

Mary Quattro Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Mary Quattro
Interviewer: Randolph Adams
Date of Interview: December 9, 2019
Location of Interview: Manassas, Virginia
Length: 28 pages

Biographical Note

Mary Quattro served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia from August 1968 to November 1970 as a secondary education teacher.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed March 22, 2021, 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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

Mary Quattro, recorded interview by Randolph Adams, December 9, 2019, 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

Mary Quattro

December 9, 2019
Manassas, Virginia

By Randolph Adams

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

QUATTRO: [00:00:02] I don't need to talk to, in that direction.

ADAMS: [00:00:04] Yes.

QUATTRO: [00:00:05] Okay.

ADAMS: [00:00:06] Today is December 9th, 2019. This is Randolph Adams, and I'm interviewing Mary Quattro, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia from August 1968 to November 1970. She worked in secondary education. Morning, Mary. How are you doing today?

QUATTRO: [00:00:30] I'm well, thank you.

ADAMS: [00:00:32] We're going to start off the interview just by talking a little about what your life was like before joining the Peace Corps, childhood,

education. Any experiences that are relevant to maybe having influenced you to become a volunteer?

QUATTRO: [00:00:47] Okay. Um, I grew up in a little town in Davis, called Davis, West Virginia. It was a coal town, um, mostly made up of at that time, uh, immigrants from Italy and Poland. And, uh, so I didn't hear much of a West Virginia accent. I heard European accents. Uh, my, uh, father was first generation, and my grandmother and her and my granddad were, had come over and started a family here. Um, I think one of the things originally that, uh, I heard about, uh. Uh, it was a very small town, so we didn't have a lot of, of outside influence. But I always understood that about a broader world and wanted to be able to see that.

QUATTRO: [00:01:40] And one of the first things that I wanted to do was when I went on to college, and I was the, the first in my family to actually get a college degree. But when I went on to college, I had heard about, um, VISTA volunteers, uh, which were in the Appalachian regions, most of them. And I wanted to do that, but I wasn't accepted into, uh, VISTA volunteers, and I was, not until later anyway. At first I wasn't accepted there, and I was really upset about that. And Peace Corps had just been, I think Peace Corps was in the early, about '64 started?

ADAMS: [00:02:17] '61 announced and '62 started.

QUATTRO: [00:02:20] Started, yeah. So I was concerned that it would be gone by the time I was old enough to, you know, time I got out of college. So I was very hopeful that that would be a possibility for me, to go to the Peace Corps. Um, I liked the whole idea of, of having it, like, you know, of course, John Kennedy was an inspiration to everyone.

QUATTRO: [00:02:44] Um, but my family was not excited about me leaving, so, um, I didn't tell them about it until, I didn't tell them I had taken the test. I didn't tell them that I'd been accepted until it was getting down to the wire, and I needed to do things like, um, get my shots and get my, uh, tickets and get ready to, to leave. Um, I think they were just afraid for me, and they didn't want me to go. Um, my mother had lived all her life

within 20 miles of where she was born, as had my dad. So it was, uh, it was a daunting prospect. We might need to stop just a second.

ADAMS: [00:03:28] Let's just go back a step. Uh, where did you go to college?

QUATTRO: [00:03:31] I went to, um, undergraduate. I did my undergraduate work at Shepherd College in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. It's now Shepherd University. And I later did graduate work at University of Virginia.

ADAMS: [00:03:45] In?

QUATTRO: [00:03:46] Charlottesville.

ADAMS: [00:03:47] In education or?

QUATTRO: [00:03:49] Yes, in education. In guidance and education. Yeah.

ADAMS: [00:03:56] Um, continue talking about your, your family. What happened after you finally told them?

QUATTRO: [00:04:03] My dad was really opposed to it. He, he did not, didn't want me to go, but I was adamant. So I was gone. So they, they eventually, I think, you know, did what they could do to help, help me, you know, in terms of getting the medical things approved and all that. But it was, I think it was a big stretch for them to have me go.

QUATTRO: [00:04:25] Um, so I left out of a little tiny airport in Elkins, West Virginia. Had got on like a little honest to God prop plane almost, and flew up to, uh, Pittsburgh airport and left out of, out of Pittsburgh. And my dad took me over to the airport. But he was, he was very sad to do that. Um. So I, and that was the first time I'd ever flown. So I flew from, uh, from Pittsburgh to, out to California. And I was in the group called, uh, Group 20, Malaysia 20. And most of the, of that group were, uh, education and, uh, some rural, uh, rural health projects.

ADAMS: [00:05:19] Did you have siblings?

QUATTRO: [00:05:21] I did. I had, uh, there were six, six of us. Uh, two older sisters. And then, um, I was the middle kid. Um.

ADAMS: [00:05:33] So how did they react to you leaving?

QUATTRO: [00:05:35] I, I think, uh, my sisters, they were fine with it actually. My youngest sister, Bec, was just a kid. She was just young. And the funny part was, when I came back, I was like, I felt like I'd been gone forever. And she, she was, like, on the edge of being a teenager. When I came back, she was just kind of grown person. Um, what happened to these people? Now I think they were, my siblings were pretty supportive, but, but I just think my parents were more afraid than anything else.

ADAMS: [00:06:11] So why did you join the Peace Corps?

QUATTRO: [00:06:14] I, part of it was to be able to travel, but I think the other part was to be able to, to serve in a way. My dad always talked about doing service. Uh, his idea of doing service, though, was what he called for this family. It was always, you know, you took care of your own family. Uh, but there was a real, uh, um, strong emphasis on emphasis on that. And he, uh, you know, we, we heard that growing up, and we did that and all my, all my siblings have been very, very active, uh, in their personal life, active socially, and doing been politically. So I think we learned it well.

ADAMS: [00:07:04] Um, how did you hear about the Peace Corps?

QUATTRO: [00:07:08] You know, I'm not sure. I'm sure. Maybe some guidance counselor somewhere along the way told me, but somehow I had heard. Well, I mean, I certainly knew about it from the news about being founded, but, uh. And, you know, once I was familiar with the Appalachian volunteers and VISTA volunteers. So I think it just was a something I'd heard about over growing up.

ADAMS: [00:07:35] And when you tried to get into VISTA, was that for education also or what was?

QUATTRO: [00:07:39] Yeah. I mean, I was, you know, I was going in education. I, you know, the part about that is I think that later on I was accepted, initially I wasn't, was not, but some of that might have been just because I wasn't finished with school when I applied.

ADAMS: [00:07:59] Do you remember, um, the application process you had to go through?

QUATTRO: [00:08:03] Not much, because I was, I did it. I mean, I took, you know, there were tests and things, and I think we were able to take the test at, at Shepherd. Uh, I honestly don't recall a whole lot of that because I just, I just knew I was applying and taking, you know, doing what I needed to do and trying to make sure that, that my parents weren't going to stop it in the process because they, I didn't tell them about it.

ADAMS: [00:08:32] Um, did you have a specific country in mind?

QUATTRO: [00:08:36] I did. I was hoping to, uh, to go. I didn't want, I didn't ask for Malaysia. I was hoping to go somewhere like Thailand or something like that. That seemed more exotic to me, but, uh, I ended up being selected for Malaysia and it turned out to be a good thing.

ADAMS: [00:08:58] And obviously you were interested in the education program.

QUATTRO: [00:09:03] Yes, yes.

ADAMS: [00:09:07] What was your reaction when you were accepted?

QUATTRO: [00:09:09] I was, I was happy about it. I was like, but then, oh, I guess I'll have to, guess I'll have to let the rest of the crowd in on this one now. So I waited a few, few weeks.

ADAMS: [00:09:27] Do you have time to prepare? How quickly?

QUATTRO: [00:09:30] Yeah, I did because I, you know, I, it was, it was like late August or September. So I mean, I was out of school by, I'd graduated by like May. So yes, I had the months to do that.

ADAMS: [00:09:44] Remember what you did? Did you look up where Malaysia was?

QUATTRO: [00:09:47] I did. Looked up where it was and, and just, you know, just trying to go through the process of knowing what medical things I needed to do. And, um. I just remember just the time, just going quickly, it seemed to me. But I was ready to go. I was anxious to go. Um.

ADAMS: [00:10:15] Let's talk a little about training. Um, you mentioned, um, before we started the interview that you trained in Hawaii.

QUATTRO: [00:10:22] I did.

ADAMS: [00:10:22] What was that like?

QUATTRO: [00:10:23] Wonderful. Wonderful, wonderful. That was one, we were, I think, either the last or the next to last group to train, uh, in country, uh, for Malaysia. Uh, later on, everybody went directly in country to, to train. But we were, uh, were there for three months. Uh, we lived in, uh, there were two or three training groups. We, our group was the smaller one. Um, and we had, uh, Malaysia *cikgus*, teachers, who came to Hawaii to, uh, teach us. Uh, there were in my group only two, two women, uh, and there was one married, one married woman and two single women. The rest were, were male trainees. So we had a smaller group.

ADAMS: [00:11:16] The other groups were also for Malaysia?

QUATTRO: [00:11:18] They were going to Malaysia, but they were going to West Malaysia. We didn't know that at the time, but that's what it turned out to be, that a lot of our group went to East Malaysia, to the island of Borneo.

ADAMS: [00:11:30] What did training cover?

QUATTRO: [00:11:33] Uh, mostly language. Uh. You know, we did some, uh, we learned some things about the schools. Um. But it was mostly just intensive language.

ADAMS: [00:11:51] Do you recall, were all of you, um, previous teachers or?

QUATTRO: [00:11:57] Um. Well, a lot of us were newbies. I mean, we were just out of college, a lot of us. So there were a couple men who, who were older and had done some, uh, I mean, had worked as engineers or other kinds of things. But most of us were, were young, fairly young, fairly inexperienced.

ADAMS: [00:12:18] So you didn't really get any technical training in terms of teaching techniques or things like that?

QUATTRO: [00:12:25] Some. I mean, that's what I was saying. I think that it depends on if you were going to a secondary school or to, a couple of people taught in the, the, uh, it wasn't really a college level, but it was, it was in a sense college level classes. And so there were different training courses for that. And so we got a little bit of an idea. I mean, it was based on the English method of the, because Malaysia had been a British protectorate and a British colony for 100 years. And so the method of teaching was similar, something that we could relate to.

ADAMS: [00:13:01] And what about the language? What language were you being trained in?

QUATTRO: [00:13:04] In Bahasa Melayu, which is the national language. Um, Malaysia itself was new. It was a new country. And so they had, uh, recently, just recently themselves been, uh, formed. And so they were still trying to teach their own people to speak the new, new language. And so I can remember one of the things that once we got in country that they did, that you could go on the radio and they would have this class every day. It was called, and it was the Malaysian government doing it. And they would say, learn a word a day, and then they would tell you the Malay word and the English word so you could learn it. But

Malaysia itself was still in transition because it was brand new. It was a brand new country.

QUATTRO: [00:13:50] And, uh, you know, we were invited there to help develop their education system and some of their, their rural, rural schools. Um. Many, many people spoke English, though, and spoke English well, because, again, it had been a British protectorate for 100 years. And so they, their English was in most cases excellent. So. We had Chinese language. Some, some people took Chinese language courses. I did not. Some took it because they knew they would be living in, uh, took Mandarin because they'd be teaching more in those areas. Uh, the area that I was in was in, uh, more of a, uh, what they call Bahasa, was a, uh, a local, local dialects rather than. So, again, people were speaking different languages. They were learning Bahasa themselves.

ADAMS: [00:14:45] And your language instructors were from Malaysia?

QUATTRO: [00:14:48] Yes.

ADAMS: [00:14:50] Um. In retrospect, were there aspects of training you wish you had had?

QUATTRO: [00:15:01] No, I felt pretty well prepared. I thought it was good. I thought they were, uh, they worked pretty closely with Malaysian government trying to learn, you know what they needed. Uh, so I think, I think, uh, as far as the training itself was concerned. Now, placements were a little bit different question, I think. And that should have been done better. But uh, the training overall was, I think was suitable for the areas. Again, we, you know, Malaysia is the island of Borneo and then the, the West Malaysia, which is very much a different kind of atmosphere.

ADAMS: [00:15:44] One last thing about the training. What about the cultural aspects? Were they, uh, sessions presented by Americans or Malaysians or?

QUATTRO: [00:15:56] Both. Uh, some of the, the instructors and some of the people who worked in country already, uh, came to provide training. Another thing about, about that was that Malaysia at that time, as it is now, very much an Islamic country after the revolution, after the Iranian revolution. When we went there, it was, it was not. I mean, they were, they were uh, uh, Muslim, but they were not strict Muslim. I mean, they weren't Muslim, fundamentalist Muslim in the way they are now, like they did not wear the, didn't cover their heads. In fact, most of the Malay women wore beautiful saris. And, you know, over at the time after we left and after the Iranian revolution, then they started taking on the, the hijab and all that. They didn't do that when we were there.

QUATTRO: [00:16:49] So it was a different, it was a very interesting time because Malaysia itself didn't know what it was doing. I mean, didn't know what it was becoming. And it, it became more and more an Islamic country. But at that, up to that point that its influence was really much more British.

ADAMS: [00:17:07] You said after the revolution. What?

QUATTRO: [00:17:10] The Iranian, after the Iranian.

ADAMS: [00:17:11] The Iranian revolution. Okay.

QUATTRO: [00:17:13] And then all that spread. I mean, all the whole idea of a more fundamentalist approach to Islam. Because in Malaysia, even though they were Muslim, they had for, for hundreds of years been under British rule and then their own rule. But the Chinese and the Malays were not, obviously not Muslim. I mean, you had changes like in Philippines or in, in some of the other countries making an influence on Malaysia.

ADAMS: [00:17:46] Interesting. Um, what about the trainees? Were any asked to leave during training?

QUATTRO: [00:17:52] A couple. Um, we had some who, you know, Vietnam was still on. Some got drafted.

ADAMS: [00:18:02] Right out of training?

QUATTRO: [00:18:03] Right out of training. I, we, none of us ever got quite over that. That, you know, here we were Peace Corps volunteers and we had at least two that I can recall, maybe more, who were drafted and had to go home.

ADAMS: [00:18:22] Did any decide to leave on their own because, for whatever reason, they said it wasn't probably had something they had to do?

QUATTRO: [00:18:29] We had a couple. I, I mean, for whatever, you know, personal reasons, I don't think. There was a married couple that left, left early. They decided they didn't really want to stay. I, uh, for our group, not so many, though. I can't, I really don't recall other people just leaving on their own accord.

ADAMS: [00:18:49] I know in your time period, there were, in other training centers like yours, they usually had psychologists and psychiatrists.

QUATTRO: [00:18:56] Yes.

ADAMS: [00:18:57] So you went through some of those assessments?

QUATTRO: [00:18:59] We did. We had several, several assessments. Yeah. They came on site and were there with us for a couple of weeks, I guess.

ADAMS: [00:19:10] Any reaction to that?

QUATTRO: [00:19:11] Some people got de-, I think there were some deselections based on that. That's what they would call it. You've been deselected. So. But not many.

ADAMS: [00:19:25] What was the size of your group?

QUATTRO: [00:19:29] You know, I. Malaysia 20 was. I'm thinking we probably weren't more than, say, 35 to 40 at the most. Maybe not even that many. I'd say around that number. But there were different training

groups going on at the time, depending on what part of the, the country you were in. And some were, some came in like even a couple, uh, a month after we had started. So that was a new another group, 21 or 22, you know. So there were several groups training.

ADAMS: [00:20:04] And once you then went to Malaysia, how did that work? What was the country entry like?

QUATTRO: [00:20:09] When we first went in country, we flew into KL, uh, Kuala Lumpur, which is the capital in, in West Malaysia. Um. Well, we stopped in the Philippines. Then we flew into KL. And the people who were, and that was, that was a whole plane load of us. I mean, we were all, you know, all Peace Corps volunteers. And the people that were going to stay in West Malaysia stayed in West Malaysia, and the rest of us flew into East Malaysia. Um, I just remember getting off the plane in KL and the heat just hit us in the face. So it was just like, ah. And the smells. And I was like, oh my God, we're, we're in for this.

QUATTRO: [00:20:57] I happened to have gotten a, uh, some kind of cold or flu or something. I was sick as a dog on that plane, but I thought, I'm going on this plane no matter what. If everyone else gets what I got, then that's where it's going to be. But I was sick as I could be. And got, uh, you know, into Malaysia, like I say, KL and then we flew. Um, we were in there for a few days, and then we flew into East Malaysia. And most of the people were, uh, we had some, some, some training sessions there. And then within a couple of weeks' time, everybody was assigned to their post.

QUATTRO: [00:21:36] I had been assigned to a post, uh, which was further in country, and, um, they decided that as a single female, I probably was not going to go so far up ulu, up the river. And they posted me to a place called Lundu, which is where I ended up. And that was only a couple, um, an hour or two hours from, from, uh, the Peace Corps office. Then the other single female that, uh, trained with me, she went a little bit further up, but it was more, it was a bigger school.

ADAMS: [00:22:18] Uh, can you talk about your, uh, entry into your community? What was the environment like? How would you describe it physically?

QUATTRO: [00:22:27] It was a little rural school. The students were all boarders. They all lived, you know, on site. The, uh, headmaster was a Chinese man, young Chinese man named Sim Ah Sim. And Sim kept picked me up. I was, I had to go on a bus from, uh, from my, from my, you know, originally from where we were in Kuching. Took a bus out to Lundu. And the bus was an adventure because everything went on the bus. It wasn't unusual to, if you were on the bus, to have a, like a sewing machine that was going up and down the aisle because nobody was attached to it. It was just being sent to somebody. Um. Or to have animals on the bus.

QUATTRO: [00:23:26] And of course, and everybody along the road, they just stopped and they'd hailed the bus and you'd get on, and then you'd get off at the next little post in the jungle somewhere, and that's the way that went. So I got into, uh, Lundu bazaar, into the town, and I was supposed to be picked up, and I was there for about, I don't know, an hour or so. And I'm standing around, I, you know, I don't know what. Everybody obviously can see the *orang putih*, the white person, who's here. And then all of a sudden down the road comes Sim Ah Sim on this big motorcycle, big Harley. And he says to me, in not very good English, you know, he said who he was and said, get on. I said, okay, man, left my bags there and got on the motorcycle. And we went to the school. And the school was, uh, I'd say probably a mile or two from the bazaar.

QUATTRO: [00:24:24] Um, I had a nice little, little place in my own little, um, quarters. There were three, three in a row. And that's where the teachers, uh, lived. And there were two Malay teachers who lived on either side of me, two men. Um, it was very much a British setup of how the school was built and operated. But we had, uh, three forms of students, um, and they were learning English, obviously. So I taught English as a second language, but I also, which always amused me, taught Malaysian, Malaysian history, uh, which I'd have to learn the night before because I didn't know it. But I learned a lot of the past

history because, as I say, Malaysia was a new country. So it was interesting to go back to the time of the Raj and also hear, you know, update it to, to the current, uh, time.

QUATTRO: [00:25:21] And while I was there, um, there was still, uh, a lot of, uh, fighting going on, and we were several times put on alert that we might have to vacate because there were Indonesian. Malaysia in Borneo is right on the border of, of, uh, Indonesia. And so very often Indonesian rebels would come over into the side of, uh, across the border. Uh, I honestly remember several times of, I would assume Malaysian rebels. Their bodies were brought down to the, to the *padang*, to the area to, like the. So I, you know, there was fighting going on and I was, I was right on the edge of the jungle.

QUATTRO: [00:26:14] Um, there was a, uh, CUSO volunteer there, a Canadian volunteer who was there, and me. Um, and I was in charge of the girls dormitory, which was close to my house. It was just like, it was a short distance. So the I kind of was the house mother for them as well. So. But I think I, you know, we were, we were pretty much accepted.

QUATTRO: [00:26:47] Um, I remember one time, um, somebody was missing, some child was missing, and so they tried to see if they could, I mean, people were searching for him, and they called in the, uh, Iban, uh, leaders. I don't want to, I don't exactly what they called them. Now I'm forgetting my words. But he was like the headman. And so to see if he could find, you know, kind of discern where he was from, where the child was or what had happened, if the *hantus* had taken him, the spirits had taken him, or if he was hurt or whatever. And then they did that the same thing with one of the Malay *cikgus*.

QUATTRO: [00:27:33] So then they decided, well, they'll just try me then and see if I could find where it is, because here's, you know, here's this American, maybe she's got something, some special magic that she can find. And I was thinking to myself then, I mean, I want this child to be found, but I hope to God I'm not the one that finds him, because then, then they'll think that I got, like, I'm a witch or something. Very much in that area, a

lot of this whole idea of *hantus*, of ghosts, and, uh, and that kind of thing.

ADAMS: [00:28:05] You mentioned, uh, something about jungle. Is that, was it a jungle area?

QUATTRO: [00:28:09] Oh, yeah. Yeah, I mean, I was, the jungle was, I was surrounded by the jungle. People would say to me, did you not see the snakes? I said, I didn't look at them. I didn't see any. They were there. I just didn't look at them. So I managed to spend almost two years not seeing snakes that were there. I just didn't want to see them.

ADAMS: [00:28:33] Um, was this a small community or a small town?

QUATTRO: [00:28:37] Yeah, the town itself was called Lundu town, Lundu bazaar. And it was, you know, shopkeepers, a lot of Chinese shopkeepers, um. The, the Malay, there were some Malays because they had a, uh, a mosque. They also had a little tiny church that an English priest had been there for, since birth I think, he was a very old man. And he had, he had like, uh, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts that he'd done forever. He was very British. Um, but, but it's, the center was the bazaar, and it wasn't huge. It wasn't big. But there was also a military post there. And then the school was, you know, some distance, a couple miles from the town, quote, town.

ADAMS: [00:29:26] So was your area considered a suburb or a community of itself?

QUATTRO: [00:29:31] It was just considered the school.

ADAMS: [00:29:32] Just the school?

QUATTRO: [00:29:33] Yeah. The kids, we had, the Chinese students came in every morning. Most of them lived in the bazaar, in the town. The other kids, the Iban and Malay kids, lived in there, on site. They lived at the school.

ADAMS: [00:29:54] So were they walking from a great distance or transportation?

QUATTRO: [00:30:00] No. There was no, there wasn't a bus or anything. They usually rode their bikes, and though it was like a mile, mile and a half at the most. It wasn't much.

ADAMS: [00:30:10] What about your typical workday? How would you describe that?

QUATTRO: [00:30:17] Well, we had, uh. We'd get up, you know, for classes. I don't even recall the time. It seems to me like 8:00 or 9:00. Uh. We would teach for until about noonish, then take an hour or so break because it was hot, and you'd go home. People would take a nap or they'd, you know, eat lunch and take a nap. Um, I think it was pretty much a typical school day.

QUATTRO: [00:30:46] I was also in charge of the library, and they didn't have much of a library. And I closed it down one time because I decided that we needed to catalog the books. Well, that was really one of the dumb things I did, because we didn't quite get that cataloged, and it had been closed for about a week or so. And I just remember my students were saying, miss, miss, you must open the library. We're just so sad. We need to be in there. All right. Let's, you know, and because they, they really, they were really good students, really, uh, you know.

QUATTRO: [00:31:22] It was funny. They, of course, spoke all kinds of languages. Most of the kids spoke three or four languages because of the Iban. And the Chinese students spoke two or three different dialects, you know, and, and the. And of course, many of them spoke English. Um. So they decided that I, you know, I was writing and speaking in English, but it was American English, so sometimes they weren't sure it was exactly right. Um, and so I said, okay, well, I can't write in, in Jawi script or anything, but I, here's, I'll teach you this. So I taught them how to do shorthand. So it tickles me that somewhere somebody could write in shorthand, I'm sure a script that nobody uses anywhere anymore in the

world. But at the time, I could write in shorthand. So they thought that was interesting.

ADAMS: [00:32:27] Uh, what about, uh, leisure time? What did you do outside of teaching?

QUATTRO: [00:32:34] Well, sometimes we, we would go, you know, go down to the town and it depended. The first year, uh, you know, mostly we ate together. All the teachers ate together so that every evening you'd have, you'd have a meal together, and that would last an hour or so, a couple of hours, you know. So it was a good time to talk. And you'd be in a room, you know, with a teacher's meeting, and there would be maybe four languages going on at one time. And they, and they would not necessarily be speaking Bahasa Melayu. They'd be speaking Chinese or, or in Malay dialect of some kind. So you'd sit in there and then everybody, everyone would throw out an English word for me, so I could kind of keep up with the, with the conversation. Uh, because they did not always speak in English.

QUATTRO: [00:33:24] Um, so I, I, I think I learned a lot by that, by being the minority, because as a white woman, I was not used to being a minority. And it was a good experience for me to, to be that. I remember even coming back, uh. I was downtown, I was in Washington, and I was on an elevator, and I was speaking to another volunteer who was with me, and I was speaking in English to her. And I said to her, I'm not sure where we need to go next. And the person in the elevator said, well, I'll help you. And both of us went like this. We weren't used to being able to speak English and not have, and have someone understand us. So because we were just off the plane, we were like, okay, brand new. So I was like, oh, I guess we're home.

ADAMS: [00:34:12] You ate with the teachers, you said.

QUATTRO: [00:34:13] Yeah.

ADAMS: [00:34:14] Who was, who was cooking the meals?

QUATTRO: [00:34:15] Cook father. I had a guy who was cook father, he, he cooked for, uh, for everybody. I mean, he cooked for the kids, and then he cooked for us as well.

ADAMS: [00:34:27] At night?

QUATTRO: [00:34:28] Usually evening. Evening, evening.

ADAMS: [00:34:31] You would do that?

QUATTRO: [00:34:31] Yeah. Yeah, in the morning I would just get tea or something, a biscuit or something like that. But he would, uh, cook for us.

ADAMS: [00:34:40] Were the, the, how many teachers? You said there were two male teachers and others.

QUATTRO: [00:34:45] Yeah. I think we probably had, uh, uh. We probably had about, uh, I wish I had that picture I could show you. We had about ten teachers.

ADAMS: [00:34:56] The others lived nearby?

QUATTRO: [00:34:57] Some lived in the little town. Uh, one. Actually the first, the first year, uh, one of the Chinese teachers lived with. She and I lived together, and then she later left, and I had my own little place. That was interesting too, because when we lived, when, uh, we lived together, um, again, the insurgency was still going on, and it wasn't uncommon to, I mean, sometimes the Malay soldiers who were posted by were nearby. They would come by and they'd visit, you know, these two single females, but they would come by and visit us. And it was not unusual to have 5 or 6 guns stacked up on the outside of your house, because I didn't want them in, but they needed to bring them. And so it was just a different thing. You just kind of accepted that, I guess.

ADAMS: [00:36:01] So what about connecting with other volunteers during your service?

QUATTRO: [00:36:06] We would go into town. There were a number of volunteers who were in Kuching, in the main town, which was where the Peace Corps office was. So we would go in there sometimes on the weekend. It was a big trek, though. I mean, if you were going to do it, you had to do it. Um, I did, I didn't have my friend Don, who came the second year I was there. He lived in the town. Um, so he, he would, if he came up, he'd ride his bicycle up in the evenings or something. And we'd sit there and discuss the problems of the world and what we were doing in the middle of the jungle. And say, say, I'm not sure if I'm up for one more goddamn enchanted evening because it was always in the jungle supposed to be enchanted evenings. And we were like, yeah, well, we'll see.

ADAMS: [00:36:58] Um, what was your relationship to Peace Corps staff? Did they help out at all?

QUATTRO: [00:37:05] No. I mean, not really. They, they weren't very helpful. Uh, one incident in particular, as I mentioned to you, one of the reasons I went home early for the. Before I left, I would say for about six months before I left, um, I had a stalker. And he was persistent, to say the least. At first I couldn't quite figure out what was going on. I was like, what is it? My, we had the shutters on our windows, you know, like the wooden shutters. I'd wake up and my shutters would be open and I'd think, I'm sure I closed that. Um. Or I would go back to my house and something seemed odd. Uh, and I couldn't, I didn't know what was going on.

QUATTRO: [00:37:55] One weekend I went into town, into Kuching, and I was going the whole weekend. And I came back and my kids were so upset, my girls. And they, they had washed all my clothes and they were hanging them out on the line. And I was like, what happened, what, what? What's up kids? Oh, miss, miss, we're so sorry. So apparently this horse's rear had gotten into my house and had, you know, scattered the clothes everywhere. And the girls saw him. And so they were trying to clean them before I got back. And, um, this just went on, and I kept telling Peace Corps about this. And they kept saying, oh, no, no, we don't want to disturb any of the host country nationals. And I was like, okay then.

QUATTRO: [00:38:48] The first time then and then he, whoever this person was, and we never found out. Got into, was into, or we never tried to find out anything. **

QUATTRO: [00:38:58] uh, got into my house, I went to the police, the local police, with my friend Don. He went with me. And the local police said, must be your friend. Must be some friend of yours. I said, no, no, no, no. So even then, they didn't believe women. You know, first of all, I was a single woman here by myself. They even asked me, or did your family? I mean, they, I guess they kind of assumed we must have been prostitutes or something. Why would single women be here, you know? So they were, I could tell, were going to be of zero help. Um, so, as I say, I reported to Peace Corps several, several times, went in town and reported it, and they kept telling me to put a lock on my door. Well, I, I did, but that didn't. I had several locks.

QUATTRO: [00:39:51] So one morning, um. No. Anyway, this went on. And one evening I was asleep and I woke up and he was in here, right in my face, just right here. And I can still hear the sound I made, which was furious. I was so damn mad. I was like, God knows what I called him, but it was mostly a sound. And I just, I guess I scared the hell out of him, which was fine, because he went out running. But I did too. And I ran after him and in the jungle, and I was, I was out in the jungle when it finally occurred to me that that probably wasn't a sensible thing to be doing. I'm barefooted and out in the jungle, you know.

QUATTRO: [00:40:52] So I went home, waited till it got light. Again reported it, and I think one time, one time, one of the, whoever was head, was head of the Peace Corps volunteers at that time in Kuching did come out and talk to the, um like the other teachers, the principal. I don't know if he talked to the policeman or not, but I could tell they weren't going to really do anything to help me. So, uh, one, one morning I was going to school. Had my cup of tea, locked all my doors, and spilled the hot tea down myself and couldn't get back. Couldn't get back in because I'd forgotten the key in there. So I thought, I think I'm going home. And,

and I did. I decided, I went in and I told them, I need to go now because you're not going to help me.

QUATTRO: [00:41:46] Um, and this, like I say, this had gone on for months, and it was unfortunate because I, for me, it was overall a good experience. The reason it wasn't so good, a good experience, is that Peace Corps did not support me. Uh, they didn't really try to help. And come to find out afterwards, there were a couple of, uh, women volunteers who had been posted at that same place. Same thing had happened to them. I didn't know that until, until much later. But Peace Corps knew it, and they should never have posted a person there, a woman there, but they did because they didn't want to upset the host country, as they said. And I thought, well, but I learned much later that that's what had happened. And then the one woman who, Joan, they're actually both of them were named Joan. But, but little Joan, little Joan had moved into town, uh, because that was happening. But.

QUATTRO: [00:42:42] And Peace Corps knew that, they should have told me. But they didn't. They didn't. And they shouldn't have posted someone there. So that part for me was very unfortunate, because I would like to have stayed my whole time there. I had intended to stay the whole time. But my concern mostly, uh, at the end, was that my girls would be, um, hurt. You know, if this dumbass is going to come into my house, he's also going to come in to where those girls are. And so, uh, I, you know, and that's the reason I came home early. But Peace Corps failed, failed me on that. And I, I remember going to, uh, a couple of, uh, one, one year down on the Mall they had a, you know, a Peace Corps thing, you know, when they have 4th of July, they used to. And there was this whole group talking about, oh, Peace Corps, you know, we'd send our kids, we'd do this and that. And I'm like, well, no, that's not always the case.

QUATTRO: [00:43:39] I mean, we had a volunteer killed while we were there. Uh, a volunteer died while we were there, there was in country. And I just think that that they, it wasn't until many years later, and I don't know if you probably know when, that they started finally funding, I mean, they're trying to really follow through on some of this stuff. There was

this whole attitude about don't, don't rock the boat kind of stuff. And I think that was unfortunate. But, but I, you know, I didn't want, I was determined that that was not going to be my only Peace Corps experience. That was an experience and it was unfortunate. But that's not what defined my time there. And so when I, when I look back on it as overall it was positive for me.

QUATTRO: [00:44:26] It was very positive experience. It gave me the opportunity to travel. It certainly gave me the opportunity to meet other people. It gave me the opportunity to be a minority and to see how that feels. Uh, it gave me the opportunity to just have an experience that I never would have had in Davis, West Virginia. Uh, so I am, um, I'm grateful that I did that. And I think probably one, was one, I mean, I'm glad I went, and I think it was probably one of the bravest things I ever did, uh, to just decide that that's what I was going to do. And then, then it was also, um, I think, brave to say that I won't take any more of this. You know, I'm not going to just be this nice little kid here. A nice little Catholic school girl. This is not right. And you, you need to help protect me a little bit.

ADAMS: [00:45:22] Um. Just changing subject a bit. Um, what, did you develop relationships with local, um, colleagues or neighbors, friends?

QUATTRO: [00:45:38] You know, obviously our, our teachers who were there. I mean, my first year was, uh, I had my, uh, teacher was a Chinese, uh, taught Chinese language, but, uh, she was my roommate. Um, we had, uh, two Canadian volunteers, one, one man the first year. And then, then the second year I was there, this woman named Anne, who we called Anne of a thousand words because Anne liked to talk and a thousand words came. And she and I got along pretty well. I mean, you know, she had another. We didn't live together, but we were on the same place. She decided to go home early, though. She, uh, she didn't stay the whole time because she got engaged or something. And, uh.

QUATTRO: [00:46:28] So I think mostly the people that I knew were the teachers, the, the. I had two principals, the Chinese principals. Uh, Sim was a wonderful young man. He was very young. And Mr. Wong, who was the

but, but that's neither here nor there. But I mean, the teachers, most of them of us got along pretty well.

ADAMS: [00:46:56] Have you been able to make contact with any of them?

QUATTRO: [00:46:59] The teachers? No, I, as I say, I do have contact with some of the people that I served with, though. I'm, uh, Harriet was in, that I'm going to have lunch with next week, it was, she was in Kuching. She worked in, more in the Peace Corps office. Uh, and then my friend Don, uh, have just been lifelong friends. I mean, because we were in our 20s. And, you know, several others actually. But I mean, those two are the more local ones that I have, have contact with.

ADAMS: [00:47:36] What about vacation time? Did you we travel anywhere?

QUATTRO: [00:47:39] We did. We went to Singapore and we went to, uh, Brunei. We traveled in country mostly. The only exception was when we did go to Singapore. But otherwise we'd travel in country and go to see other Peace Corps volunteers.

ADAMS: [00:48:06] It sounds like your living arrangements were pretty steady throughout your entire time period.

QUATTRO: [00:48:12] Yeah, I think we were very fortunate. I mean, we had, we had, you know, it wasn't primitive. I mean, we certainly had running water, although I didn't know. The first time I was there, we had, they would store the water in these big cement things inside your house. Well, I, I didn't know what my door. You were supposed to go in and dip the water and take your shower. Well, I didn't know that. I got in the cement thing. Well, I'll tell you, my roommate just, oh my God, she was horrified. She's like, what the hell is wrong with this woman? I'm sure she thought to herself. But I thought, it must be a shower. But it was awful, it was difficult to get into, but I thought, what do I know? So I'm in here ruining the whole water supply, you know, taking my shower. Like, no, no, let me explain. Just dip it. Okay. Splash and dip. Okay. Got it. So I only did that one time.

QUATTRO: [00:49:10] Um, but, I mean, it was nice. We did have running water. I could cook if I wanted to, although God knows I didn't want to, but we had, like, you know, gas. Uh, I guess it was propane stoves and stuff. And toilets, which was very, very nice to have toilets.

ADAMS: [00:49:28] Electricity?

QUATTRO: [00:49:29] Yes. Yeah. Yeah. It was, I mean, the British did something right. So we had a few things that were nice.

ADAMS: [00:49:41] Um, looking back, what would you consider your, your main accomplishment as a volunteer?

QUATTRO: [00:49:50] Well, I think just being able, uh, you know, I did, uh, you had asked about did I have any contact with students? My friend Don still has contact with one, uh, woman, uh, who's, who we both taught, and now her daughter also writes to them. So I hear about her. But I think it was in what we did was say, this is how America looks. Um, because there was a war going on. There was, you know, we were in Vietnam and we were not telling the truth about what we were doing there. You know, we would listen to, uh, Armed Forces Radio and they'd say, well, we knew there were troops in country, for God's sake we could see them, you know? So, so, I think, uh, I mean, we just were not telling the truth.

QUATTRO: [00:50:39] And I think, um, the fact that there was the insurrection that was going on with Indonesia, uh, we got, we learned, you know, I mean, there was, there was a lot of unsettled things. And somehow we were a little bit, there was some stability, but there was also a different face to us. We weren't necessarily all the people that were fighting all the time. We were trying to do something. And I know, I know my, like my girls, I mean, they were young girls. They were young, you know, ten, 12 years, 13 years old. But they appreciated, uh, what we were doing.

ADAMS: [00:51:18] What, what grade levels did you teach?

QUATTRO: [00:51:20] It was forms one through, uh, three, which is like, uh, middle, little middle school, kind of. Yeah, yeah.

ADAMS: [00:51:30] Um, have any regrets? But did you suggest changing sites? Just wondered about that. Was that an option? You were pretty deep into your second year already.

QUATTRO: [00:51:44] Yeah, yeah. You know, I don't think I did. I mean, I don't know if I did, I don't remember that part. I don't, I don't know if it occurred to me that I should could change or I had to go away or what, I don't. I don't know why they didn't though. I mean, I think about that now. Why didn't somebody in the Peace Corps office say, well, then you come, come into town? But they didn't. They in fact said, put on more locks instead. And I think there was this, this kind of almost a disbelief. And I mean, that's crap. You don't send women out there. I don't think it would happen today. What I'm saying is, I don't think that attitude would be there today. But we're talking 50 years ago and women were not, I mean, we weren't treated as if we had any sense or we knew what was going on. And it surely must. Like the cop said, the local policeman, surely he must be your friend. No.

QUATTRO: [00:52:35] But I mean, there was that attitude too. Why would this single woman be out here in the jungle? Um, so I don't. I would hope that Peace Corps would have more sense today. I don't know that the other countries would, but, I mean, you need to be taken much more seriously in that. I could have been killed. And I didn't even know that. I didn't have enough sense to know that. I thought that I was just, I was just furious. I was just furious that somehow someone could be so intrusive to me.

ADAMS: [00:53:10] What about lessons learned apart from the issue with Peace Corps, um, with your engagement with Malaysia? Or take away lessons for you?

QUATTRO: [00:53:21] Um, I think we did a good job in Malaysia. Malaysia, we came at a time when they, when they really asked us to help. And I think we did. We supplied the teaching, the teachers that they needed,

because they were a developing country. Uh, we supplied. Uh, just, you know, we just supplied rural, rural development people. Um. We supplied engineers. I mean, I think that we were really helpful in nation building for them. And I don't know how many years we had volunteers in Malaysia. I would think maybe, maybe 15 may be the most. I wouldn't think more than that. We finally, I think kind of, I used to know that, but I don't know it now.

QUATTRO: [00:54:18] But I think we, we did work ourselves out of a job. We did help the, the overall development, um, of the country from. Because it was very new and, and they, they just didn't have, weren't able to do their, the services. They needed help and they were willing to take it. And they, they asked us and um, and then they asked us to leave. And so that worked out. That's the way that should have been too, when they felt they could take care of their own needs. Yeah. Because it wasn't, it wasn't our job to stay forever.

QUATTRO: [00:54:59] And I would like to think that some, some old coot somewhere thinks, remembers, uh, U.S. citizens with kindness, rather than the face of what they see now sometimes. That they know everyone, uh, that the United States isn't always the face that it presents, uh, politically. And, you know.

ADAMS: [00:55:30] What about how the Peace Corps experience influenced your future plans? What did you do once you came back?

QUATTRO: [00:55:37] When I came back, I taught for a while and then I went back to graduate school. Um, or I went to graduate school. Not back, but I went to graduate school. I, uh, then went into social work for a number of years. And then one day I got tired of social work and went into the least, the farthest removed that I could be from doing social work and teaching, which was commercial real estate. I thought, my God, you got, you go in there, you do your contracts, you look at the surveys, and you go home. So I did that part for many years.

QUATTRO: [00:56:22] But I just, it was, it was a good, I mean overall it was a life changing experience for me. It changed my life. It changed how I saw

the world. It changed how I, uh, related to it. It changed how I saw myself. I, I, I think I felt that I was more capable than I knew I was. And then I felt that I was, you know, from before. Um, I'd recommend it to people. I would recommend it to young people now.

ADAMS: [00:56:57] Um, one of the things that Peace Corps always promotes is the three goals. The technical assistance. Better understanding of Americans. Better understanding of other people. Were you conscious of those goals as a volunteer?

QUATTRO: [00:57:10] Yeah, very much. Bringing the world back home, is what they used to talk about. Yeah, I did a lot. I mean, I think when I got back, I was certainly, over time, more, more politically motivated and more involved and engaged and, you know. I like, I worked at elections for years and years and just other things, you know, that I did that were related to that. I, uh, I actually helped to start the Friends of Malaysia. There are a couple, there were a couple of us that worked on it. But I came, I was cleaning out my basement the other day and came across a few things from when we first started that group, and then some other people have taken over, obviously.

QUATTRO: [00:57:52] Uh, because I didn't think, I didn't think it was up to us as Friends, as Friends of Malaysia, to always be. You were talking about the first group that kind of died out. See, I think you don't just keep saying what we did or how it was. And that's why I like the groups that I see, like the Wisconsin groups and others. What do you do now? Because that's bringing the world back home. You can't just be back in my day, you know, or back in the day. I mean, that's nice to reminisce about, but, uh. You know, a lot of our people went into, had contacts with through State Department and things like that. And I think that's what they were doing. You know, they were really bringing the world back home in their sense of somehow understanding that.

QUATTRO: [00:58:41] We had one volunteer, I don't think he ever did come home. He just stayed. There's one volunteer, I forget his name now, but there was one guy who just, he, he stayed. He never came back. He's like, no, I like this country. So.

ADAMS: [00:59:02] Uh, through the, your country of service group, um. Did they become involved, you sort of hinted at it, in explaining your service overseas or getting engaged in?

QUATTRO: [00:59:18] I don't think so. I mean, I don't feel like they do. That's one of the reasons, I mean, I still belong to it, but I'm not as engaged in it as I was. I think it's, I mean, a lot of times it's just for here. What happens is Friends of Malaysia, because we've got a Malaysian embassy, they'll go to the embassy and it's nice to have those contacts. And plus you get good food and, but it's, it's. I don't know that that we have any. I don't see that group, and maybe I'm wrong. I should not just condemn it like that. But I'm not convinced we've done any kind of, um, current thing as far as Malaysia is concerned. I mean, it's a different, it's a different country. It's got a different approach, uh, from the time we were there. It's become, uh, much more, uh, in some sense a fundamentalist country, which was not what we were. Uh, we weren't used to that. I mean, it was a different experience for us.

QUATTRO: [01:00:18] But I think it's, I think as a country and especially on the island of Borneo, uh, they have worked so hard, the natives, the, the *bhumiputra*, the sons of the soil, they work so hard to try and preserve the, the jungles and that. And we, we did, have contributed money and things. We've done some rural, uh, rural, uh, electric and water, uh, projects with, with other organizations. We've done some of that. But, but East Malaysia is still is much is, is behind the curve and in a way good. It's good for them. But they're also, their resources are being just, just diminished. Um.

ADAMS: [01:01:11] I think you've talked about this already, but sort of a summation. Um, the effect that Peace Corps service on your life or any last words of wisdom?

QUATTRO: [01:01:22] Well, as I say, I would recommend Peace Corps to anybody, no matter what your age. If you decide to go, go. I mean, I was at the time. You probably remember this, too. You would remember when Lillian Carter went, remember? Miss Lillian went to serve in the Peace

Corps. Um. I just think that it, it is a good, it's a good program. I think it's one of the most successful programs that the United States has had. And it's, it's, people don't realize how successful it can be one-to-one. Um, so I would encourage people to do it, but I also would encourage people, I would encourage Peace Corps to not be afraid to have some courage. Um. Not to just say, you know, we don't always have to be concerned about host country nationals. If there is something that's not, that needs to be corrected, we need to say that to, the volunteers need to say that to Peace Corps.

QUATTRO: [01:02:28] Um. And I think we don't go with the idea that we're being benevolent, because what happens is we, as volunteers, I suspect, learn more and get more out of it than we give. And to me, that's critical right now in this, this climate that we're in, uh, that we don't become so insular and so isolated that we think we're the ones that know everything, because we don't know squat half the time. And just to be, uh, and I mean this sincerely, to be a minority absolutely changes your perspective, and I, I think we need it.

QUATTRO: [01:03:10] And I think we also, you know, we don't, uh, I mean, it's got to affect our immigration policy. It's got to affect our social policies. I mean, we, we just, we don't have all the answers. And Peace Corps is a way of of contributing. But it's not to be arrogant. I don't think Peace Corps is arrogant, but I, what I'm saying is if you go, you go with a certain, uh, as a volunteer, you go with a certain amount of humility.

ADAMS: [01:03:41] Thank you, Mary.

QUATTRO: [01:03:42] Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]