

**Carol J. Peiffer Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Carol J. Peiffer  
**Interviewer:** Judith Salisbury Cline  
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**Biographical Note**

Carol J. Peiffer served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from 1967 to 1969 as a teacher.

**Access**

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Oral History Interview

with

Carol J. Peiffer

May 29, 2003  
Evans City, Pennsylvania

By Judith Salisbury Cline

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

CLINE: [00:00:12] Today is May 29, 2003. This is Judith Salisbury Cline, and I am interviewing Carol Peiffer, who served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from July 1967 to July 1969 working as a teacher. Carol, would you please state your name and current address?

PEIFFER: [00:00:38] My name is Carol Peiffer. My address is [address], Evans City, Pennsylvania.

CLINE: [00:00:52] And Carol, could you describe your current residence?

PEIFFER: [00:00:59] I live in a single-family home on a double lot in a small town, just a block away from the main street. So I have access to groceries, post office, bank, that kind of thing. My husband and I lived there together with four cats, and we have many more rooms than what we need. But we are two of the world's biggest pack rats, and so we have filled it up.

CLINE: [00:01:29] And Carol, what do you do for a living now?

PEIFFER: [00:01:32] Well, I'm working as a customer service representative for Verizon Wireless. After retiring from teaching for 32 years.

CLINE: [00:01:42] And do you have any other family beside your husband?

PEIFFER: [00:01:45] Yes. My mother is still living. She's 89, and my father and my older sister are both deceased. And I have two nieces that were my sister's children and their families.

CLINE: [00:02:01] Do you have any interests outside of work?

PEIFFER: [00:02:04] Sure, I do a lot of writing. I've been. I do. I write short stories. I've been working forever on my Peace Corps novel. And I do a lot of artwork and I've done everything from weaving, ceramics, painting, drawing. But currently, and for about the last five years, I've been doing all digital artwork.

CLINE: [00:02:30] Think back to your life before you joined the Peace Corps. Where did you live at that time?

PEIFFER: [00:02:39] I lived in a suburb of Pittsburgh. And it was my father and my mother and my sister, who was three years older than me. My father was a postal worker and had other side jobs. My mother was mainly a homemaker. However, she did occasionally work as an extra at a department store. My sister and I both went to college. I studied art and got my degree in art education right before I went to the Peace Corps.

CLINE: [00:03:20] Do you feel that any of your earlier life was relevant to your later Peace Corps experience?

PEIFFER: [00:03:27] Well, my parents were people who were involved in volunteering. For example, my mother worked with Girl Scouts, worked with church activities and so on. Like my father did the same. He always said he was a Girl Scout leader, too, because he always helped out. And

we did things like camping, which was really good experience for being in the Peace Corps.

CLINE: [00:03:56] How did you first hear about the Peace Corps?

PEIFFER: [00:04:00] Well, I guess when President Kennedy proposed the idea was when I first heard about it. And I thought it was a really neat idea. I lived in a community that was highly Republican, and during the elections I was the only person who volunteered to take the Democratic side during our debates. And I believe that during the elections is when Kennedy proposed the idea of a Peace Corps.

CLINE: [00:04:32] What made you decide to join?

PEIFFER: [00:04:35] I'm asked that question so often, and I always say, I don't have one really good answer, but I guess I have several answers. I'm sure there was some kind of altruistic motive involved, but also, of course, they're always selfish motives. I wanted to do something good. I wanted to improve the world. I want to do something different. I wanted to travel, but I think maybe a lot of it was just, you know, that rebellious stage in your life where you want to get away from home. And my parents were fairly strict and kind of oppressive at times, and it was a way for me to kind of get out and on my own very quickly after I graduated from college.

CLINE: [00:05:25] Did you have a specific project or a country in mind when you joined?

PEIFFER: [00:05:30] No, because I remember when they asked me if I had any choice, I chose nothing. I either put down no choice or said I would go anywhere. And at first, actually, I received an acceptance to go to Chile. And so I had never taken Spanish. I had studied Latin and French, so I immediately got a Spanish major to start tutoring me. And we didn't get very far into that before I got the change to go to Brazil. And then, of course, there was no one on campus that knew Portuguese.

CLINE: [00:06:13] So how and when did you apply? Did you actually apply?

PEIFFER: [00:06:22] There were recruiters on campus. I think that was during my maybe the early part of my junior year of college because I know I got accepted during my, I think, probably the second semester of my junior year of college.

CLINE: [00:06:42] That you were going to wait a year.

PEIFFER: [00:06:43] Well, it was. They had a, they sent us to an advanced training program. I believe it was the last advanced training program that they had. And we trained for 12 weeks between my junior and senior year. There was a conference in Chicago over Christmas break, which I didn't attend because I had just had my appendix removed. And then we met the next summer and went for additional training in Brazil.

CLINE: [00:07:19] So you were accepted and you were invited to join the Brazil project when you were accepted? Was there any hesitation on your part?

PEIFFER: [00:07:31] I don't think so. I mean, I think there's always a little bit of, you know, am I going to be able to do this? What's it going to be like? Oh, my goodness, how am I ever going to learn Portuguese, that kind of thing. But I don't think there was much hesitation. There's just that little kind of back of the mind, can I do this?

CLINE: [00:07:53] What was your family's reaction?

PEIFFER: [00:07:57] I think my mother was not real happy. I think she, you know, I think she pictured me in the middle of the Amazon with headhunter Indians or something. My father thought of it as being like a missionary, which is exactly what I didn't want to be. But they seemed to rather, you know, accept it. After I went to the, I think they thought I would go to the training between my junior and senior year and then maybe I would decide not to go, but I did. And they, you know, they had a year and a half to get used to the idea, so they seemed OK with it.

CLINE: [00:08:36] How did you prepare yourself and others for leaving for two full years?

PEIFFER: [00:08:47] Well, one of the things is that when you go right after you graduate from college, you don't have to do a lot of preparation as far as you don't have to get rid of possessions and have someone take care of a house or take care of pets or whatever. So I basically had my, you know, stored my stuff from college at home, and I know we had lists of clothing and other things that we needed to take that maybe weren't readily available in Brazil. I know I put a little bit of money in an in an account and told my mother that if I ever needed any money, I would send her a check and she could send me some kind of a money order or something. It was more, I feel like I didn't do a lot of preparation more than just going on a long trip.

CLINE: [00:09:50] Where were you trained?

PEIFFER: [00:09:53] My training between my junior and senior year of college was at Sacramento State College in California, which was a very nice campus. It was hot. So we trained there. I believe it was 12 weeks and about three weeks of it we spent in in field training. I was stationed with a VISTA worker in Tracy, California. She worked a lot with migrant workers and she put me in a home with a minister. It's a Black family and it was a minister and his wife and their children, and I helped her with various projects. So for those three weeks and then we had an additional training time in Brazil and we were just divided. We went to Rio and then we were divided into three groups. One group went to Goiás, one went to Espírito Santo. My group went to Salvador, Bahia, and we trained for six weeks in Dias d'Ávila, which was a small town. And we were each put with a family. In some places, two people were put with a family and I was put with grandparents, parents and a small boy. And that helped with our Portuguese training while we were there.

CLINE: [00:11:20] What kind of faculty trained you?

PEIFFER: [00:11:25] In Sacramento, the Portuguese teachers were almost all college students who were Brazilian students studying in the United States, and that was their summer job. And then there were other people who I believe were either faculty at Sacramento or their faculty that were brought in. And they were people who taught us everything from we had a

phys ed class and we learned about soccer. We had Brazilian studies, health studies, geography, history of Brazil. A lot of information about customs and expectations.

CLINE: [00:12:08] Did you have any technical training?

PEIFFER: [00:12:11] No, not really. We were, our group was supposed to be urban community development, and we talked a lot about the felt needs of the people that we were supposed to discover and, you know, do something to meet their needs. It was all very ambiguous. It wasn't very specific. We had some training and group dynamics and how whole groups work. I don't really remember any technical training at all.

CLINE: [00:12:44] How was the selection handled? To choose the volunteers who would go?

PEIFFER: [00:12:51] First of all, our group started out with somewhere around 108, 110 or 112. I don't remember people. When we finally went to Brazil, I believe the numbers were down to the 50s and a lot of people selected themselves out over that senior year of college. And I think that's why they didn't do advanced training programs after that much and people got offers for graduate school or jobs that they felt they couldn't pass up.

CLINE: [00:13:22] But the training. I'm not exactly sure what all the criteria was, but there were psychologists, there were trainers who would deselect people in the middle of the training. I believe there were two people that went very early on, and they were two young men from Texas who seem to be have not realized that the civil rights movement had occurred and they were very prejudiced and that just wasn't going to go in Brazil, so those were the first two that were selected out. After that, it seemed like they selected people out because they were not kind of meeting the program's standards. I often wonder why I wasn't because I was not very good at learning the language.

PEIFFER: [00:14:18] But there was an unfortunate incident that happened when we were in training, when we were out in our field training. There were a few of the volunteers that were at some youth center. They took some

students for to swim somewhere, and one of the children died. They drowned. And it seemed like everybody that was involved in that incident got selected out. And I don't remember how many people there were maybe three or four of them. And that was a really bad situation. I mean, we all felt really bad about the incident and of course, the aftermath of it.

PEIFFER: [00:15:03] I think a couple of people were selected out because they suspected that they were gay. And I don't know whether that was because just at that time, that was something that they could do or if it was that they felt that that would be a hindrance to them and working with the Brazilian people at the time. But everyone feared the selection process.

CLINE: [00:15:33] How often did it happen?

PEIFFER: [00:15:35] It seemed to me that the first one happened, I think, about halfway through and then maybe there were two more times when maybe three quarters of the way through the training and one at the end, but I'm not really sure it might have just been two.

CLINE: [00:15:50] Do you think the training prepared you for useful Peace Corps service?

PEIFFER: [00:15:56] Yes and no. I don't think it prepared me in a real practical sense, but I think at least I went in with some understanding of the history of pursuing people information about customs a lot. We were told a lot of things that were just absolutely unacceptable in Brazil, which turned out not to be true. Like we were told that women only wore slacks at like resorts and beaches and so on. And that wasn't true, you know? But of course, things change in every culture. The Portuguese training, I think they did their best to help me out, but I was just one of those people that had a really hard time with it until I actually got there and had to do it and had to use the language. And I'm sure that happened with a lot of people, but I never had a facility for learning languages.

CLINE: [00:16:59] And describe the day that you arrived in Brazil.



PEIFFER: [00:17:05] So we arrived. It was a day in July. I don't remember the exact date, but I can remember we arrived in Rio. It was kind of hazy. Now, of course, that was winter in Brazil, but winter in Brazil, even in Rio, you can go to the beach or go swimming. I have pictures of myself. I'm in a sleeveless dress, so it couldn't have been that cold. And it seems like they just waved us all through. We didn't have any. We didn't have to go through customs or, you know, they didn't check our bags or anything. And I guess we settled into a hotel, and I do remember that I went to we went to have breakfast and I tried to order two fried eggs. And of course, I had everyone in stitches because I ordered two fried grapes because instead of ordering ovos, I ordered uvas. But I got my fried eggs because the waiters probably were familiar with Americans who made stupid mistakes.

PEIFFER: [00:18:19] And then we went, I think we were given the day just to go and do whatever we wanted. And so I think there were three or four of girls that went together and we went in bus and fumbled our way through our Portuguese, and we met a guy who helped us out and we went to see Corcovado and Pain de Sucre and all the Copacabana Beach and just, you know, had a good time just being tourists for a day before we kind of got down to business.

CLINE: [00:18:54] What was your general reaction to the country and to the people?

PEIFFER: [00:19:01] Well, I had never traveled outside of the United States, except maybe for Canada before that. So it was just everything just seemed so exotic and different. And I don't know. I mean, the people were all very nice, but of course, they're all gibbering away. And you know, and you don't know what they're saying. And that people were very helpful. They, like I said, we were on the bus and we were having a hard time explaining to the bus driver where we wanted to go. And a young Brazilian guy probably, you know, flirted with us a little bit, but he helped us out and everybody was always. That's one thing. All through my experience in Brazil, there were always people who would help and want to do something for you and make sure that you were OK and that you were

safe and that you had what you needed. And the Brazilian people were very good about that.

CLINE: [00:20:02] Can you give us a description of the physical environment and also of the people so that we could see them through your eyes?

PEIFFER: [00:20:11] You mean, for instance, in the town where I was stationed?

CLINE: [00:20:14] No, right when you first arrived.

PEIFFER: [00:20:17] Well, when it first arrived, well, the physical environment in Rio, it's I mean, it's a modern city, but there's also a lot of old buildings that have a real broke feel to them. I think there's an opera house in Rio that's based on an opera house in Italy, and it's got this real baroque feel to it. The sidewalks are mosaic, and they're kind of in different patterns. They're almost all black and white mosaic, and you'll be like a mosaic pattern, almost like the pop art movement of years later, it was swirling patterns or geometric patterns. And I often thought that in Brazil, a lot of the buildings had artistic decorations on them, which I really appeal to me as being an artist. The people were, the Brazilian people don't ever seem to be in a hurry. They kind of, you know, they don't walk as fast as people do, for instance, in New York or in in a big city in the United States. And yet the driving is crazy. They drive really fast and they yell at each other and they honk their horns. And so it was kind of like a strange contrast of this kind of slow moving people who always have time to stop and help and say hello and whatever. And then the opposite of these crazy drivers, you know, kids that can't get there fast enough. And of course, everyone you know, compared to Pittsburgh, for example, everyone was dark complected. Almost everyone, not everyone, but most people were dark complected, dark hair, dark eyes. In general, they were shorter than Americans and they dressed maybe a little more casually for work than Americans do. But when they are going to a party or whatever, they dress up a lot more than Americans do.

CLINE: [00:22:28] You mentioned ordering from ordering your food in Portuguese. Did you start speaking Portuguese right away?

PEIFFER: [00:22:37] Oh, I tried as much as possible not to because I just had such a hard time with it. Any time I could get away with not speaking Portuguese, at least on the first days, I would. If I could find someone that would speak English to me, that would be fine. And of course, we tried but you know, it's frustrating when you try and you're not understood and someone answers you and you're clueless as to what they said back.

CLINE: [00:23:04] There were Peace Corps staff in the country?

PEIFFER: [00:23:10] Oh yes.

CLINE: [00:23:10] What were they like?

PEIFFER: [00:23:13] You know what, I don't really remember much about people in in Rio because we were there for such a short period of time. I'm sure that the country director was there and I know we met him. I have photographs, actually, that a friend sent me of some of us at a party, and it was before our groups were all split up. So I know it was in Rio. And I, I kind of think it might have been in the American ambassador's home. He had a party for us, but it may have been the Peace Corps director. I really don't remember, I remember very little about the staff in Rio. I mean, they were helpful and, you know, told us, you know where to let our parents know to send mail and you know, that kind of thing and that if they got anything, they would forward it to our new addresses. But other than that, I don't remember much.

CLINE: [00:24:10] Did you undergo any further training?

PEIFFER: [00:24:12] Yeah, we each went, we went to our respective states. Now I went with a group that was in the state of Bahia, but I ended up actually being the only person from my group to be sent to a state north of there in Sergipe. But we were trained in a small town outside of Salvador for an additional six weeks.

CLINE: [00:24:38] Well, what did you learn during those six weeks?

PEIFFER: [00:24:43] Well, we stayed with family so that we were trying to improve our Portuguese. And as far as I remember, most of the time it was Portuguese studies and we had, well, we they talked a lot about the customs and I think there we maybe had a little more practical information about maybe just buying food. And, you know, just the day to day living how to get along, depending on where we were going to be. Now, as I said, my most of my group was urban community development, and a lot of the people were going to be stationed in Salvador, Bahia, which was a fairly large city, but a lot of them ended up being sent to rural areas as well as myself.

CLINE: [00:25:28] So you ended up being a teacher. Can you describe that project?

PEIFFER: [00:25:33] Well, yeah, there was a, um, a volunteer that was already in the town where I was. Her name was Bruni de Chavez. She was from Southern California. And she had been. She was mostly interested in health projects, but she kind of got pulled into teaching English as a foreign language at the high school, and she didn't want to do it anymore. She wanted to concentrate more on her project, so she requested that they send somebody else to be a teacher. And I know when we were talking about the selection, I was told later that because my Portuguese was so bad that the whoever was training us were kind of recommended that maybe I wasn't going to last, that maybe I shouldn't stay. But Ralph Goot was the director in Salvador, and he had always said that he had a very good experiences with teachers. He thought anybody that was trained as a teacher made a great volunteer, so he overruled everybody else.

PEIFFER: [00:26:44] And since and then he I don't know who made the decision, but I was the one that got sent to the little town of Nossa Senhora da Glória in Sergipe, and I started out teaching English as as a foreign language at the high school and also Bruni, the other girl was involved in a literacy project. The first day I got there, she dragged me to the literacy course and made me start teaching literacy. And which was amazing because I could barely read Portuguese, let alone teach other people to do it. But of course, they were on such a low level that I actually was able to help them. But and

then I ended up doing some other things as well. But that was my mission was to teach English.

CLINE: [00:27:35] At your post, what were your living conditions like?

PEIFFER: [00:27:39] Ok, well, Bruni, first of all, kind of welcomed me into her house, and I think I may have slept in a hammock one night and then we went out and bought a bed with a straw mattress the next day for myself. But I ended up living there with her for, we overlapped for about a year. The house was on the end of a row of houses. The houses were all like one wall of one house to be the same wall of the next house. They were made with sticks and mud. And then the insides or the outsides of almost all houses were plastered. A lot of times the insides were not. Now my house was and we were warned not to live in houses that did not have the insides plastered because there were some beetle that carry the parasite that causes Chagas disease that would live in the cracks of those little houses if they if they weren't plastered.

PEIFFER: [00:28:45] The wall of our house being the wall of the next house, it ended at a vertical point, but then the roof was in a triangle above that. But that whole area was open, so you could hear everything that went on in the house next door, including the neighbors making love or using their bedpan at night or whatever. You could hear their conversations. And then, of course, they could hear ours as well.

PEIFFER: [00:29:15] The house had with the way we finally set it up, it had a long hallway that went from the front of the back of the house. There's a mud brick floor. It had shuttered shutters in the front. No screens, but the shutters would open. There was enough light in the house, even though there were only windows at the front and the back because there's the ceramic tile roof allowed light to come in. We had the front room, which was kind of the living room and we used. We had a couple of chairs and some foot lockers in there. We could put a hammock up if we had a guest. And then there were two smaller rooms. It was bedrooms that we made into bedrooms. We had a kitchen that had a wood burning stove. We had a table in the hall. There was a little shower room outside. You had to go outside and into this little shower, but we never used it because snakes

would get in there once in a while. So we would just pour a bucket of water over our head in the kitchen, and the floor was conveniently slanted, so it would just run out the back door.

PEIFFER: [00:30:18] We had an outhouse in the back and we had no electricity, so we use kerosene lanterns. We did eventually have a gas stove with a tank and we bought a kerosene refrigerator and which often didn't work very well, but it was nice to have that. Before that, we would just go to a neighbor and who had a kerosene refrigerator and ask if we could store at least our meat in the in their refrigerator.

CLINE: [00:30:53] Yeah. Who were you working with, were you working with this Bruni, or just living with her?

PEIFFER: [00:30:59] Well, we worked together on some projects. She was interested in the, in doing health projects, and because I was an artist, we would make up stories and storyboards, you know, like about Susie dirty hands or whatever, or, you know, something about worms or more nutritious foods or whatever. So we made up some storyboards and we got a big tablet of drawing paper and we could flip the the drawings. I would make drawings with her. But mainly, I was assigned to the high school and there was a director of the high school, Summa Well.

PEIFFER: [00:31:38] And he was a very nice man. He was very interested in the education in the town. The high school had only been in existence for three years. So I saw the first graduating class and because of that, my students ranged in age from like 12 to into their forties because there had never been a high school in the town before, but it was run by the church and there were two priests. They both happen to be from Poland and a Catholic brother from Michigan who ran the church. So I worked with them quite a bit, although there was kind of unwritten rule that we were not allowed to be alone with any of the priests or the brother because a priest that had been there before had recently ran off with one of the girls that worked in as a cleaning person in their home. And so they didn't want any young women getting too friendly with the priest.

CLINE: [00:32:40] What was your typical day like?

PEIFFER: [00:32:45] Ok, I would wake up in the morning. I've never been a good morning person, but Bruni was always up bright and early, and she liked to sing. So she was always up and singing and sweeping the floor and so on. And of course, we had to cook everything from scratch so we would have breakfast and we would often have eggs for breakfast, we'd make pancakes or we don't have fruit. And actually, because I was teaching at the high school, the high school, a lot of the teachers that taught at the elementary school taught at the elementary school in the morning. And so the high school classes were in the afternoons and the evenings, and they were more like we think of college classes.

PEIFFER: [00:33:33] They might have English Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and they might have science Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. But they didn't have Saturday classes in the evening. But they had afternoon classes Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturday and then they had afternoon and evening classes in the evening or Monday, Wednesday and Friday. So I really didn't have to go and teach until afternoon, but we would take care of, you know, stuff around the house, cleaning up, washing the dishes, that kind of thing in the morning. Maybe go to the store or go to the post office or visit someone in the morning. And then in the afternoon, I would teach at the high school, and then in the evening. I never taught evening classes.

PEIFFER: [00:34:26] Generally, there were three social clubs in the town and one of them, two of them were political party social clubs. And one of them was run by the bankers. There was a fairly large branch of the Bank of Brazil in the town, and they started their own little club and they were mostly young guys and they would invite Bruni and I. And there were a couple other kind of outsiders that worked there for the Brazilian Legion of Assistance and there was an organization called Incarsey. And I can't remember exactly what it stood for, but there was an agronomist and home economist that were young people that worked out in the interior with one-room schools, and they would go to the club. We would play endless games of a game called *buraco*, which was kind of like canasta. And they would have beer and snacks, and they would have parties once in a while and have dancing and music. But that was kind of a typical day. We would often get invited to someone's house for lunch or dinner. They visited neighbors and

our friends a lot. I read a lot. The Peace Corps book locker did me well, I have a list of 91 books I read while I was there.

CLINE: [00:35:59] Describe your work. Who did you report to?

PEIFFER: [00:36:04] Um, basically I reported either to the priests or to the school director. They had the priests had in their home, they had a typewriter and a mimeograph machine. That was really basically it. As far as anything that I could use the um, the school rooms were small. They had those desks with a palm desk, a chair with the palm desk on it. There was usually a table at the front of the room for a teacher, not a desk. There was a blackboard that was probably about six foot by three feet and one bare light bulb hanging down in the middle of the room. And we had electricity in the town from six to 10 o'clock at night, so they would turn the one light bulb on for the night classes. But during the day, they you just used the light from the out, from the windows.

PEIFFER: [00:37:10] The students were, basically, they were more from like the middle or upper class kids in the town. Actually, they were kind of the middle class. The poorer people couldn't afford to send their children to school because it was there was tuition at the high school and people that had money. There were few people that had money. They would usually send their children to the capital city to live, maybe with an aunt or an uncle and go to a better school there. But the classes were, I mean, the kids would. I tried to make the classes a little fun. You know, I'd teach him a card game and they had to use English for that or whatever. But the schools were, it wasn't as organized as you know that people go to a certain class at a certain time, all the time. If someone couldn't go to their class one day, they would just say, well, we're not going to meet on Wednesday because I have to be in the capital city or they would ask somebody else to do their class for them. I ended up teaching, I was there to teach English. I also taught a class in art. I also taught on occasion everything from French. My high school French teacher would roll over in her grave if she knew that I taught Brazilian history, geography, health, home ec, because every once in a while, you just have to fill in for someone who couldn't be there.



CLINE: [00:38:53] What did you do with your leisure time? You know, you mentioned playing cards.

PEIFFER: [00:38:58] I read, I read a lot. Or you would just, you know, you would you had friends and you would talk, you know, we'd just go to people's homes. And in the evening in the town square, you would sit and they would say you, you could go and sit and watch the movement to the movement. And that was just people walking around talking girlfriends, boyfriends, best friends. You would maybe visit someone.

CLINE: [00:39:36] Did they have any celebrations or festivals?

PEIFFER: [00:39:39] Oh yeah, they had a lot of celebrations. One other thing they had was they had a movie theater in the town, and on Friday and Saturday nights, they would have movies. But I'll tell you what, the movie theater was excruciatingly painful. First of all, most Brazilians are much shorter than I am and have very short legs, and the knees would touch the front of the back of the seat in front of me. So I had to sit sideways and the seats were very hard. They weren't cushy seats. They were wooden seats. The movie projector. They had only American movies in Brazil. There was a rule that American movies could not be dubbed. They had to be subtitled because they were trying to promote their own movie industry. And of course, there were so many people that were illiterate. So of course, they had these American movies with subtitles in a town where most people were illiterate. So they hired high school students to sit strategically throughout the theater and yell out the subtitles. And it was always very hot, and they also the um, the sound on the movie projector did not work very well, so it sounded like a someone talking underwater and it was very garbled and I couldn't understand the English. And of course, at the beginning I couldn't read the Portuguese fast enough, or I couldn't even understand it when the students were yelling it out. So for me to sit through the movie was very painful.

PEIFFER: [00:41:20] So I went a few times and then I didn't go very often festivals in the town they had. We always think of, you know, Christmas being our big festival. Christmas wasn't a real big day in Brazil. People didn't give gifts and they didn't have a big they might have gone to church, but they didn't

celebrate. New Year's Day was a bigger festival. And of course, Carnival was the big festival. Now I spent two carnivals in Brazil. I spent one in Aracaju, which is the capital of the state where I was, and I spent the other one in Salvador, Bahia. I really didn't spend either one of them in my little town. The St. John's Day in June was a big festival and it was kind of almost I always thought it was kind of a cross between Halloween and Sadie Hawkins. Stay. They always had a big square dance. And girls, people dressed up as kind of like hillbillies, Brazilian hillbillies. And it was customary for the girl to invite the guy to be her partner for that. And we were the high school students would practice for weeks and weeks and weeks to do this square dance because it was more of a performance for the rest of the town. And then also at night, people would build little fires in front of their houses and roast corn, and you would go around from house to house and ask for something to eat. So it's kind of like Halloween in a sense. But it was also and it was St. John's Day, and I have no idea who St. John was or what it was about, but those were the probably the biggest festivals. Of course, Carnival was the big one. It was described to me once as being kind of a pressure valve for Brazil because the conditions were so poor and so bad for so many people. And this was like almost a whole week where they would just totally let loose. Everything shuts down and everybody just lets loose and get strung dances and parties and has a good time and then they're ready to get back to work and wait till the next year.

CLINE: [00:43:41] Sounds like our Mardi Gras. Were there any other PCVs living and working near you?

PEIFFER: [00:43:50] Well, Bruni was the one that was there for. We overlapped a year and there were other people that were in other little towns or surrounding us. They weren't real close, but occasionally we would either visit them or they would visit us. And there was one woman she was. Her name was Helen Surah, and she was from Youngstown, Ohio. And she was older. I mean, we were mostly, you know, right out of college. And she was in her forties and she had been a practical nurse in Youngstown, and she was working in a town with a doctor, and he came to our town once a week. And so she came with him to, you know, to staff the little medical center we had in town.

PEIFFER: [00:44:38] So we always had her eat with us on the day, the one day a week that she was there, I believe it was Tuesday, and she would pretty much do kind of what we would call triage. When people would come into medical centers, she would decide who she could take care of, who the doctor had to see, who might need more time or less time or whatever. But she, I guess she had a couple of sons who and she was divorced and when her sons were old enough to be on their own, and she joined the Peace Corps. And I thought she had an awful lot of courage because I know I did it when I was young and naive at 21 or 22, but I thought she had a lot of courage to kind of give up her life for two years to join the Peace Corps.

CLINE: [00:45:30] And what way did your own life change over the first few months?

PEIFFER: [00:45:36] Well, well, you know what? The first few months actually were pretty wonderful. It was, I always described it as being like on a two-year camping trip because you had to use kerosene lanterns and you had to buy a live chicken. You had to do everything from scratch. And it was kind of fun and everything was so new and different and exotic and you were learning everything. And I got there in August to my town, and as I said, the first night I started teaching literacy class and then I, you know, I think it was a week later, they threw me into the English classes and I started to teach those. And then their school break came in December.

PEIFFER: [00:46:29] But what really changed was in December, when I suddenly didn't have a whole lot to do. And that's when I think the infamous culture shock set in. I think I really was kind of depressed. I started to miss things from home. You know, the conveniences and friends and family and that kind of thing. And that that pretty much lasted until the school vacation ended, which was after Carnival in February or March. I can't remember what dates, but of course, the language improved over the first few months. It seemed like I just struggled and struggled and struggled. And then I remember one weekend, Bruni had befriended a judge and his family in Aracaju, and they invited us to come and spend a weekend. And I think because they were the people in the family were all educated, they

actually could understand me and I think a lot of people were poor. So if you didn't say something exactly as they expected you to say it, they would look at you as if they had no idea what language you were speaking. But these people, I mean, they could put my bad grammar and my bad pronunciation together into something, and they kept saying, oh, you've only been here two months. You speak wonderfully, you speak wonderfully. And it just seemed like I just needed that little push and that little vote of confidence. And it seemed like after that it was, I think also it was just that, you know, it took me two months to kind of get used to the sounds and the particular dialect where I lived and so on.

PEIFFER: [00:48:18] But it seemed like after about two months, suddenly it all kind of started to click and the language was easier to understand. One thing I have to tell you is Bruni was absolutely wonderful in that, I mean, first, of course, I thought she was very harsh. But you know, in hindsight, I think she was very wonderful. She absolutely refused to speak English to me anywhere where we were around Brazilians. I could say in Portuguese, how do you say and then put in an English word? And she told me how to say it, but she would not let me. She would not speak to me in English and would not allow me to speak to her in English. And that, for it was two reasons. One, it forced me to learn the language. And secondly, it was just a polite thing that we weren't talking in a foreign language in front of the Brazilians who couldn't understand us. In our home we could speak English. But another rule that we had was that we never set anyone's name in our house because, of course, the next-door neighbors could hear everything that we said. So you never wanted to say, well Jose Augusto is a wonderful man because they would hear Jose Augusto and know that you were talking about them but not know what you were saying about it. So we would say the tailor is a wonderful person, you know, and we would say that in English and we had nicknames for everyone, the school director, the lady that, you know, that lives us down the street. The woman that has the bar or the seamstress, but we never said anybody's name in our house.

PEIFFER: [00:50:03] And I mean, there were things that probably I would have never thought of, but she was really, you know, tuned in to that kind of thing and she was really good for me. And she taught me so much about the little

ins and outs and who got along in the town and who didn't and who were people that would say they would help you. But nothing would get done. And the people who would say they would help you and it would get done and what people were in conflict with each other because of politics. And I just, you know, sucked up all that stuff while she was there and really, really helped me.

CLINE: [00:50:42] Did your work change during the first year?

PEIFFER: [00:50:49] Well, I think, you know, I went in to teach English as a foreign language, but anything else that popped up I would end up doing. I made a lot of visual aids for the elementary school, and I mean, that wasn't in my job description or whatever, but I did it. For instance, the elementary school had, I mean, they didn't even have a map of Brazil. I remember drawing maps of Brazil. I remember I went to one elementary school. Bruni, during the first couple of weeks, she would say, let's go spend a day at the elementary school or let's go and spend a day with the people from the agronomists and economists or whatever so that I would learn I would meet the people in the town and also learn about what was going on. And I remember I was in a class and they were learning the multiplication tables and they were sitting there going, one times one is one, two times two is four. They just they were going over these things. So I made them a multiplication table and they thought I invented it. They had never seen one before. And I mean, it just seems like such a simple thing that we all had in school. So I did things like that.

PEIFFER: [00:52:00] Then the doctor who came to the town, he had a little medical school in the town where he lived, and he asked me when he found out I was an artist. Sometimes he had one textbook for all the students, and so he asked he would bring a textbook and he would mark pages and he would bring me these big sheets of poster board and asked me to do illustrations from the textbook for him that were large enough that he could, I guess, hang up and everybody could look at instead of having to look at this little drawing in the textbook. So I did that and then I would help Bruni with her health projects and her storyboards, and I would go and I would do things. Oh, the municipal commission was started in the

town. It was very interesting because one of the things that was we were told all through training is Brazilians are very apathetic.

PEIFFER: [00:53:04] One of the things they used to say all the time is *é assim mesmo*, which meant that's the way it is. In other words, no use doing anything about it. That's the way it is and nothing would get done. It would be really hard to get people to help you. I was so lucky the town I was in, we had this municipal commission and there were a lot of people in the town who, for instance, the bankers who were not from that town. A lot of them were from the capital city. And of course, this was like being put out in the boonies for them. So they wanted to see things improve in the town. And there were a couple of people that, you know, that the school director and the priests and the Peace Corps, people who wanted to help. So we got this commission going and we would look at a problem in the town and see what we could do to improve it or fix it or whatever.

PEIFFER: [00:54:00] And boy, there were so many people in the town that were not apathetic, that wanted to do something that wanted to see the town improve. And I will, I saw amazing changes. When you think about the town and the where it was out in the middle of nowhere and that there was no electricity for hours a night. And um, well, I often think of the changes that were happening in the town. I think when I got there, there were three buses a week to and from the capital city. By the time I left, I think except for Sunday, there were three buses a day to the capital city. Some of the streets were paved with cobblestones that hadn't been paved before. The town square, which was just this kind of dirt thing had trees and bushes and park benches, and the high school had its first graduating class. We got full time electricity. I mean, it was just really amazing to see the changes, and I would love to go back and see what's there now because I'm sure you know that there are changes now.

CLINE: [00:55:13] Were there any unexpected events that happened during your tour that you could remember?

PEIFFER: [00:55:22] Well, unexpected events. Um, well, maybe I shouldn't say they were totally unexpected, but the every once in a while we would find a snake in our house. Sometimes poisonous. And I have only one phobia in

the whole world and of course, snakes. The first time it happened was, I think it was a Saturday, and I started packing my bag. And then Bruni reminded me that there wasn't a bus out of town until Wednesday, and by Wednesday I'd kind of calmed down. That was near the beginning of my stay there. Um, there were, um, I don't know.

PEIFFER: [00:56:06] One time there was a guy who he was the brother of a woman that lived in the town and she was the director at the elementary school. And she was a very progressive woman and she was a very nice woman and helped us a lot in. But her brother was kind of this young wild guy. He came to visit, and the whole time he was there, he was threatening to kidnap Bruni and I and hold us hostage because of the imperialistic Americans. And it was right after, I don't know if you remember the Pueblo incident in Korea where an American boat was captured and people were, the military people were held hostage. And I think that's where he got the idea. I think we, you know, we figured that he was just pretty much of a blowhard and that nothing ever came of it, but it kind of surprised me.

PEIFFER: [00:57:08] Um, another thing that surprised me was, there's no really one big event, but little things. It surprised me was that we, as Americans, were almost like celebrities in the town, everybody wanted to know us. We had people coming to me and saying, how do you cook chicken? And it was like, I mean, these people had been housewives for 30 years, and they're coming and asking me how to how I cook chicken, how Americans cook chicken, or how do you do this? Or how do you do that? And it was kind of like in a way, it was kind of flattering. But in another way, I wanted to say, I don't know any more about this than you do. You know, and um, I mean, I would help them and tell them maybe what we did and I'd say, you know, but I'd always try to ask them, how do you do it? You know, I'd like to know how you do it, too. And of course, we all the time would ask people, how do you cook this or what's your recipe for that if we'd go to their house and we'd have something good.

PEIFFER: [00:58:16] But I was really surprised at what quote and it wasn't even in the town. Sometimes I go to the capital city, which was about 90 kilometers away, and I'd be in a store and someone would say, oh, you're Carolina from Nossa Senhora da Glória. And I'd say, how do you know?

Oh, everybody knows. And I mean, I guess they describe you and, you know, people. The thing is that most everybody in the town where I live had relatives in the city. The city was a fairly large town. I don't know how many people lived there. Maybe I don't know, maybe twenty thousand. It wasn't like just a dinky little town, but people knew who you were all across the state. It was a small state, but I think from the capital city to the farthest point of the state might have been maybe 80 miles or something, it wasn't pretty big.

CLINE: [00:59:18] Did you develop any special relationships with any people?

PEIFFER: [00:59:22] Oh yeah. There was a woman that lived down the street that Bruni kind of adopted as her mother. And then they kind of took me in too and that whole family kind of adopted us. And her name was Bonnania and she had a whole slew of kids. And the one, the daughter was 11, maybe 12 when I got there and she got to be a good friend of ours. And then they had a domestic. She was a girl who is a very common. Someone who was very poor and couldn't take care of their children would give their, especially their daughters away to a family to do the housework. And Maria was their domestic, and I really, really liked her. And although they weren't really mean to her, they often weren't extremely nice to her. And when I left, I gave her a lot of my clothes and I gave her, you know, like fingernail polish or things that I had that I knew that she would really like. I really liked her. She would often do things for us, like I never got to the point where I could kill a chicken. So we would buy a chicken and then would take it down there. And Maria would kill it for us now. We would have to defeather it and, you know, cut it up and do it and cook it and everything. But um, she would do little things like that for us.

PEIFFER: [01:00:49] There were a couple of students that I got to be really close to, and there was one guy who was a banker that I kind of dated and he was, um. Senses of humor don't always translate from one language to another. But he had this wonderful sense of humor that I got. And I really enjoyed him. He was kind of a playboy, and I knew I could never get terribly serious about him. But he was very charming and really delightful person to be around, a lot of fun. And it was nice because he had a car because every once in a while, if I needed to go into the capital city or



something, he could take us. But a lot of the bankers like to be close to the home economist and the agronomist. It was mostly people about my age that were working there in the town and most of them were kind of the, uh, I mean, although I was close to some of my students who were from that town, most of the people that I was pretty friendly with ended up being people that were not from that town. They were kind of out of their element as well. You know, they were stuck out in the boonies for a period of time for the work as well.

CLINE: [01:02:18] That just everyday living was a kind of a challenge to you.

PEIFFER: [01:02:24] Definitely. First of all, everything had to be done from scratch, especially cooking. And as I said, you had to buy a live chicken. There was a market that was every Saturday. And what would happen is that all the people who had any goods to sell that lived anywhere within driving distance would come to the market and set up their wares. And it could be food or other things like pots and pans, ceramic things, sandals, aluminum, tobacco, anything. And they would set up their things to sell, and then they would use the money that they made to buy what they needed. And in the morning, on Saturday mornings, trucks would start coming into town and someone would have a big truck. It's kind of an open back truck and they'd just drive a certain route. And along the way, people would be standing on the side of the road at maybe three or four or five in the morning, depending on how far away it was, and the truck would pick them up and they would pay them for the ride. And then in the afternoon, they did all back on the truck with the stuff that they had purchased and go back home.

PEIFFER: [01:03:48] And so on Saturday morning, we would usually get up early. First of all, a little man would come to sell us eggs and he would just stop at our place on the way and have eggs. And Bruni had gotten to be real friendly with him, so he should always make breakfast for him. But she got a little discouraged at one time about having him come all the time because he started to ask her to marry him. Now this man was in his 70s and Bruni was a year older than me and I was like 22 or 24 when I was there.

PEIFFER: [01:04:28] But anyway, then we would go to the market and you would have to buy everything from scratch, you know, from a live chicken to weighing out everything. And so but it was it was a really fun day and we had to cook either in a wood burning stove. We eventually did get a gas stove. But you had to have a fire going in the wood burning stove all the time. Keep things hot and we had to boil and filter all our water. So we had to boil the water for 20 minutes and we would put it through a water filter, and then we had to clean the filter out every week. You couldn't buy much ahead of time. You had to buy enough for a week, but you couldn't buy a lot of perishable stuff ahead of time because you didn't have any way of keeping it if you didn't have electricity. But we did get a kerosene refrigerator. We could keep some things in there, but every once in a while we'd come home and there'd be this black smoke coming out of it and it would have shut off and we had to clean it out and start it up again. It was really a big pain. After a while, we did get about six months before I left. We did get full time electricity and then the people at the hotel would also let me keep things in there. They kept absolutely nothing in their freezer because they knew nothing about frozen food, so I would buy meat and wrap it up and put it in the freezer. Or I would like maybe blanch some green beans and put it in the freezer. And then I could just, you know, heat them up and do things like that.

PEIFFER: [01:06:14] We had to get someone to bring water to our home, and we kept it in a big ceramic pot. It was about three foot high and maybe about two foot feet across. And when we, now most of the Brazilians took cold showers, but, you know, pampered me. I couldn't stand to take a cold shower so we would heat up a pot of water. I would get it so it was almost boiling and then we'd mix the hot water and the cold water together and take a warm shower or bath in our kitchen.

CLINE: [01:06:51] How did you do that? How did you take a shower?

PEIFFER: [01:06:54] Well, we would just take like a bucket or a big pot of cold water and just put enough hot water in it to it would get like lukewarm. And we.

CLINE: [01:07:06] Just throw it over your head.

PEIFFER: [01:07:07] Yeah, dump it over our head. Now I after Bruni left, excuse me, after Bruni left I stayed in that house for maybe a month or so. And then one of the guys that worked at the bank had been buying property and he was going to fix it up, and he was complaining one day that he bought a house because he got it really cheap. It was on the market. And but he really had to spend a lot of time to fix it up. So it was going to be sitting there without anybody renting it for like six months until he had enough money to do that because he was already fixing up another house. And I said, well, I'm going to be gone. And I think by that time it was maybe nine months. So I'm going to be going to nine months when you should let me rent it. And then when I leave, I will pay you enough money, maybe that you can fix it up. And it was so much better than the house that I had been in. Instead of having it had mud bricks in a lot of it, but part of it, it had ceramic tile on the floor.

PEIFFER: [01:08:09] It had a real shower room and there was a container at the top of the shower roof where if you moved the ceramic tiles, water would run into that tank. And what I would do is I would let the rain fill that up and then I would dump one pot of hot water into it. And that was enough to take a shower, a lukewarm shower. And it actually had a drain that drained the water out into the backyard. And it had a cisterna, which was a place that gathered water in a big tank for rainwater. And so before that, I would give my clothing to a laundry woman and she would take it out to the dam at the end of town, and she would beat my clothes on a rock and she'd iron everything. And we insisted that she iron everything because we figured it would kill some of the microbes from because the dam water wasn't all that clean. There were animals that would, you know, waste that would go into it and so on.

PEIFFER: [01:09:18] But then I had after I moved to this place with the cisterna, she would come to my backyard and she would wash the clothes. And that water, which was relatively clean compared to that, and she would take the wet clothes home and iron them and then bring them back. And of course, they did this dirt cheap. But just kind of the, it would take so much longer to do everything to cook, to clean, to do laundry and everything. But the labor was so cheap that we did farm some of that out.

CLINE: [01:09:55] What did you eat regularly besides chicken?

PEIFFER: [01:09:57] Well, um, the Brazilians for breakfast would eat usually bread and fruit and coffee mixed with hot milk. At lunchtime, they would, every day they had black beans and rice, and then they would have either fish or meat or chicken or something with it. And for dinner, they usually had a lighter meal, which was usually soup and bread, maybe fruit. But we because Bruni and I could cook for ourselves, we would make whatever we wanted. I mean, we made pancakes a lot for breakfast. She had brought someone that told her there was no maple syrup. So she had brought some maple flavoring with her. And now we use Karo syrup and put a little bit of maple flavoring in it. Or what was even better, we'd make a fruit salad and eat it with the pancakes. We'd make eggs for breakfast and we had we always had bread. The bread was very good and the butter and we had milk. And whenever one of the neighbor boys used to bring us milk once in a while. He'd go out to the farm and milk the cows outside of town, and he'd bring his milk and we'd make hot chocolate for him. And he would come and bring his smoke because he wanted hot chocolate.

PEIFFER: [01:11:15] For lunch, we would make, I mean, we got a meat grinder and we would make hamburgers. We'd make spaghetti. We would roast to, you know, do a pork roast. You, you know, have beef. Bruni didn't like fish, but I liked fish. So once in a while, I'd make fish if I could get fish at the market. She liked a couple of things that I did not like. She would every once in a while by she was from a Mexican-American family, and she had some food preferences that I didn't like. She loved buying a lamb's head and roasting the whole lamb's head. But she didn't like liver and I liked liver, so I would buy liver when she would make her lamb's head. But we ate more quote kind of American style food because we didn't eat at a pension or, you know, we weren't living with the family. But I enjoyed the food when I did go and eat at someone else's home. I just didn't want to eat beans and rice every day of my life for two years.

CLINE: [01:12:18] So how did you handle any health problems?

PEIFFER: [01:12:21] Well, let's see, I didn't really have very many health problems or I didn't know I did what I left when we did. When the doctors did their final little tests on us, I found out I had roundworms that I didn't know I had, and I had to take some pills that were enough to choke a horse for a couple of days, and they all would come out in the toilet, which was kind of disconcerting to see them. But my biggest problem was I had colds, so I always had had bad colds all my life, and once in a while I'd get a really bad cold. But we had a Peace Corps first aid kit, and if we were running low on anything, if we would go into the capital city, we'd do the Peace Corps office. They would, you know, give us whatever we needed.

PEIFFER: [01:13:11] And there were a lot of things in there that were, I guess, were really, in this country would have been prescription drugs, but they gave them to us so that we would have them. I remember one time they had a directive that we were all supposed to go out and it was all supposed to start taking quinine because there was some malaria in the area. But pretty soon that passed and then they said we didn't have to. However, once while you get some kind of a bite or, you know, an insect bite or something, you didn't, maybe wouldn't know what it was, but.

CLINE: [01:13:47] You never got bitten by one of the snakes?

PEIFFER: [01:13:49] No, I never got bitten by one of the snakes or a poisonous spider or anything, but I did have, it seemed like you know you had mostly, it was intestinal. Like, you know, every once in a while, you just be constipated for a few days and then you'd have diarrhea for a few days, and sometimes you just didn't feel good, but there was nothing in particular. The other thing I can tell this story. At one of the conferences where we had medical tests, we also had a dental checkup, and the doctor told me I had to have my wisdom teeth pulled. So he sent me to a Brazilian dentist, and I have to admit I was a little afraid because I didn't know what to expect. And the Brazilian dentist, first thing she asked me was where I was from and when I told her Pittsburgh. Here she had done her dental studies at the University of Pittsburgh, and then I went to an anesthesiologist and he had studied at Duke University, so I felt much better about it then.

PEIFFER: [01:14:59] I was totally naive. I had no idea what this all involved and I knew it was being done at the dentist office. They did it a general anesthetic. I was totally out when they did it and when I woke up, I went there by myself on a bus and then they ask, well, who is going to come and pick me up? And I said, no one, I'm here by myself. So they had like a dental hygienist, young man who took me home in a cab and I was staying with our assistant director and his wife and his wife was a nurse, but they lived in an apartment on the third floor. This was in Salvador, Bahia. And this poor guy had to practically carry me up the steps. I was so out of it. And when I finally got to the apartment and got in the apartment, I remember I just sat down and started to cry. I was just so exhausted of trying to get up to, I don't remember was the third or fourth floor, but we had to go up several flights of stairs.

PEIFFER: [01:16:03] And of course, my face was all swollen and whatever. But the funny thing was is when I got back to my town in Brazil, nothing is private. Everyone would say, you know, how much did it cost to get your teeth pulled? And I can't remember now how much it was, but maybe it was something like, now the Peace Corps paid for it, of course. But it might have been something like two hundred cruzeiros, which would have been maybe 50, 60 dollars. And other people said, Jose Dentista, this guy who was not a dentist, but everybody called him, Jose Dentista. He would have done it for like one cruzeiro per tooth, which is about 25 cents. And now, why was I so stupid as to go and get some real dentists to do this and cost so much money when he would have pulled my teeth for 25 cents apiece? But that was the kind of thing that they would, you know, do. They always had a solution to something.

CLINE: [01:17:11] Yeah.

PEIFFER: [01:17:11] The other thing that other health thing that was interesting is that in Brazil, no matter what you had wrong with you. You had a bruise, you had a headache, you had a stomachache, you had a rash, whatever it was, people would tell you that it was because of your *figado*. And I love the word *figado*. But it was liver, and everybody thought that every problem that you had was because of your liver. You had a bad liver or something was wrong with your liver. You had an infection in your liver.

And I even heard stories later, I don't remember ever hearing them in my town, but I heard stories later that in some areas of Brazil, you know, we used to be afraid of the boogeyman. They had this *papa figado* or something who would come and steal people's livers or drain blood out of their livers at night when they were unsuspecting. And so and I would just say, oh, OK. I said, must be my *figado* because there was no argument. It was that everything that was wrong with you is because of your *figado*.

CLINE: [01:18:29] Well, after two years of this, how did you feel about leaving Brazil?

PEIFFER: [01:18:35] Well, I have to admit that there were times while I was there that I would have left in a second if a bus had been available to leave town on that particular day. And there were times when I thought about leaving because it wasn't easy. It was hard and it was, um, I mean, there were just days that were just so frustrating. I mean, sometimes it was loneliness. Sometimes it was culture shock. Sometimes it was just being so tired of having to do everything from scratch or, you know, the old-fashioned way. And it was exciting at first, but it got tired, pretty fast. But by the time I left there, it was time to leave. I really considered staying on. I didn't particularly consider staying on in the Peace Corps, but I did look into teaching at a Pan-American school in Salvador, and I looked into a couple of other things and eventually I decided not to stay. But by the time I left, I really loved Brazil. I love the Brazilian people. As I said before, the Brazilian people were just wonderful to me.

PEIFFER: [01:19:54] One experience when I traveled, I took a bus, an overnight bus from Montevideo, Uruguay, to Porto Alegre, Brazil, and there was a young boy, he was like 18 maybe. He was on the bus all night and he sat with me and all night long he kept asking me about America and, you know, whatever. And when I when I got to Porto Alegre, I was just waiting for another bus to take me. It was the end of my vacation. I was heading back home. And he said, well, come and spend the day with my family. And I said, no, no, I can't. I can't. I said my goodbye to him at the bus. I went to pick up my luggage. And like 15 people suddenly surrounded me and it was his mother, his father, his aunts, uncles, his grandparents, his brothers and sisters. And they all insisted that I go home with them and

spend the day with them, and they fed me. They made me take a nap. They drove me around the city to see things that I had been there on my way south.

PEIFFER: [01:20:58] But on my way north I was planning just kind of I was going to hang out in a movie theater most of the day because it was a Sunday. But I mean, it was just those things happened all the time. People would take you in and take care of you and whatever, and it was hard. And it was also kind of a nice, slow, relaxing pace of life that was very appealing to me. And so I really didn't want to leave. In a sense I wanted to go home. I wanted to get on with my life. I wanted to get a job. I want to go to graduate school, I want to see my family. But there was a part of me that wanted to stay on in Brazil. There were at least four people in my group that. I think there are three people still in Brazil, and there's one woman who lived there for 20 years before she came home. So it did have an appeal for a lot of people.

CLINE: [01:21:54] In regard to your teaching, did you feel a special sense of accomplishment or did you feel that that was not something that went well?

PEIFFER: [01:22:05] Yes and no. I mean, I thought I found teaching frustrating. In some ways it was difficult because there was so little to work with. The students had to buy their own books, their own materials and that made it hard. In a lot of ways, I thought teaching English wasn't going to help a lot of people, but on the other hand, the few people that maybe knew some English would help them in their jobs. The guys that worked at the bank, if they knew English, they could get a better position. I thought my work doing teaching other things or helping Bruni with their health program, and I thought that was a little more rewarding because really deep down inside, I thought very few people were going to get out of that town and be able to really use English at all. But on the other hand, it made them high school graduates. That was just something that was not very common, and it was a great accomplishment for them and for you.

CLINE: [01:23:16] Did you do any traveling afterward and had you done any traveling in the country before you left?



PEIFFER: [01:23:23] Well, we were allowed, I believe, 15 days and 30 days vacation. I ended up taking mine altogether. So I planned it so that I would take my 45 day trip. And then at the end of it, I ended up at my first year conference, which was really not like at the 12 month point. It was maybe at the 14 month point or something, and my trip was rather interesting. I corresponded with some other volunteers that were from my group and so on. And there was a guy named Elroy Decker. I talked to him about this about a year or so ago, and he didn't even remember most of this, but we laughed about it. I had mentioned that I was going to go on a trip. And when I told him what day I was going to get to Salvador and I was going to see him. We had been friends during training. We weren't boyfriend, girlfriend or anything. We'd just been friends.

PEIFFER: [01:24:24] So I arrived at the bus station in Salvador to start my trip. And here he's there, waiting for me and announces that he's taking the trip with me. Well, Elroy was one of those people that was my really good friend as long as we didn't have to spend a lot of time together. But we found out that we just had absolutely opposing opinions and interests, and I don't know how many things, but it would be. We ended up going by bus from Salvador to Belo Horizonte to Brasilia to Rio to Sao Paulo, down to Porto Alegre to Montevideo to Buenos Aires. And it was a wonderful trip. We would spend. We didn't have much money. We had a per diem for days that we would travel. And I had a little bit of money that I had brought with me. He was from a very wealthy family and he had his parents send him money all the time. And he lived not like most Peace Corps volunteers there, because he always had a lot of money. But that comes into play a little bit later in the story. But first of all, he was always trying to save money by getting one room and not getting two. And I refused, and he kept saying, no, no, there's not going to be any sex or anything. But I knew Elroy and I said, no, we had to have two rooms.

PEIFFER: [01:25:54] We would get to a town and we would go and see some things together. And that maybe the evening would want to go to a movie and whatever movie he wanted to go to would be the last movie I would have picked. The movie I wanted to go to would have been the last movie he ever picked. So we would both go to movies separately and then we'd

meet up together anyway. When we by the time we got to Buenos Aires, then he decided he didn't want to stay there very long. So he headed back to Rio and I stayed there for a few more days and then I headed back up and then we met up again. And I remember we got on the bus in Rio and he wanted to buy something at the bus station. And he had run out of money. And but he just money just went through his fingers like, you know, through a sieve. So I wouldn't give him any money because I didn't have all that much and I needed to, you know, I still needed to get to Salvador or whatever. And I remember we were, I wouldn't give it to him.

PEIFFER: [01:26:50] So we were on the bus and we got into this big verbal battle and we were calling each other names and we were swearing and we were saying things to each other and so on. And then we just stopped talking for about the first hour outside of Rio. Or maybe it was longer, I don't know. Anyway, we stopped at a for a pit stop and we got back on the bus and the people in front of us turned around and introduced themselves, and they were a missionary couple from the United States, I don't remember where. And of course, they had heard all this. I mean, we were thinking stupidly that, you know, we were calling each other names and swearing and being obscene and yelling at each other. And that, you know, none of the Brazilians would know what we were saying under our breaths and you know, whatever. And of course, this American couple of missionaries had heard it all. We were kind of embarrassed, but it was it was a great trip and it was.

PEIFFER: [01:27:53] I saw a lot of the country and the only thing I really regret is that I didn't go to the Amazon. But at that time, nobody thought much about the Amazon and that it would never be the same. So I did go from up on the whole east coast. I traveled at various times from Recife, which is in the northeast and all the way down to Porto Alegre, which is in the southeast, when a little bit into the interior in different places. And then I did go to Uruguay and Argentina as well. And on the way home, I stopped in Peru and Mexico.

CLINE: [01:28:30] So were you on your own then?

PEIFFER: [01:28:32] Yes, I was on my own.

CLINE: [01:28:34] So you felt comfortable traveling in all of these countries on your own?

PEIFFER: [01:28:38] Yeah. And now I hear about so much violence in Brazil. But we were pretty much told that it, I mean, we weren't supposed to be stupid and go out alone at midnight or whatever, but that women alone were pretty safe. That rape was almost unheard of in Brazil. And just to be a little careful with cameras and flaunting your money and try to dress like the natives and, you know, whatever, and the fact that we could speak Portuguese was good because then we weren't totally naive or we didn't sound totally naive as somebody that could speak very well, like with taxi drivers or whatever. But I never felt in danger anywhere in Brazil, except for the snakes.

CLINE: [01:29:32] What were your future plans when you came home?

PEIFFER: [01:29:37] Well, you know what? Even though I mean, I taught for a couple of years in Brazil, I didn't think that I was that good of a teacher. I thought, I mean, I was, I don't know, of course, that you're trying to teach in a foreign language and whatever and all these other things going on. So I came home and decided I was going to get some other kind of job, but I ended up going to teaching anyway, and I taught for a total of 32 years. And I did like it. I did enjoy it. And I think a lot of it was just that I was kind of immature and didn't know what I was doing. But it was kind of a it was a good proving ground.

CLINE: [01:30:21] Did you teach English or art?

PEIFFER: [01:30:23] No, I taught art. Once I got home.

CLINE: [01:30:27] How would you evaluate your service? According to the three Peace Corps goals. I'll remind you that the first goal was to provide technical assistance where requested.

PEIFFER: [01:30:42] Well, where I don't know if it works the same way in every country, but we had to have been invited by the local government, and I

know Bruni requested an English teacher or a teacher of any kind and that had to be approved by the mayor of the town. And I mean, as far as technical assistance I did, you know, I taught English, I taught a lot of other things as well. I helped it out with the health classes and with the doctors school and so on. So I think I did a good job in that. I think that that was productive.

CLINE: [01:31:27] How would you evaluate the second goal to help promote better understanding of Americans by other peoples?

PEIFFER: [01:31:37] Well, as I said, we were kind of celebrities and everybody wanted to know us. Everybody wanted to talk to us. Everybody asked us all the time about the United States. I think that there were certain people who had a little bit of fear of us. And I mean, there were people who believed that we were there to scoop out a missile site for the United States, which we just thought was laughable because who would want to go to Nossa Senhora da Glória to put up a missile site? So I think there were people that mistrusted the United States, they thought it was the imperialists. This is during the Vietnam War. People would one of the first things people would ask us is, are you liking it here in Brazil? And we would always blush and say, yes, we liked it.

PEIFFER: [01:32:30] And almost invariably, the second or third question that they would ask us is why is the United States in Vietnam? Even though a lot of people didn't know very much about it, they would just know what they heard on their radios that were hooked up to car batteries. But I had to admit I knew very little about Vietnam. I knew very little about it. But a lot of people would say things to me like, I don't like Americans, but I like you. And I think that was probably an experience that a lot of people had in a lot of countries that maybe they had heard some things or they had an impression of Americans from whatever, from television or movies or or just rumor. And so often people will say, oh, I really don't like Americans, but I like you. So I think we did a good job of and people would ask us about our homes and our families and what does your father do? And I mean, because they would also ask questions like, how much money does he make and things like that? But the other thing is, people couldn't understand, you know, they'd say, are you an orphan? That was usually

one of the first couple questions. Are you an orphan? And I'd say no. And why would you ever leave such a, you know, a rich country like the United States to come here? I'd say, well, I wanted to see the world, I wanted to meet someone else, and I wanted to see something different.

CLINE: [01:34:06] The third goal to help promote better understanding of other people by Americans. Were you able to do that during your service?

PEIFFER: [01:34:20] Um, I well, I wrote letters home. I guess that might have helped, but I think most of it came after I came home. I mean, I taught school. I would often talk about Brazil to my students just in an informal way. I mean, I taught art, and therefore the students were allowed to carry on conversations while they were doing their artwork. And sometimes there's just a weird subject would come up and they'd say, what's the strangest thing you ever ate? You know, the kids would talk about it. Then they'd say to me, hey Miss Peiffer, what's the strangest thing you've ever ate? And I could tell them that when I was in Brazil, I ate iguana and armadillo, which luckily at the moment I didn't know what I was eating. I only found out later it was good. I, you know, I don't know whether I would have eaten it if I had known I was eating it, but I also would let the teachers know, like when the sixth grade teachers were teaching about Latin America. If they wanted me to, what we would do is switch classes. I do their class one day and they'd cover my class and I've done Peace Corps days over the last, maybe five or six years. I almost always go to a school and talk. But I also talked about it informally, a lot to a lot of people.

PEIFFER: [01:35:45] And the one thing I really try to emphasize is that other cultures are no better or worse. They're just different. And there's some there are wonderful things about the Brazilian culture that I absolutely love. And there are some things about my own culture that I absolutely hate. And it's just, you know, um, a different way of living. And it's wonderful. I mean, it's just I feel like I learned so much and I like to pass that on too.

CLINE: [01:36:23] Have you continued to be involved with Brazil and with those people in any way?

PEIFFER: [01:36:28] So the Brazilians that I knew then and that I worked with. Brazilians just are not big letter writers. And I would write a letter and tell them, you know what I was doing or that I got married or what was going on in my life. And I would hardly ever hear back from anybody. Maybe for every ten letters that I would write, I would get maybe, maybe one back. And after a while, they nobody would answer anymore. So I kind of, you know, gave up on that. But over the years, I've had opportunities to be around Brazilian people. I've had several students that were from Brazil. Often they would like most of the time, they would come to our school and really not know any English. And I know the first girl that I had, she was a domestic for a fairly wealthy family. And whatever rules there were that govern that she had to attend a certain number of hours or school a day and she was in ninth grade. And I think at that time I was teaching seventh or eighth grade, but they put her in my art class because I could talk to her.

PEIFFER: [01:37:42] And I had a really great kids that would try to help her with her English and also, like, maybe she'd be in math class and she didn't understand something the teacher would send her with the paper to me and say, could you explain this to her in Portuguese? And then I could send her back to class. And they had other I had over the years, maybe eight or 10 different Brazilian students. And then I also made some Brazilian friends outside of that as well. And we correspond occasionally. Now we can do it by email. And um, I belong to an ex-PCV Brazil website that I get every day I get emails from people talking about Brazil, what's going on in Brazil, the politics in Brazil or whatever. And some of them, I'm not really interested. I delete them in other ones, you know, I'm interested in.

PEIFFER: [01:38:46] I've continued to read George Amato novels. He's a really good Brazilian novelist. When something is on the news about Brazil, my ears perk up. You know, I'm not real actively involved, but I am interested. I like to hear about Brazilian culture and music, and if we find a Brazilian movie like Don A Foreigner, Two Husbands, Gabriel Clove and Cinnamon, Central Station, Bye Bye Brazil. I have tapes of all those movies. I watch them over and over. And so I've been involved, but not really actively.

CLINE: [01:39:27] Sounds like you miss Brazil.

PEIFFER: [01:39:29] I do miss Brazil, I miss a lot of that.

CLINE: [01:39:30] Do you like to go back?

PEIFFER: [01:39:31] I would love to go back, but I don't want to go back for a week, you know, like, I want to go back, maybe like for two months or something and spend some time and go back and visit the town where I worked.

CLINE: [01:39:45] Think there'll be a lot of differences?

PEIFFER: [01:39:46] Oh, I'm sure there will be. I hope there will be.

CLINE: [01:39:51] What would you say is the main effect of Peace Corps service on your life, both immediately after your service and later on?

PEIFFER: [01:40:02] Definitely my appreciation of my own life from my own country and my opportunities, especially the opportunities that I have. I often say that I don't complain about having to pay taxes because even though you know it takes a lot of money away from me, I think I get a lot of a lot for it, whether they, whether it be a highway or health services or whatever we get for that support of the arts, whatever. In Brazil, the tax system was just crazy and the federal highway that went through my town was a mud road. And, you know, so I think if I think for one thing, it made me see my own country from a more global point of view. It made me see my country from the perspective of someone else and from, I compare it to a lover that you don't see their flaws when you're in the relationship and six months on the road, you think, what was I doing? Why did I ever like that guy? And I feel like I felt the same way about my own country in a way. That while you're there, it's all rah rah America. Everything is wonderful. And then you go someplace else and you see that we do have flaws, but at exactly the same time you see that how lucky you are to have been born where you were and that you grew up there and that you have all the opportunities and privileges that you have as an American citizen that other people don't have.

CLINE: [01:41:51] Carol, I thank you very much for participating in the Peace Corps archival project.

PEIFFER: [01:41:56] Well, thank you. I've enjoyed it.

CLINE: [01:41:58] Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]