they call it the most dangerous road because pretty much on a weekly basis, there was a bus or a truck or a vehicle that went over the edge and killed tons of people, 30 or 40 at a time, including some other projects. I knew some development organizations had lost employees there as well in accidents with their vehicles. But it was just a fascinating part of the country and fascinating work. And we had a grant fund over the six or seven years of that program, probably totaling somewhere around \$60 or \$70 million that we invested in social infrastructure, schools, clinics, markets. Um, water and sanitation projects, pretty much everything that increased access to water and increased access to sanitation and increased access to market and to education.

BLUMHORST: [01:01:30] So we actually measured the quality of life index from the time we started to the time the projects ended, and the quality of life index went up substantially in those areas as a result of the work we were doing. And I was really happy with myself, I think, because I felt as a Peace Corps volunteer I had learned what it was like to work at the grassroots level. And I'd really come to appreciate the importance of being driven by the community itself and not being a program where you come in and you tell them what you're going to do or you condition your support on something, or you, or you simply just make sure the money gets flowing and goes somewhere. And I felt it was really important to do good development work. And so I applied, again, almost everything I learned in the Peace Corps, from the fact that I could relate to most of the people we were working with as beneficiaries. I could have a conversation with them. I could spend time in their villages with them. I could eat and drink and, you know, stay overnight in their houses with them.

BLUMHORST: [01:02:31] And most development people or USAID and embassy people weren't doing that type of interaction with the communities. But this also helped me to be able to design a program that was driven by the community and implement it in a way that said, we're going to attend to the community priorities. And we made sure that, um, the vast majority of the resources were put right into the community as opposed to, say, paying salaries of executives or paying salaries in Washington or even fancy vehicles and those sorts of things. And so I felt like I was helping be a good steward of taxpayer money by the experience that I've had in the Peace Corps, by knowing that we wanted to put most of the resources that we could into the local cause.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:19] Plus this is a much harder thing to do than coming in and having, for example, being a teacher where it's all structured and you fit into that job and you just do that. So community development really relies on the.

BLUMHORST: [01:03:37] Mm hmm.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:37] I guess, the imagination to some extent of the volunteer.

BLUMHORST: [01:03:42] Right.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:42] And the ability to deal with ambiguity.

BLUMHORST: [01:03:46] Absolutely. Yeah. And the whole way I'm learning all kinds of things. So I never quit learning at all. And so quite often felt I was in over my head but somehow learned what I needed to learn. And again, it all goes back again to things you pick up in the Peace Corps about the tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to innovate and figure things out on your own, and the ability to listen well, I think, to community members and others, and to just be, just really be persistent in what you're trying to accomplish. And so it all really just happened because of my Peace Corps experience. And I think it was better because of the Peace Corps as well.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:27] So let's, for the last few minutes of the interview, talk about your current position as director of the National Peace Corps Association. How does all of your experience over these years bring you to this job? And how do you, what is it that the association does and how do you instill that spirit in your work now?

BLUMHORST: [01:04:53] So I finally left Bolivia after those ten years because they asked me to come to Washington and be a part of the headquarters office here. And I did that for four years with VOCA. And then I decided that life needed to bring something different to me. So I just took some time off and was spending time with my daughter in particular and the son and really just enjoying not carrying a cell phone with me all the time and not having to check email all the time and put a little self-imposed sabbatical in place there. And, um, was looking to make a transition to something different. And I kind of had set up three goals for myself. One is my mid-year mid-life crisis, I guess. One is I want to go back to working with volunteerism. I just really felt volunteerism was so meaningful to me.

BLUMHORST: [01:05:48] Two, I wanted to in some way, um, how would I say, get back into that Peace Corps community. I'd always been a Peace Corps

volunteer, you know, I'd always been part of that community. And I knew that Peace Corps was something that I really admired and appreciated for what it had done in my life. And then thirdly, I just said, I want to do something new and learn something new and do something different. I thought it might be humanitarian work. It might be something completely different from what I've done before. So those were kind of my goals. And during that sabbatical then I was kind of pondering those things and I got a call from a recruiter, actually a headhunter, who asked me if I'd be interested in this position with the National Peace Corps Association. And quite honestly, I think my reaction was probably, what's that?

BLUMHORST: [01:06:34] And I said, I don't think I'm the person for you because I don't really know much about membership associations. And I've been more of a practitioner in the field and more around community development and international development. And she said, well, let's talk. And I, so we talked and, uh, the first of several interviews. I learned that the Peace Corps experience creates a community of individuals who are like-minded, who can immediately connect and can relate to each other. And we have a strong passion and affinity for our experience and the Peace Corps in general.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:17] It's true.

BLUMHORST: [01:07:17] And I've met numbers of them along the way and in my work prior to that. And it's just a huge, wonderful community. And it seemed to me, well, then the community development work that I've done actually could be applicable here. And I asked some questions about, you know, what the goals were. And I found that it seemed to me at least, that there was tremendous untapped potential in the National Peace Corps Association, and a challenging opportunity to make more of it and to, uh, bring some of my experience that I had to develop what the community could do as a whole. And so, again, I see myself as I did in the Peace Corps as a community facilitator. I accepted the opportunity to serve as a director, as the president, and have considered that to be the role I play as community facilitator.

BLUMHORST: [01:08:12] So if, um, if we are community driven, that means, first of all, I need to get out and listen to see what it is that the community expects and requires of the National Peace Corps Association. And so I spent my first year or two really just going out on a listening tour and meeting as many of the groups and individuals that I could out there, hearing what they had to say. A lot of times it wasn't necessarily the most encouraging. I did understand that there was an expectation that National Peace Corps Association could provide really much better support and services to our community and to the groups. And so that became part of our strategic plan, is to really orient it toward the community and toward the individuals. And that's why we have two of the goals being just that. One of them helping the Peace Corps community thrive, both individuals and members, and helping the community also have its greatest impact, which is our third goal.

BLUMHORST: [01:09:09] And then the second goal, which I think was for me really intriguing that we came up with is, is if we are the number one advocacy organization for the Peace Corps, then we need to make the needle move in terms of funding for Peace Corps and improving the reforms and everything that are required for Peace Corps to be better. And so helping the Peace Corps be its best became one of our other goals. And if the Peace Corps is its best and the community of returned Peace Corps volunteers and others is at its best, then we are delivering third goal. So much more impactful around the world and in our communities everywhere and all that we continue to do in a lifetime will be multiple its efforts that we're putting out now. So I felt if we can become a thriving community, one that is engaging of as many of our community members as possible, we can really make a difference in this world.

BLUMHORST: [01:10:02] We are, of course, already, but I think as a collective effort, we can do so much more. So that's what I thought was most important about NPCA. And I think what we've seen is that this is a tremendous opportunity right now, for example, the environment that we're in, for the community to come together and help address issues like intolerance and fear.

GANZGLASS: [01:10:25] That's exactly right.

BLUMHORST: [01:10:27] And Islamophobia and the crisis with refugees and how we treat them and welcome them. And then really just continuing to bring the world home and create greater understanding of others because it's needed now more than ever. And I believe also that Peace Corps is the most under-appreciated and underutilized foreign policy tool that the U.S. has. And I say foreign policy in the sense of helping other communities do what they need to be doing around the world, not as imposing.

GANZGLASS: [01:10:58] Soft power.

BLUMHORST: [01:10:58] Soft power, yeah. And so our vision is to see the Peace Corps double, at least to double. And so we're set our sights on a really enhanced advocacy strategy that brings that about. And I'm very confident we're going to make it happen. We're going to work with whatever administration and whatever Congress we have and make that happen. And we're also going to work on behalf of volunteers who come back and have continued challenges from their Peace Corps services, to make sure that they receive the health care in particular that they need, and that our community of returned Peace Corps volunteers has the resources and support from us that they need to thrive. And so I say we're all about the community first, and then we're all about the Peace Corps itself as well.

GANZGLASS: [01:11:46] I think that's probably a great place to end. So is there anything else that you want to talk about that I didn't ask you about?

BLUMHORST: [01:11:57] Um, I would just end it by saying, you know, I think like we all do, we wish every American had the opportunity to serve in the Peace Corps. So many of them are turned away now because there's not enough resources for funding volunteers. 25,000 applicants, and only 3,500 slots available for them. So several thousand qualified applicants are turned away and it's just a matter of having the resources for it. I think if every American that wanted to join the Peace

Corps could and or did some type of national service, we could really, really change the way.

GANZGLASS: [01:12:29] Change attitudes.

BLUMHORST: [01:12:30] The way, yeah, the way things are in the world. And I'm just very grateful for my own experience and very blessed to have had such a really fascinating life and career that was marked deeply by my Peace Corps experience, and for which I'm just really grateful to the Peace Corps and fortunate that I was able to have that opportunity.

GANZGLASS: [01:12:53] Great. So thank you.

BLUMHORST: [01:12:55] All right, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]