

Donald Stierman Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Donald Stierman

Interviewer: Gail B. Gall

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Biographical Note

Donald Stierman served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras from 1969 to 1972 as a teacher trainer.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Donald Stierman

September 11, 2019
Lesterville, Missouri

By Gail B. Gall

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

GALL: [00:00:02] Ok, today is September 11, 2019. This is Gail Gall from Honduras 15, and I am interviewing Don Stierman from Honduras Group 13, who trained in Brockport and served in the Peace Corps between?

STIERMAN: [00:00:22] 1969 through 1972. September 1, '69 to August 31, '72.

GALL: [00:00:30] And we are in Lesterville, Missouri. And we will begin with probably the most common question is why did you join the Peace Corps?

STIERMAN: [00:00:44] My Uncle Horatio spoke Spanish. Aunt Rose spoke Hungarian, and they hosted some refugees from Hungary after the 1956 revolution. They hosted some refugees from Cuba after the Cuban revolution. They also had several they hosted some exchange students from Peru. And I became fascinated with Latin America. I took Spanish in high school and was relatively good at it. Then, after three years of

college as a physics major, I decided I wanted to be a teacher and they had a program in which they were recruiting teachers. I would get a teaching certificate and I would get a assignment in Honduras or Peru, which was all the things I wanted at that time. So that was that was an offer I couldn't refuse. We were also great admirers of President Kennedy and the Peace Corps always sounded like a good idea to me.

GALL: [00:01:50] Great, great. Before joining the Peace Corps, we talked a little bit about your aunt and uncle and their activities. Any other childhood or education or other experiences that you think contributed to your joining the Peace Corps?

STIERMAN: [00:02:06] I was the oldest of eight children. The house was getting kind of crowded. And when I was in college, I was working three different jobs. And this would be a way to kind of break that pattern. And I could get out of town and finish up my education at Brockport State.

GALL: [00:02:28] Well, that was quite the I assume then that getting the teaching certificate was a big motivating factor.

STIERMAN: [00:02:34] Yes, it was. You also have we so we had to take the 18 hours of education courses. We took Spanish every semester because we were going to be teaching teachers. So we had to do this efficiently.

GALL: [00:02:48] So was your degree then from Brockport?

STIERMAN: [00:02:51] My degree was from Brockport. It was a Bachelor of Science and Physics.

GALL: [00:02:55] Ok, all right, great. So how did you hear about this offer about the Peace Corps?

STIERMAN: [00:03:01] I think I saw it in a brochure or an advertisement.

GALL: [00:03:07] And where were you studying before that?

STIERMAN: [00:03:09] I was at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. It's a small Catholic men's college.

GALL: [00:03:15] What was the name of it?

STIERMAN: Loras.

GALL: L-O?

STIERMAN: [00:03:17] L-O-R-A-S. Word in Spanish, parrots. Named after a bishop who was one of the early bishops in town.

GALL: [00:03:31] Oh, OK. And so your training was actually part of an undergraduate degree program?

STIERMAN: Yes.

GALL: And did you have any training specifically related to Honduras or was mostly the language around you had intensive Spanish, right?

STIERMAN: [00:03:50] Also, the spring break before our final summer, they arranged a trip for us to Honduras to spend a week there. My mom didn't want to invest in another member of everybody and then have people drop out right away. So they took us, right. They took us to Honduras. I got off the plane in Tegucigalpa, got in another plane right away to San Pedro Sula, got on another plane to Santa Barbara. So I went from a four engine to a big two engine prop to a DC three, like my dad flew with the Second World War. He was a navigator radio operator. So it's really an interesting progression of aircraft. Yes. So I spent several days in Santa Barbara with Craig Wanky, who was a Peace Corps volunteer, and he wickiup and got to visit a couple of other places, sort of a couple older volunteers. And I realized this is going to really change me.

GALL: [00:04:53] You realized then?

STIERMAN: [00:04:55] Yeah, yeah. But I still like it.

GALL: [00:04:58] Ok. All right. So you really had more prep than those of us who didn't get there until we were ready. So this question is a little inappropriate about like your reaction when you were accepted. But basically when you decided to change and study Brockport, was there much of a reaction among your family and the people that were close to you?

STIERMAN: [00:05:22] Not really. That my parents were supportive.

GALL: [00:05:25] Mm hmm.

STIERMAN: [00:05:26] I like to say we are the family admired John Kennedy. We thought that he thought maybe.

GALL: [00:05:32] Yup, yup. And so did you have a preference aside from Latin America?

STIERMAN: Not really.

GALL: OK. So is there any particular with a particular people trained for this Peace Corps assignment, this Peace Corps program at Bridgeport Fort Brockport that focused on you becoming teachers in Latin America? Well, I was there. So aside from the general teaching, learning how to teach with a teach you how to teach in Latin America much cultural information and things like that?

STIERMAN: [00:06:20] We have had several of our language teachers were from Latin America. OK, so there were there were times when we would have discussions on the culture. But we were trained as a group, mostly, mostly specialty classes. It was all the Peace Corps for the education, psychology, the developmental psychology, the teaching methods. The only people in the room or the instructor and teach for trainees.

GALL: [00:06:55] And how many people were in your group?

STIERMAN: [00:06:57] Started out with 50 and 25 went overseas.

GALL: [00:07:03] And so there was a slow attrition over?

STIERMAN: [00:07:06] Several people got offers for graduate school and decided they'd rather do that. People dropped out little by little.

GALL: [00:07:16] Yeah. OK, what do you think the training adequately prepared you for what you were going to be doing?

STIERMAN: Yeah, I think it did.

GALL: And were there any particular Honduran host teachers with you?

STIERMAN: [00:07:34] Not, not at Rockport, an Ecuadorian and some Costa Rican. And we had a couple of visitors down the road, Stevie Yorkeys was from Honduras, I forgot exactly what role he played in Rockport. She was there for the last summer.

GALL: [00:07:59] All right.

STIERMAN: [00:08:00] He later became interim director in Honduras.

GALL: [00:08:03] Oh, good. Good. So your initial entry into the country, would that be going back to the trip to Santa Barbara and your impressions there?

STIERMAN: [00:08:16] You spent there. Yes.

GALL: [00:08:18] So how did let's get a little bit more picturesque about like what the physical environment was like that struck you?

STIERMAN: [00:08:25] And which was the first thing that struck me was they had only got electricity only about five hours a day, two hours right before sunrise and then three hours starting at sunset. So electricity went off like at night or 93. The place is very quiet. You know, at night, very, very little vehicle traffic.

GALL: [00:08:54] Oh, yeah, yeah.

STIERMAN: [00:08:55] Oh. Also, the fact that the water was not on all the time. So there was a large pila store water and the water did come on. Craig would fill it up and you would hope and then Daddy come on again before he had to fill it up.

GALL: [00:09:17] Yes, yes, yes.

STIERMAN: [00:09:19] The water was just too hot to be able to drink. The water was an issue. Had to boil it first. This was before bottled water.

GALL: [00:09:29] Did you have those iodine, the tablets to put in?

STIERMAN: [00:09:33] So we had iodine tablets in case we couldn't get boiled water.

GALL: [00:09:35] Yeah. Yeah. And did you meet any co-workers, like Honduran teachers while you were there?

STIERMAN: [00:09:44] Not on that visit.

GALL: [00:09:45] Ok, and did so when then when you came back now as a volunteer, where were you assigned?

STIERMAN: [00:09:54] I was assigned at the National Teachers cut teachers college. Yes, we will give you a preference. OK, and I got there in the middle of the semester. So the first class, I thought was a five or six week class for elementary school teachers, try to teach them some science. Meanwhile, I was told this is what you're going to teach next semester. So I had time to find the equipment I wanted to use in the teaching and I had time to develop some physics laboratories

GALL: [00:10:34] And the Peace Corps help facilitate any of that for you?

STIERMAN: [00:10:37] That was all done with the school.

GALL: [00:10:39] With the school. And how did you feel about the resources that the school had?

STIERMAN: [00:10:44] They had all a whole cabinet full of stuff, mostly in Europe, and the instructions were in made. It's hard to understand, but they were back to figure out what most of it was. The thing was, a lot of the physics being taught at that time was mostly by memory. You would tell them formulas and they would revert to take them back. So I was trying to get more hands on stuff going. Hmm. And so this was this cost a little bit of an uproar because students were used to memorizing stuff and then regurgitating it instead of doing things, certainly experiments. And so some of the students complained to the director. And then we had a long discussion about what really science is a nice thing was three semesters later, one of the freshmen was assigned to teach optics. There was also French volunteers there. And the students complained that all he was giving them was memory. So they had to come over to like the experimental side of things. We did things like a contest to try to figure out how to protect an egg.

STIERMAN: [00:12:01] She could drop it off the third floor balcony. Oh, yes. Yes, right before we dropped the gavel, we would experimentally drop stuff from the third floor and see which room first. It seemed always had time. I had some tricks about how you can get a piece of paper to the same velocity as the book. You put a piece of paper on top of the book next year out of the way. So those type of experiences, these. We're flabbergasted that they could do these things. There was one time in class. This is how we break through this. I told them now, Plato said heavy things fall faster than light things, right? Right. There's Plato, right? Of course, he's a smart guy. Then there was the question. Galileo says heavy things and light things fall at the same rate. Is he right? Oh, yes, Galileo was right. So I wrote down that these people disagree with each other. They can't both be right. You tell us telling me my Galileo, you know, my Plato and somebody says I was doing experiments.

GALL: [00:13:15] So you really were able to change the perspective of learning?

STIERMAN: [00:13:20] I did. And several of those students went on to get their keys in physics.

GALL: [00:13:26] Awesome. That's really impressive.

STIERMAN: [00:13:29] Come on. Came out of at the university. And when I visited there on my Fulbright, they still had in the library the physics journals that I had gotten monthly when I was a Peace Corps volunteer, say they found them useful.

GALL: [00:13:49] I bet. Yeah, that is great. And did you. Was it how did the workday work for you in the daily and where you lived and things like that?

STIERMAN: [00:14:05] Well, I lived about. 20 or 30 minute bus ride from the from the school, so typical workday, I'd have to be out catching one of the mini busses. Seven-thirty, eight o'clock. Take the trip across town from Comayagua to Tegucigalpa. And then the school day usually ended mid-afternoon when I had an evening class that would usually be just one day a week. So I have evening classes were mostly the primary school teachers trying to get a parking lot of. A lot of the teachers did not have teaching certificates at that time. So the whole project was to try to get every teacher into Honduras to have one Honduran teaching certificate.

GALL: [00:14:57] Ok, so you did have a goal like that.

STIERMAN: [00:15:00] Was that was the big overall?

GALL: [00:15:01] Yeah, yeah. And were the teachers who would they selected based on merit or any particular qualifications?

STIERMAN: [00:15:09] Not sure how they were selected. I mean, I was I was given a roster and these are teachers. This is supposed to teach them.

GALL: [00:15:17] And what was your impression of them?

STIERMAN: [00:15:20] Some were very good. But all of this being used to memorizing stuff. Yeah, I went out to visit with teachers supervisor. He

says today you're going to see the anatomy of a fish. I says, all right. He says, that's what this guy always teaches when I come to observe him. And the students were very good. Copying down into their put knows exactly what the teacher told them. Right. But instead of going out, getting a fish and dropping it open to see what it looked like, they would draw all these, label all these parts. And they were all saying.

GALL: [00:16:02] So this is so there was no fish?

STIERMAN: [00:16:05] To break the rope. Trying to get people to observe and draw conclusions.

GALL: [00:16:11] So basically the scientific method?

STIERMAN: [00:16:13] Yeah. They would memorize the scientific method and not use it.

GALL: [00:16:17] Hmm. And did you have any colleagues in among your your other professors or teachers that you developed a relationship with?

STIERMAN: [00:16:29] Oh, we get invited to all the parties. Arturo Suarez taught math.

GALL: [00:16:36] Oh really.

STIERMAN: [00:16:38] You know him.

GALL: [00:16:39] Yeah, he was assistant director.

STIERMAN: [00:16:41] I know about that picture of somebody looks like. Oh, OK, Mark, maybe.

GALL: [00:16:56] Yeah.

STIERMAN: [00:16:57] I can't remember all the names now and then we'll spend 50 years, yeah, kind of jumbled up with the mathematics teacher and I got along real well. He was also trying to teach me about things. He had just

gotten his master's in mathematics from the University of Florida. OK, so he was trying to get people to think mathematically differently. The other physics teacher and I didn't get along real well, he just kind of standoffish. I think he felt threatened, but I was replacing somebody who had been teaching physics and who was in the states to get an advanced degree. So I was put into a slot that was already there. They didn't say I was substituting.

GALL: [00:17:46] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

STIERMAN: [00:17:47] But I got invited to the teachers' parties. I played with the faculty against the students in soccer. Uh huh. I coached the basketball team. We developed a photography club and I taught how to how to develop film and how to make photos. Oh cool. The students came with initiatives on this. Ask how we how we could do this. They found out I knew something about photography and there was a dark room in the school with equipment that was not being used or anything, and it was a camera. So I lent them thirty bucks for a camera and they paid me back with money they collected by taking each other's I.D. cards. You needed pictures for all kinds of stuff in Honduras and the students found out they could do it cheaper than having it done on the street. The students were they were pretty cool, but they took a lot of initiative. But most of them were college age, a little older, some were married. And they, they got into the real support through a competitive exam and they all had scholarships. And so that was a bit of it to them. This was a high motivation to just to do well and stay there.

GALL: [00:19:12] Great. Great. What about your you know, your vacation time, your work and living arrangements?

STIERMAN: [00:19:21] Ok, I got married about four months after I got in country with a Peace Corps volunteer in a different group, and she was in group fifteen. She was a registered nurse. And so we leave about the same time in the morning for our jobs. Sometimes we'd be on the same bus for a while and we get off about the same time. We didn't have a refrigerator for the first year, but we could get cold stuff from across the street or we watch something on the way home.

GALL: [00:19:55] Uh huh. Did you have an apartment or a house?

STIERMAN: [00:19:58] We had we have lots of. On the front of the block look like one solid wall with doors in it, and some had windows or painted different colors, there were different heights, but they're all there. There was no gaps in it. It was kind of like being in a trailer where you walk in one end and in the other end was the bathroom and the pillar and the small patio. OK, and so there is a living room, dining room, a kitchen in the bedroom. And there was a volunteer leaving the country just about the time we were setting up house. And he was a very large person and he had a very large bed. He sold it to us at a at a bargain. So we had a almost as big as the bedroom.

GALL: [00:20:53] Oh, and did you guys take any trips and vacations?

STIERMAN: [00:20:59] We went to Guatemala. We went to pick it up and we went to Panama a couple of times. A couple of Linda's friends came to visit us and we met him at the airport, got on the same plane, went to Panama, took a bus back from Panama, stopped at Puntarenas in Costa Rica. Yeah. So we got we take our vacations out of town.

GALL: [00:21:26] OK, all right. And. Did your relationships with Peace Corps staff or change over time?

STIERMAN: [00:21:40] When we got into country, the director did not approve of us getting married. Oh, but he, he was replaced within a month by another director that was hanging around. And Henry Reynolds, we wanted to talk to him. He looked at the director's guidebook.

GALL: [00:22:04] Mm hmm.

STIERMAN: [00:22:05] We should frown upon this. So he frowned and he was just good luck.

GALL: [00:22:14] That's great. That is great. So did you extend for third year then? Did I hear properly that you were there for three years?

STIERMAN: [00:22:22] Yeah. OK, what happened was I figured that I was just getting to learn things well. Mm hmm. And meanwhile, they were sending in a new physics teacher. And so I stayed around with him for a while.

GALL: [00:22:39] So you had a team teaching?

STIERMAN: [00:22:41] Well, we, we. He taught different classes, but I was able to tell him where everything was and how to do certain things.

GALL: [00:22:47] Oh, good. Was that the fellow that had gone away to study?

STIERMAN: [00:22:53] He was still studying.

GALL: [00:22:54] Ok, so if you look back on your tour of service, who knew there'd be someone mowing the lawn today? What do you think were your main accomplishments?

STIERMAN: [00:23:05] Well. I think I did help great reporting, at least in physics, and we threw a science fair one year. Mm hmm. I. There weren't any prizes, but I gave the students an assignment to do a project and then and then to discuss or at least do an exposition of what they learned. Mm hmm. And there were some very good ones. One person I gave a brochure of, this is. What caught yours look like a failure, this nutrient in that nutrient, and she went out and found corners and looked just like the pictures.

GALL: [00:23:47] Oh, cool.

STIERMAN: [00:23:48] And so this is what that was. That's that kind of thing was very useful. Well, the students thought this is such a good idea. They organized the science fair for Tegucigalpa. And so they went out and got prizes for this for the best presentations, did all the judges. Awesome. And then schools outside Tegucigalpa said, wait a minute, why don't we have this for us, too? So for a few years there, they had regional science fairs. And this is something I started with this we support. And then these being all teachers, they went out and did their way.

GALL: [00:24:28] Yeah. Yeah. And do you have any regrets or feelings of things you didn't accomplish?

STIERMAN: [00:24:38] I do I usually don't set a lot of goals. I mean, I try to do the best I can. If I had it back when I ran track, then I would try to break a certain time. But when you're trying to teach. How do you I mean, it's hard to we didn't have any test. Students took, you know, as I did. I don't think I had any real regrets of things I didn't accomplish. I didn't have any unreasonable expectations.

GALL: [00:25:14] And so how did your Peace Corps experience influence the future?

STIERMAN: [00:25:20] Well, I probably wouldn't have gotten into Stanford if I hadn't been in the Peace Corps. There was a return volunteer there to put an ad in the Peace Corps newsletter looking for graduate students. And this was in the geophysics department at Stanford. And I had just read a report in TIME magazine about earthquake detection. And Linda, my wife had gone to Peru to help pick up after the 1970 earthquake in Peru. And she came back with some interesting stories. I thought it would be a very good idea to learn how to predict quakes. So when I applied to Stanford, a couple of my references at Brockport told me that Stanford is a good place if you get a chance to go there. I applied some other places too. A couple offered me assistantships, and Stanford didn't accept any. So we counted our pennies and Linda was going to get a job. She already had talked to Stanford Hospital and they said they take her. So she was going to work and support me in school. After I got there, they gave me a job of changing the diaper on the seismograph, something I had done back at Morris College and a very good job at it. I went out in a couple of projects and one of them, they were building a concrete block house to house some instruments next to the San Andreas Fault. And I was the only one there who knew how to build a concrete block Houses doesn't have on the farm. And so the guy who took me under his wing preferred hard work to a lazy brilliance. And so I worked with little things that took a lot of work. And yeah, he had a good time there and learned a lot. So but I wouldn't have gotten in if I had been in the Peace Corps. I don't think I would.

GALL: [00:27:21] And so we're almost to the top of it. And one of the questions this is it's how do you assess your service in light of Peace Corps' three goals? And three goals listed here are, A, provide technical assistance where requested, B, to promote better understanding of Americans, and C, to promote better understanding of other people by Americans. So we'll just go back to the top of the list in terms of the goal of providing technical assistance.

STIERMAN: [00:27:55] We're required in an academic setting. It is to teach the class well or you don't. And so I think I did well in that, especially since when I go back for later visits, I am warmly greeted by my former students.

GALL: [00:28:12] Isn't that great? And to provide better understanding of Americans?

STIERMAN: [00:28:20] I know we did have a lot of discussions on cultural differences that time, there was there was protests against the Vietnam War and the students would take me to the protest, but we'd stand in the back room because they said if they see a green go up in front, somebody come up and hit you. And then all.

GALL: [00:28:42] Because you were a gringo?

STIERMAN: [00:28:43] Yeah, yeah. And I'm a six foot two, so I stood up above everybody else. We also played a group of Americans played in the National Basketball League in Honduras. And I was one of the better Spanish speakers. So I got elected to be the representatives and went to all the meetings of the league teams. And that that's where I learned a lot of the cultural differences, for example, that in Tegucigalpa there were groups of called Arabased and they were mostly Palestinians. There were also a group of Jews. And they had businesses that competed. And one of the teams was mostly Autobus and the other one was mostly the Jews. And I hadn't realized that until I went to those meetings that there were those kinds of social or cultural differences. Yeah. Later I learned a lot more about the Lebanese and Palestinian influence. And in Honduras, I went to a geographers meeting about 20

years later and someone was discussing how the culture of the Palestinians was to help other people out. If you're successful, you give loans. So I hadn't realized that that's the way it was working there.

GALL: [00:30:10] In the north, in the north coast. They called the Lebanese and Palestinians turkos. And the Latinos would put a little tone in their voice when they talked about the turkos. But that was so, I mean.

STIERMAN: [00:30:24] They also used that term.

GALL: [00:30:25] Yeah. Yeah. And so in terms of promoting better understanding of other people by Americans?

STIERMAN: [00:30:33] I think I learned an awful lot about Latin America. I knew, for example, during the Salvadorian conflict that we weren't getting the straight scoop from Washington. Ronald Reagan was claiming that there were arms being smuggled overland from Nicaragua to El Salvador. Well, if I went out on a ride in the couple of months later, they would ask everybody, see, a big gringo. I was tall, skinny guy, right? Them, you know, people out there see things you can't sneak it by. And if there would have been arms being smuggled, there would have been evidence, people would have seen it there. We've been witnesses. So I understood a little bit about that way at that time that we're just not getting the straight scoop flying.

GALL: [00:31:32] And so do you, but do you think that there was some link into how the Hondurans felt about Americans?

STIERMAN: [00:31:38] I really don't like really kind assess that, OK? All right. I got invited to there. We got invited to their parties. I got invited to join a local softball team with our Arturo Suarez, got us into their thinking, OK, if you guys want to send some ringers there, as we were, we were pretty good hitters.

GALL: [00:32:01] The and he understood I thought he was Peace Corps staff at that point.

STIERMAN: [00:32:05] Peace Corps staff. Yeah.

GALL: [00:32:06] Yeah. So it's interesting for me to hear the influence of sports participation.

STIERMAN: [00:32:13] Yeah. I think I would, I would, I would coach the basketball team at the end of the year, but then we went out to visit another school. I'd have to be referee. And so I would have to tell those students to give you five start and after five minutes you come in and that I have to go out and be referee. They were friendly game.

GALL: [00:32:38] Yeah, well. And they trusted you to be the referee.

STIERMAN: [00:32:41] I was the only one who knew the rules out. Well.

GALL: [00:32:44] Oh, that's important. So have you continued any involvement with your country of service or contact with people from that country?

STIERMAN: [00:32:52] I made about seven or eight trips to Honduras between 1993 and 2002. One of my graduate students did a thesis based on working work he did in Honduras. He did a land use study in order to help protect water quality for one of Tegucigalpa major reservoirs. And this became important because it prevented the dumping of a lot of sewage into the basin. He was Panamanian, he spoke Spanish and he went back to Panama and was teaching and one of their technical schools now. Oh, great. So I've been in touch with him from time to time where Hondurans geologists tend to lead off. And he did a thesis there and he went back to Honduras, has a master's degree from Toledo, and he's teaching at a couple of different schools there, Unitech. And then when I went on a Fulbright to Honduras, I spent a semester at the Universidad Pedagógica. I taught geographic information systems. And at that time, Mario was working for COPECO, which is the Honduran equivalent of FEMA. And I investigated a half dozen geological hazards. And a couple of them I wrote up these reports for the, um, delivered them to the Geological Society of America at meetings. So it was very interesting to go back after so many years and now with some geological experience to be able to read what's going on. Yeah, but I was a Peace Corps

volunteer. I couldn't see all the stuff I can see now when I read geology. And I think it was useful.

GALL: [00:34:50] Great, great. So this is just this big open bucket question about what has been the effect of your Peace Corps service on your life?

STIERMAN: [00:34:59] How. It really changed my life. I wouldn't have gotten into grad school, I got into. Hmm. My wife and I got really close. We had our rough spots now and then. But usually she's also a very generous person. And you can tell when you watch her work that she learned enough Spanish that when she was in Toledo, she would have Spanish speaking clients. Mm hmm. And when she was on home care. Yes. Yes. So I think it was I think it was it really helped make me what I am.

GALL: [00:35:42] Great. Great. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

STIERMAN: [00:35:48] I've met Peace Corps volunteers on some of these trips, and I think. They're having a lot harder time doing they're doing their job, they're living allowance is probably not enough. All right. I know the prices are going up and so on, and they seem to have a little bit Peace Corps out of Honduras now because it's got too dangerous. So I think the Peace Corps, we were we were there at the golden era. And it was a time when relationships were quite close, I think, in the 1980s with the U.S. involvement in Central America. Americans really aren't well liked in a lot of places there anymore. I found out that some of the contacts I had as a Fulbright. But by then, I had become a little better knowing my way around.

GALL: [00:36:51] Great. Great. Well, this has been very, very good. You you're obviously very comfortable with speaking and we're ahead of time. So is there any other thing that you'd like to say?

STIERMAN: [00:37:07] I really think that service to others is a good way to develop your own character skills. You still try to get involved with the university, it's becoming formal. We now have a service learning projects, right? Yeah, some of the ones I get involved with, I'm a I'm a gardener, so I give advice on gardening and so on.

GALL: [00:37:39] So it you're what you're interested in your strengths?

STIERMAN: [00:37:42] Yeah. Also, I've gotten involved with a number of environmental issues, trying to stop a deep injection well for liquid waste in Michigan, looking at the loss of well water when they pumped it out of a quarry in Michigan. I've been having lunch some more landfills and you can believe that that's awesome of working with engineers to solve human problems.

GALL: [00:38:10] Great. I like that. Working with engineers to solve human problems. It sounds like a motto.

STIERMAN: [00:38:16] Well, the model is the one that John Hall, the engineer, says, tell me what the bad news is and I'll fix it. Great. Great. I'm the one that finds the bad news is a geologist who investigates what the ground is, what's going on underground, and then you'll fix it and usually does. A lot of my former students work for him. So I see my students out there in the environmental field. Some are partners in the companies.

GALL: [00:38:44] Yeah, great. So you've helped contribute to a new generation of leaders?

STIERMAN: [00:38:50] Well, the new generation of problem solvers.

GALL: [00:38:53] Problem solvers. Good. OK, I think we can finish up. So this is Gail Gall finishing the interview with Don Stierman on September 11th, 2019, in Lesterville, Missouri. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]