

Richard Shields Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Richard Shields
Interviewer: Charlene Loriston
Date of Interview: October 15, 2019
Location of Interview: Reston, Virginia
Length: 21 pages

Biographical Note

Richard Shields served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Liberia from 1963 to 1965 in an elementary education program.

Access

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Suggested Citation

Richard Shields, recorded interview by Charlene Loriston, October 15, 2019, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Oral History Interview

with

Richard Shields

October 15, 2019

Reston, Virginia

By Charlaine Loriston

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

LORISTON: [00:00:01] Today is October 15th, 2019. My name is Charlaine V. Lauriston. I served in Guinea from 2016 to 2017. And today I am interviewing Mr. Richard Shields, who served in Liberia September 1963 to August 1965 in elementary education. Hello, Richard.

SHIELDS: [00:00:26] Hello.

LORISTON: [00:00:26] Would you prefer to be called Dick?

SHIELDS: [00:00:28] You can call me Richard.

LORISTON: [00:00:29] Okay. Awesome. So, Richard, can you please share with your listeners a little bit about your background, your family life, and basically what you were doing before Peace Corps?

SHIELDS: [00:00:40] I grew up in western Massachusetts. My father was a pharmacist. He owned a drugstore in a small town called Stockbridge, Mass. I had one sister. And in college, which was the University of Massachusetts, I majored in government. And it was during that period of time that Kennedy announced the formation of the Peace Corps. And it interested me. And so I applied for it.

LORISTON: [00:01:17] So the first time you heard of Peace Corps was through President Kennedy's speech?

SHIELDS: [00:01:22] Correct.

LORISTON: [00:01:24] Okay. And what was it about service that, that sparked your curiosity and interest into joining?

SHIELDS: [00:01:33] Well, it's a long time ago, uh, over half a century. But I think for a lot of us, idealistic liberal arts majors, if you will, the idea of being of service to our country and doing something of value for people in other countries was appealing. So that's why I applied.

LORISTON: [00:02:01] And were you already in your career during that time when you applied?

SHIELDS: [00:02:07] No, I graduated from college in 1963.

LORISTON: [00:02:11] Ah.

SHIELDS: [00:02:12] And, uh, and then I went right into, I applied during my senior year, and I went into training at Syracuse University in the summer of 1963.

LORISTON: [00:02:25] And how long after you? Well, first of all, the program that you ended up in, did you select adult, excuse me, elementary education as your program or was that assigned to you?

SHIELDS: [00:02:40] Well, of course, they reviewed our background and our capabilities. Um, I was never great at languages, so they selected me

for a English speaking country. And a lot of us back then really didn't have a, any kind of trade of some sort that would enable us to go into farming or something like that. So. There was also a lot of need for teachers, so they put me in a teacher program.

LORISTON: [00:03:20] How soon after your application did you receive your invitation to serve?

SHIELDS: [00:03:29] That's a hard question to answer. It's been so long. I can't remember exactly when I applied. It was sometime during my senior year, I'm sure, and it was probably months.

LORISTON: [00:03:41] So how did you feel once you received it? Do you recall that?

SHIELDS: [00:03:45] I'm sure I felt elated. I can't, I can only assume that that's how I felt. Yes.

LORISTON: [00:03:51] How did your family respond to your announcement that you were going overseas to serve?

SHIELDS: [00:03:57] They were very positive. I didn't have any, you know, my, my dad and at that time my stepmother didn't show any, any kind of concern or, you know, problems with my, with my going over. So I was happy that they supported me.

LORISTON: [00:04:18] Now, before starting your official training in Syracuse, what did you personally do to prepare yourself for your service?

SHIELDS: [00:04:33] Well, that's, I don't, I don't frankly recall, to tell you the truth. It's been so long. I mean, I packed a suitcase and did whatever they told me to do. And, you know, if they sent me things to fill out, I filled them out.

LORISTON: [00:04:57] How did you get to Syracuse?

SHIELDS: [00:05:00] I think I probably drove.

LORISTON: [00:05:03] Wow.

SHIELDS: [00:05:04] Yeah, it wasn't that long. It was probably a four, 4 or 5 hour trip.

LORISTON: [00:05:08] And so how long were you in Syracuse before you had to go to Liberia, would you?

SHIELDS: [00:05:17] I don't remember exactly how long the training was. Maybe six weeks, maybe eight weeks. It was during the summer of '63. So 6 or 8 weeks, whatever they had.

LORISTON: [00:05:32] What was your training like?

SHIELDS: [00:05:37] Well, there was a piece that, uh, that spoke to us about health. They certainly wanted us to be healthy over there. So we learned about the various concerns that they had and what to do with that. Malaria, of course, was a, you know, endemic in Liberia. So they talked about that, dysentery and so forth. They wanted us to be physically fit. So there were various kinds of physical education, physical kinds of things we had to do. And the other thing, the other piece would have been preparing us to, as teachers. They really didn't know too much of what we would be facing, but they gave us some general educational principles to be following. So I would say, looking back over half a century, those were the, the three areas that they focused on primarily.

LORISTON: [00:06:44] And so you took a flight after training to head over to Liberia?

SHIELDS: [00:06:49] There were 163 of us, I believe.

LORISTON: [00:06:51] Wow. Huge group.

SHIELDS: [00:06:53] The third, the third group.

LORISTON: [00:06:55] The third group for Liberia. And what did, what was it like when you finally arrived?

SHIELDS: [00:07:04] Well, you know, it's, uh, we arrived at Robertsfield. Now, Liberia has a big Firestone rubber plantation. And Robertsfield was built to service that rubber plantation. It was about, I would say, 50 miles from Monrovia, the capital, where we, where we would be going for in-country training. And it was the middle of the monsoon season. The September month is probably the rainiest month in Liberia. So what struck us most was the, the smell of mildew and just moisture everywhere. And, uh, that particular month, they normally get about 15 inches of rain. So every day it was cloudy and every day it rained and, and mold and mildew was everywhere. And that was, that was probably the one thing that I can remember about that, that particular time. And it was, it was something. So we had, we had about, I don't know, 4 or 5 days of orientation, if you will.

LORISTON: [00:08:37] And during that orientation, the 4 to 5 days in Monrovia, did you immediately go to your village where you would be serving for the next two years from there? Or were you hosted by a family in Monrovia to help you acclimate to the life and language?

SHIELDS: [00:08:58] No, we, uh, they put us up in a, in an apartment building. And there was no hosting or anything of that nature. And after various meetings and so forth, we were sent to, to our post.

LORISTON: [00:09:17] And what was the name of your village?

SHIELDS: [00:09:19] Ganta, Liberia. It was more of a town, actually. It was on the Guinea border. It was a crossroads and fairly bustling, actually.

LORISTON: [00:09:31] So can you spell that?

SHIELDS: [00:09:34] G-A-N-T-A. It was about, um, I would say, 150 miles from the, from the capital, Monrovia. And, uh. So.

LORISTON: [00:09:48] Can you describe this small city?

SHIELDS: [00:09:52] Well, I would, actually I wouldn't say it was a city. It was a large town, more of a large town. It had a lot of Lebanese stores. Lebanese were the primary merchants throughout Liberia, as a matter of fact. It had one Mobil gas station. It, um, it was a crossroads, as I say, there was another main road that went down to another part of Liberia. And, um, like I said, it was on, right, right there. There was a border right, right there. I went by the border, the Guinea border, every day. There was a Methodist mission there. There was a hospital on the mission grounds. There was a leper colony. And there was a school. So, uh. And then there were various Liberian, a lot of thatched roof huts, and a lot of zinc roofed houses, one of which I lived in.

LORISTON: [00:11:05] What is the zinc, uh, zinc roofed house?

SHIELDS: [00:11:09] Well, uh, it's made out of mud brick that has a kind of a cement plaster, so it's a white plaster, plastered over with and painted white, with a roof made out of zinc. And typically square and, uh. So.

LORISTON: [00:11:37] How did your community receive you upon your arrival?

SHIELDS: [00:11:41] Very, very positive. Very positive. Um. I had a housemate. There were two other women. Actually, there were four, four Peace Corps women there. Two were on the, uh, on the mission. And they were, so they were, they had assigned four of us to the school. So. But we were received very well. But we did have to, we did replace some, some teachers, some Liberian teachers. We came in the middle of the school year. The school year started in March and ended, March till December. So we got there in the middle of the, middle of the year, so they had to do some moving around. And I don't frankly know what happened to the teachers. They had to move. But some were moved in order to make, make room for us.

LORISTON: [00:12:42] And were those four other volunteers, excuse me, three other volunteers, were they part of your training group or were they?

SHIELDS: [00:12:50] All part of our training group, yeah.

LORISTON: [00:12:51] Okay.

SHIELDS: [00:12:52] Except for the two. Well, I will say this. There was a group, Group II people were on the mission. The Group III, my group, there were four of us, the two women and my housemate and myself. So.

LORISTON: [00:13:09] So what was the living like in Ganta for you?

SHIELDS: [00:13:16] Well, uh. We had a very large house which easily accommodated my housemate, but we were also kind of a storage depot and we sort of had a part time roommate. That is to say, the Peace Corps leader, if you will. The one that actually a nice, nice way of saying truck driver, but he had a very important thing. He had, he was the one that brought supplies. He brought mail. And since we were centrally located, he would oftentimes when he was there, before going on to the next town, which was far away, he would stay overnight. So there was a bed for him and there was a room for all the stuff that he was bringing. Sometimes there was a truck that came in and we would unload the truck and put it. These trucks would have things, for example, books, this nature, supplies for the various, various posts.

SHIELDS: [00:14:26] So, um. It was, it was. There was no electricity, but we did have a kerosene stove. We had a kerosene refrigerator. So that was nice. At the time, we actually had a shower, which was, um, didn't last very long, but it was gravity feed and there was this big barrel and that took in rainwater. And then it worked until the dry season. And then, of course, more rain. And then there was a latrine. So that was. And then as far as furniture, you know, we, I think there was a table and a few chairs and beds and that was about it.

LORISTON: [00:15:16] So how did your training prepare you to be an elementary school teacher?

SHIELDS: [00:15:25] Well, that's a, that's a hard question. We were, you know, this was early on in the Peace Corps and not a heck of a lot was

known really about what life would be like. So I would say that not too much. Not too much. Um. We had a lot of assumptions that didn't prove to be correct. We found that we had to do a lot when it came to teaching, improvisation. We had to do using our own imagination of how to get concepts across and so forth. It was just kind of seat of the pants, sort of, a lot of it was.

SHIELDS: [00:16:21] To give you an example, you know, first day of school. Okay. Well, for us, of course, it was the middle of the school year, but going to the school and having certain expectations. We realized that those were not met, because we just assumed a lot greater level of organization, which just simply wasn't there. And, uh, I remember when we started the first full year, which was in '64, again still assuming that there would be a first day and the chairs would be lined up and so forth. And total chaos for the first several days. So the first day of school really wasn't the first day of instruction. It was the first day of let's see if we can get things organized here. So things of that nature were, uh, we were always surprised.

LORISTON: [00:17:30] What was the most difficult aspect of your job?

SHIELDS: [00:17:44] Um. Getting across concepts I think that were totally foreign to, uh. Having to work with supplies and texts that, that the students had no, no concept, no understanding of. I taught, for example, social studies. I taught English. How do you, for example, teach geography when you don't have a map, any maps? So you had to be creative. So, uh, so I took, you know, I took a chalk and I found that I could, actually wasn't too bad at, at drawing, which I'd never tried before really. Drawing a map of Africa or drawing the map of Liberia, things, you know, this type of thing. So having to figure out how to get across concepts. Um.

SHIELDS: [00:18:57] Having books totally unrelated to, you know. Americans are, you know, they, they're very, um, which should I say? They're kind people and they want to help. And so they send over lots of books. But the books, you know, are totally meaningless to these people. Dick and Jane books really. Well, for example, I taught fourth, fifth, and sixth

graders. Well, these, these students were not, um, eight, nine, 10th grader age. They were 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 year olds. Why were they so old? Well, first of all, there's no real compulsory education. Maybe they're needed to help out in the rice fields. And so they just don't come to school at the time we would expect they would be coming. So, so there was a disconnect between their interest and the kind of books that we had.

SHIELDS: [00:20:18] I do remember one, uh, I was able to get the concept of cold. Okay, what's cold? How do you, how do you, how do you explain cold? Well, it just so happened that an entrepreneur in Ganta bought an enormous frozen food locker because he was going to sell frozen fish, one of these walk in lockers. So I was able to take them on a field trip to the inside of this locker, which was really cold, like zero degrees. Okay. And I can say, now there's frost on the side. Scrape some of this. It's sort of like snow that falls from the. So that kind of thing was unusual, but it gave them a real idea of what it was like where I came from, where in the wintertime, you know, in January and February, one could expect.

SHIELDS: [00:21:34] So back to your question, it was difficult getting concepts across. Also, now, we had at the beginning very few resources. We did work on getting a library going. There was an extra room that was used initially as an office, but we got some nice encyclopedias that were fairly readable and we got those donated to us. We had a, what else? A CARE food program that was, was brought to us. And we had to construct what was called a palaver house, which essentially was a thatched roof supported by poles, okay, four poles and a thatched roof. So the kids, the students could have alternated between cornmeal mush and cornmeal biscuits. So they could have something to eat during the day. So that was nice.

SHIELDS: [00:23:15] So I'll never forget that time that, well, we stored the food above the ceiling, uh, in the, in the, in the school. But there was a lot of activity up there. And I'll never forget the time we got, I don't know who we got. We got somebody to go up there and take a look around and

I'll tell you, the rats scurried like crazy, and we were really running around the school chasing these rats to get out of there.

LORISTON: [00:23:58] Did they eat any of your food?

SHIELDS: [00:24:01] Oh, yeah, I'm sure they did. Yeah, they ate some food, but we finally got ourselves rid of the rats. There wasn't a latrine, so we had to have some kids, you know, build a latrine. You know. You know, I'm not sure what they were doing or how they were dealing with that. But that was something that, that had to be done too.

LORISTON: [00:24:37] And this was specifically for the school grounds?

SHIELDS: [00:24:39] For the school, on the school grounds. Yeah. But so I taught, I taught English and I taught, what did I taught? Reading and social studies. My housemate taught the younger kids, I taught the older kids. So one funny thing, you know, one of the things about the language, which was the Mano tribe. In the Mano language, really they don't hear, they don't hear or they don't have ending consonants. Okay? So I was never Mr. Shields. I mean, that's tough. So I was always Mr. Shie, okay? That's, that's who I was. You know, and I'll never forget the time a little, little boy came up to me and he said, [speaks dialect]. Translated, translated. You must please give me 5 cents, I beg you, I hold your foot. And they like to put the O on a lot of, a lot of different words. It must have had something to do with their language.

SHIELDS: [00:26:17] But I, I do remember something comical. You know, I had the word Peace Corps up there right on the, on the board. So I was talking, I was, I was, I was teaching them about, you know, in English, rather than pidgin English, which was what they used. Um. There's this, this idea that if you see a consonant at the end, you know, you're likely to, you want to pronounce it. And so one kid says, you mean it's, we should be saying Peace Corpse? No, no, no, no. Not Peace Corpse. Corpse is another word. And so I had to explain the concept of the word exception. There's exceptions to the rule. And that this, really

that word is really French, but we sort of borrowed it from the French. So there were little kind of amusing things like that.

LORISTON: [00:27:27] How did they take to you, your students?

SHIELDS: [00:27:29] Excuse me?

LORISTON: [00:27:30] How did your students take to you and your teaching style?

SHIELDS: [00:27:36] I think okay. I think fine. Yeah. Oftentimes after school, school let out at 12:30, and a lot of them would come over. We used to have anywhere from 6 to 12 kids come over to our house, spend the afternoon, help them with their, with their homework, get to know us that way. So, yeah. And in addition to teaching, I also started a glee club because I, uh, that's one of my passions is, is singing. And I've been in various courses over my life and this was an opportunity to, to lead a course. I had about 20 kids in it. And you know, I had some books sent over. And they had a lot of time. They, they enjoyed it a lot. They had a lot.

SHIELDS: [00:28:34] And I started, um, Boy Scouts. They had a, a teacher, okay, who was the nominal scoutmaster. He was referred to as Red Taylor, okay? And we had two teachers, a Red Taylor and a Black Taylor. Anyway, Red Taylor was nominal head of the Boy Scouts, but he really wasn't doing anything. He didn't know anything. So I sort of took it over and that gave me a lot of pleasure too. The students loved to march. I had never gone past Tenderfoot in my youth, but that was, again, an opportunity to do some learning on my own. So staying one step ahead of them. I learned how to do the various knots and I would show them how to do the knots. And we made badges and we, and we, on United Nations Day, we marched through the, through the town. And they had uniforms.

SHIELDS: [00:29:58] And once we took a trip, an overnight trip out into the, out into the bush. And I had, and that was, that was interesting. You know, they worked on their, on their various things that they had to do to move to the next level and so forth. And, um, at one point we decided,

let's have a project. So let's see if we can raise some money, some money. So we, we decided to have a, clear some land and plant some watermelon. And because we knew watermelon, you can make some money and people loved watermelon and so forth. And so we did that. It was a total disaster. When one of my students came and said, Mr. Shie, they're stealing the watermelon. Oh, what are we going to do about that? They're stealing the watermelon!

SHIELDS: [00:31:01] So. Well, we, we need some, we need some, what? The term was *qui*, okay? We need some something to scare them, some *qui* medicine. Okay. Powerful medicine. You know, *qui* meaning white, white man or whatever. Or whatever. I don't know.

LORISTON: [00:31:26] Can you spell that?

SHIELDS: [00:31:27] So, so we, so we, we drew. We got a piece of paper or something. And we drew a skull and crossbones and so it's just kind of amusing.

LORISTON: [00:31:47] Can you spell *qui* for me?

SHIELDS: [00:31:51] Q-U-I.

LORISTON: [00:31:53] So let's go back to these relationships. Did you have a very good relationship with your fellow volunteers? Do you still communicate with any of them today?

SHIELDS: [00:32:07] No. I don't. I will say that, that actually I did get in touch and I went to see a couple of the women 24 years ago. And spent an overnight with them. Actually I still have a relationship with one of my students, and it was a very interesting story. Um, Arthur was, Arthur was my, my Scout leader. He was, he was a very bright kid. And he called me from Liberia around 1995. Of course, Liberia was in the middle of a civil war, as you I'm sure know. And he had been chased out of his house, literally. He had to, I guess, you know, they were knocking on the front door and he was going out the back door with his

family. And he was spending a lot of time in a refugee camp in Sierra Leone with his family.

SHIELDS: [00:33:29] Somehow he managed to get a visa. He called me and asked if I could send him an air ticket. So that's when I got on the phone with one of the other women who had also been the teacher of his. And, um, we pooled our money and we sent him an air ticket. And that was around 1995. Well, since that time, he's brought over his entire family, his four children, okay, his wife, his four children. And some other relatives as well. They almost deported him, probably about 2005. As a matter of fact, I went up to the detention, detention center to see him. He came in with a lot of Liberians under temporary protective status. And they almost deported him. I went up at one point to visit him in a detention center in Philadelphia.

SHIELDS: [00:34:50] Well, he managed to get out of their clutches and he's now, has been a citizen for a number of years. And his two girls are citizens. I'm not sure about the boys. But anyway, it's an incredible story. So. Not so much as far as getting together with former Peace Corps volunteers. But I've been in touch with Arthur. And as a matter of fact, when I went to see Arthur in Philadelphia, he said, oh, well, Jackson Dolope is over here. Let's go and see Jackson. And there was two other kids we went to see. And, oh, Gertrude is here too. And I invited Gertrude Kelia. She was also, she was in my choir and everything. And she came and visited me. So it was a nice reunion.

SHIELDS: [00:35:55] So those are good, interesting stories about, you know, staying in touch and, and making a difference in some, in some lives, really making a difference.

LORISTON: [00:36:05] Have you ever returned to Liberia?

SHIELDS: [00:36:07] I have not.

LORISTON: [00:36:09] And going back to something you mentioned earlier about some of the difficulties you had in the, in teaching. How did you find,

uh, did you see any concerns with literacy levels and how did you overcome that?

SHIELDS: [00:36:30] Well. I mean, that's a big problem and I'm not sure I did overcome it. I mean, you know, you just, you just go in and do the best you can. Um, I mean, there was adult literacy program that, um, I didn't. I was not really prepared to be able to teach adults, but I did for, for a time drive the car for a Methodist missionary. We drove down to another town, and she taught adults literacy. So I sort of helped out there. But the, the students I had, they were fourth. So they had, they had some knowledge, they, you know, of reading and writing when I got them.

LORISTON: [00:37:33] And earlier, you also mentioned something about their language being, um, I think you called it the Mano tribe. Can you explain what that means?

SHIELDS: [00:37:47] Well, the name of the tribe was Mano, there are I think about 28 tribes in Liberia, okay? And I'm assuming that that particular language, I'm making the assumption that the particular language did not, did not have ending consonants. Okay. Because when I'd hear them talk, when I heard them talk, I didn't hear any, any in the. In the English, they just dropped all consonants in English. So, uh, no. I can't say anything more than that.

LORISTON: [00:38:36] Okay. So I would like for you to please explain some of the incredible experiences you had in your town. Basically, things that were maybe shocking, or the most happiest you've been while there, or even those that were the saddest. Can you describe some of those experiences, if you had any?

SHIELDS: [00:39:05] I know I got sick. I had at the same time malaria and amoebic dysentery. So fortunately, there was a mission hospital there. Um. And, you know, I got in line with everybody else and was given treatment and was given a bed, stayed overnight, one or two nights. Discovered that hospitals over there, they don't, they don't have a cafeteria. They don't, they don't have a, you know, any way of serving

you food. So, you know, depend on your, on your friends, colleagues, and so forth. Family. Um. That was an interesting experience.

SHIELDS: [00:40:00] Shocking. Well, I'll tell you one thing that shocked me was, uh, I was. There was a movie theater in town. In town. And so I thought, well, okay, I'm going to go to the movies. And there was an old Western from America, you know, being played and some cowboy, cowboy and Indian thing. And suddenly my housemate came in. And he said to me, the president has been shot! I said, you mean Tubman? President Tubman? No. President Kennedy. And that was a shock. That was a shock. We were, we were over there, you know, and we had access to radios. Voice of America, that's where we got all of our news from. Um, but that's the one, the one thing I remember that really shocked me. It had nothing to do with my work or anything.

SHIELDS: [00:41:44] I suddenly realized being over there, you know, I'm rich. The poverty. The distended bellies. The, you know, I mean. We were getting \$150 a month. But here, you don't think of yourself as one, you know, we don't think of ourselves as rich. But let's face it. Over there, you're rich. It's true, from their perspective. So. Hired, I hired, we hired one of my students to wash the dishes and iron, you know, sort of a houseboy. \$15 a month. Well, we both kicked in at \$7.50 a month. All right. That's not too much. You know, you go through the market and, and, you buy, you know, everything's cheap. Food. So we have money left over. And they saw us, they saw us as being rich. That's, that's shocking.

SHIELDS: [00:43:23] You know, it's absolute poverty. The, the kids, a lot of them came to school barefoot, okay? A lot of them walked two, three, four miles a day to get to school. That's how bad it was.

LORISTON: [00:43:52] How did that impact your life, to see that and to witness and live in such an environment?

SHIELDS: [00:44:10] When I got back, I went, I went to graduate school and got a degree in education, okay? And then I went and I taught for a year in Westport, Connecticut. Westport, Connecticut is a wealthy town. Um,

just a lot of very, a lot of rich people there. And I taught in a junior high. And I couldn't take the kids. They were snotty little rich kids. So I came to Washington and I applied, I applied for a job in the public schools in D.C. And I was among, you know, in a, in an all Black school, almost 95 percent Black school. And I felt much more comfortable. Okay. So I think that's probably impacted my life that way.

LORISTON: [00:45:33] Did you always know you wanted to go into education before Peace Corps?

SHIELDS: [00:45:42] Well, my mother had been an elementary school teacher. My aunt was a music teacher and her husband, my uncle, was assistant principal. My grandfather was a superintendent. There was a lot of education in the family. So it was just sort of like that's what I did. That's how I got involved, I think.

LORISTON: [00:46:11] What did, what did you do while you were in service and even after your service ended to, to display or to continue working those three Peace Corps goals? The first, of course, being that we want to make sure Americans are, are more fully aware and less ignorant about cultures they're unfamiliar with. How did, how did you meet that goal?

SHIELDS: [00:47:02] Well, it's not like I've joined any particular organization. But I think it comes out in conversations over the course of time. You bring it up and you talk about it. You talk about your experiences and sort of educate people that way. So I've had opportunities over the years to do that certainly.

LORISTON: [00:47:43] And the next goal. How did you help Liberians to better understand America, Americans, and American values?

SHIELDS: [00:48:07] I think that, that Liberians, and I don't want to speak for us in general, saw us, saw us, us as genuine people that were not out to cheat them or what have you. I mean, there was a fair amount of corruption, I have to say. And the term they used was eating the money. Eating, you know, we ate the money. Okay. You, he ran off

with it. And I think that that's one of the things we did. And I'm not saying that I necessarily did it, but I think that, in general, the Peace Corps was uncorruptible. In other words, we're not out there to cheat anybody. That wasn't what we were there for. And I think that's, that's something that they saw as an American value.

LORISTON: [00:49:12] And do you know if Peace Corps is still in Liberia today?

SHIELDS: [00:49:18] I think they are. Now they had a period of time when, you know, they had a revolution in 1980. People were executed. So I don't know to what extent you know about, you know, that. But anyway, yeah. They've gone through a lot and they're coming back. But, um. So.

LORISTON: [00:49:50] Looking back on your service, would, would you describe to your listeners what you believe were your major accomplishments? If you had any regrets, as well, if you could share those? Successes?

SHIELDS: [00:50:15] Well, when you're teaching people, it's hard to say, oh, well, you know, I instill, instilled in this person such and such and that person such and such. And it's not like, well, I showed them how to do irrigation. I showed them how to build dams and, you know, that was my accomplishment. You know, here's a picture of it and so forth. But I'm going to find out that because I'm going to be giving a talk next year in my church about my Peace Corps experience. Maybe he'll come, over at the Unitarian Church. Um. And I'm going to ask Arthur, to find out from Arthur what he thinks. He would be the, you know, somebody who I taught. You know, what, what would he say? I never asked him that question, but he would probably have something to say along that line.

LORISTON: [00:51:37] Do you have anything more you'd like to share with your listeners about your time in the Peace Corps?

SHIELDS: [00:51:56] A bunch of us chartered a big airplane. We went over to East Africa for a vacation, and, uh, that was an experience.

LORISTON: [00:52:16] How so?

SHIELDS: [00:52:20] We went to Kenya, Nairobi. And the difference was, was remarkable. First of all, the climate was totally different. And, you know, the game parks and so forth were there. And I even went up to Ethiopia and had a chance to do some touring up there. We spent three weeks, so that was, that was nice. That was nice.

SHIELDS: [00:53:00] And also, let's see, what else did I do? I helped, we helped to build, I helped to build on one of my vacations another school.

LORISTON: [00:53:10] Where?

SHIELDS: [00:53:11] Not, not far from Monrovia. Mostly it was just digging. Shoveling dirt.

LORISTON: [00:53:21] And do you know if any of the schools you helped build?

SHIELDS: [00:53:24] It was just one.

LORISTON: [00:53:27] Oh, just one. Is it still standing today?

SHIELDS: [00:53:31] I'm going to assume so, but I've learned not to, I've learned that this time of my life, I, um, about half of my assumptions that I make are true, come true.

LORISTON: [00:53:44] So other than the malaria scare and the amoebas that you had to deal with, were there any other scary things that just shocked you? Did you ever have a moment of, I think I want to go home, basically?

SHIELDS: [00:54:01] No.

LORISTON: [00:54:02] No?

SHIELDS: [00:54:03] No. I felt that the way of, of dealing with it. You know, toward the end, you know, I have, I have been in preparing for this interview, I

went through all the letters. I have about 30 letters that I wrote that were given back to me so I could read them over again. Toward the end, you know, I was, my letters home were, what's next, you know? Graduate school and maybe going through Europe and so forth. Um. But, um, what was the question again?

LORISTON: [00:54:45] It was basically, um. Well, I just went blank as well. Sorry about that. But the question. It will come back to me. It will come back to me. Uh.

SHIELDS: [00:55:05] Give me another question.

LORISTON: [00:55:05] Well, it escaped me. Yes, it escaped me, but, um. But. Oh, yeah, that's what it was. You were referring to the, to the school and not making assumptions as to whether or not it's still standing.

SHIELDS: [00:55:20] Right, right.

LORISTON: [00:55:21] Yeah. Yeah. But, um, we can move on to the next question since we both clearly lost our train of thought.

SHIELDS: [00:55:27] Oh, other people, and, and, um. Other volunteers. There were some that left.

LORISTON: [00:55:41] That was the question. Did you ever feel at any point you wanted to go home? Yes.

SHIELDS: [00:55:46] That's right. Yeah. And, no. I kept busy. I kept busy. I had the Boy Scouts. I had the glee club. Toward the end, one of the missionaries died and had to go home. And so I went over and he was, he was doing the church choir. So I helped out with the church choir. So this was in contrast, I have to say this, to my housemate, who really, I would say, for the last maybe six months of his service there did nothing. He went through the motions. He fooled himself into thinking that he was in love with a local girl who was the daughter of a Lebanese merchant. And he would come after school every day and

he would just go to the store where she was and just keep company with her.

SHIELDS: [00:57:08] And, you know, that was a real problem for him. He ended up proposing to her. There was a big, I mean, the merchant was fairly well-heeled, a big party for this engagement. Big engagement party. People from, you know, the Lebanese community came around and it was, you know, big, big thing. Well. At the very end, he came to his senses and he bailed out. He bailed out. He left. The poor woman. The father's chasing him. Left a bad impression. Very bad impression. I suppose, primarily to the, to the, to the Lebanese community, but, uh, a lot of hard feelings. Um.

SHIELDS: [00:58:18] But I realized that, you know, it's no good to just be sitting around and thinking, okay, what's the next thing? Okay. It's no good, you know, marking days on the calendar. It just, you know, you got to keep busy. And I kept busy.

LORISTON: [00:58:39] Was your first year easier or more difficult for you compared to your second?

SHIELDS: [00:58:58] I don't know. That's hard to say. Where there was, uh. I never thought about one being. They were different in different ways. You know, the first year you're going in the middle of the school year and still within the first year you're starting a new school year. So you're, you're coming in at the middle and then, then you have the break. And then, and then you're starting a new school year, right? And, and then the second year you're finishing that school year and then you're going to start a new school year. And then you're going to leave in the middle. So it's hard to say what's, what's the. I mean, certainly the second school year, I knew more what to expect. We had more resources that people from the States had sent. So maybe, maybe it was a little easier the second, the second year.

LORISTON: [01:00:05] And final question for you. In addition to recognizing for yourself that it was best for you to serve in an underserved community,

or rather to work in an underserved community here in the States, how else has your Peace Corps experience impacted your life?

SHIELDS: [01:00:40] And when I came back, actually. And actually this goes back to what you asked before about, um, meeting one of the goals. And that is I remember being asked by a number of groups to give talks. So I don't know if that's impacting my life or not. But it's been, it's been a, it's been a, um, what should I say? Something I'm kind of proud of. That, that I did it. And I was, you know, I feel that I made, I made a, I made a difference I think.

LORISTON: [01:01:35] Good. And you did. And you did. Is there anything else you would like to add, or should we end here?

SHIELDS: [01:01:47] I think this is probably a good place to stop.

LORISTON: [01:01:49] Okay. All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]