

Alan Dockterman Oral History Interview
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Biographical Note

Alan Dockterman served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from 1968 to 1970 in cooperative and legal aid programs.

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Oral History Interview

with

Alan Dockterman

August 13, 2018
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:04] This is Evelyn Ganzglass. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968, and today is August 13, 2018. I'm interviewing Alan Dockterman, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from 1968 to 1970. And for one year, he worked on a cooperative program. In the second year, he was in a legal aid program. Let me start the interview by asking you, Alan, why did you join the Peace Corps?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:00:40] Well, there are a number of reasons. I was 25 years old. I was graduating from law school at the time. And if you were not 26, you could get drafted. So certainly the draft and the Vietnam War, which I strongly opposed at that time, were factors. Many of my friends who were graduating law school with me at the same time, they ended up teaching school in Chicago, Illinois. And there are other methods that you could avoid the draft and service in Vietnam if you were wise enough to figure them out. I grew up in a small town in

Illinois on the Mississippi River, and I hadn't had much travel experience. And I was interested in travel. And I felt some alienated from the main culture, the United States. I thought it'd be exciting to learn a new language. I only spoke English at that time. So these were some of my reasons at the time when I found out about Brazil. Fascinating place, exciting place, interesting place as I read about it. And that certainly was a factor. When I got assigned to go to that country, maybe also some sense of, well, if I'm not going to go to Vietnam, I ought to do something to serve the country. There may have been some of that guilt thinking. So there is a majority of all these were factors at the time.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:45] I'm from the same vintage, so I totally can relate to all of those motivations. Did you apply to go to Brazil or were you just assigned to Brazil?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:02:57] No, I think I was just assigned. My understanding was the cooperative program wanted lawyers. It was agricultural cooperatives, but they were pressed because lawyers were doctors, so to speak. And, you know, it was a pretty poor fit because lawyers are not necessarily good people in agricultural projects. But they ended up, the program ended up with nine people who had graduated law school, which gave me a number of people I had a whole lot in common with. The group of bankers, 31 members, who began training in the program.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:43] Nine out of 31 were lawyers. That's that's quite a few. So let's just go back to some of the motivation. What did your family think about all of this, about your joining the Peace Corps?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:04:00] Well, at that point, I was a. My parents were no longer alive. I live with my aunt and uncle. My uncle thought it was a crazy idea, try to talk me into it. And I think he even had me talk to lawyers in the small town of Illinois that I grew up in, and they were probably primed to talk me out of it.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:29] Time to earn a living, right?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:04:32] And they suggest that there was employment options.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:37] And your peers, what did they think about all of this?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:04:42] Well, if the ones you mean, the ones who were in law school with.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:47] Law school or friends from high school or others?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:04:50] Well, it was a real mixture of people who were my peers. Those were in law school somewhere and already were in officer programs, JAG programs, and a number of them were figuring out the teaching would be a good way. I'm not exactly sure. I think if you were married and had children, that was a basis for deferment. I don't believe that just marriage was sufficient. But a lot of people were trying to.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:27] Well, marriage was sufficient in 1964 when I got married. I didn't get married because of the draft, but it was sufficient then. I don't know what it was in 1968.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:05:41] Yeah, the summer of 1967. Yeah, I don't recall that well. The key was to get to 26 years of age and then you would not get drafted. Some are already in the military I think. In '64, '65, I think people more less aware whether there were 20 or 30,000 troops there at that point. But by 1967, the summer, there were, I don't think there was much illusions as to some of the downsides of our engagement in Vietnam and the justifications in the opposition to it. So at that point, there is a pretty savvy group of people, especially those who I knew in law school in Champaign, Illinois.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:49] So you went to University of Illinois in Champaign. Is that?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:06:53] That's correct.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:54] And law school as well?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:06:55] As well, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:58] Ok, so you applied for the Peace Corps. How long did it take for you to be accepted? Do you know, do you remember?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:07:04] No, I think.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:10] Doesn't actually matter. That's not an important question. You don't have to research it.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:07:26] Well actually, I applied, I believe, in the summer of 1967, and I think I was received the letter, the offer, in probably in August or September. But they said they weren't exactly sure when I report. I think I was immediately notified that the position would be in the co-op program in Brazil in the northeast.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:03] And then when did you actually show up for training?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:08:07] Actually, I got the letter on July 6th, 1967, from Jack Vaughn. And it gave him great pleasure to invite me to train in the program named below. And that was Brazil. With the assignment to organize and develop cooperatives, it would be a 27 month program.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:32] So you got the letter in July and the training started soon thereafter.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:08:40] Yes. Well, actually, the training didn't start until October. So I think I started in the late, late October of 1967.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:55] And where was your training?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:08:57] It was the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:00] Talk a little bit about what training was like.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:09:04] Um, well, we were at a hotel in downtown Milwaukee and the Shrader, Schroeder, Shrader, I think the name of it was it. And so we all stayed at the hotel and the training began. There was 40 of us, and of which 33 were in the cooperative program. And there was two who were in urban planning. Uh, I think they had at least one who had graduated from architecture school, who grew up within blocks of your house, Evelyn.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:51] Oh, really?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:09:54] And went to Wilson High School. And then there was, I think, there were eight women of the 40 and there were a couple secretaries and there were three or four in education and in health programs I think. So that was the group of 40. We had, as you can imagine, we had tremendous differences in terms of our language skills. Some of the people were fluent Spanish and Portuguese and Spanish are pretty similar. Probably more than either languages with Italian. So that for them, especially those who were fluent Spanish, it was just a matter of trying to stop Spanish words from coming out and using the Portuguese words that were often very similar. So they probably spoke Portuguese better on the second day than many of us did three months later. And then there were some that had just strong language skills.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:22] Were you one of those?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:11:23] No, I was not unfortunately. I was in one of the weaker groups. So we were three or four of us, we started at 7:50 in the morning and went till 11 learning Portuguese. The focus was almost entirely verbal, speaking it, so that none of us particularly learned how to write it. And some never you know, if we did enough reading over the months, years there, we would write it but would none of us become, I think, very good writers without special instruction. So the whole focus was the oral. We all had. Our teachers were all Brazilian nationals, some of whom spoke good English, some of them who spoke weak English. But the classes would be entirely in Portuguese. We had, I think we had a good book that we were working off of. And

then at 11:30 we break, I guess, for lunch, and then in the afternoon we get two more hours of language training. And we would also get training and community development, which was not useful at all, in my view. We got some training about the history of Brazil and about the culture, and they brought in outside speakers, and that was very interesting. University of Wisconsin had a program. They had some language labs, which we used a little bit. I don't think very much, though. But they had a Portuguese speaking program there. And I think that we, uh. The university must have been a few blocks away. The downtown campus of the university, maybe the only extension from the University of Wisconsin, from the hotels, so we'd walk there, the two or three blocks. And then we would be there all day. Maybe we'd walk back for lunch to the hotel. I know we ate at the hotel and many of us gained a lot of weight since it was three meals and not much physical activity. I know I did.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:14:08] We were taught something about the cooperatives, but not a whole lot. And in terms of learning about our culture, or what they did, it was pretty superficial. It was an eight week program. And then at night, we would be free at night, and after dinner, we would go out, sometimes there were things at night. There were a number of bars in that neighborhood and places to go. There was a priest named Groppi at the time who was involved in civil rights marches, Father Groppi. We would join those marches, civil rights marches, at night. And my memory was that we were all going to end up in northeastern Brazil in January, which was about seven degrees from the equator. It was going to be awfully, awfully hot, and they tried to simulate conditions, putting us in Milwaukee in December and January.

GANZGLASS: Which is really cold.

DOCKTERMAN: Yeah, which of course, we all froze there. But we were involved. The staff and the volunteers were very liberal group. And of course, in addition to the Vietnam War, there were some civil rights activities.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:50] Did you have a community service component of your training?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:15:54] I think it was very little. I don't think there we really, really got that much. We learned a lot about Brazil and about the Northeast, and it's such a vast country with such an extensive difference between the north and the south.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:17] So overall, do you think that training prepared you for the job you were going to be doing?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:16:27] Well, the language, I think. I think the language instruction was very strong and, you know, it depends a lot on the level of the students. What I haven't got around to yet is talking about. There was eight weeks in Milwaukee. And then there's six weeks in Brazil. So obviously there was more hands-on training when we got to Brazil. I could talk a little bit, when I finish talking about Milwaukee.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:02] Oh, yeah, please do. I'm sorry.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:17:10] So that was some people got cut during that training. Of the lawyers, one of us got cut. No one knew why people got cut, there was speculation. I suppose, that the security check may be a reason why some of them did. I remember one of the secretaries got cut and she'd never been on a plane before except to Milwaukee. And people were speculating that maybe they thought she wouldn't be able to adapt to life in Brazil. Anyway, there were some of us that got cut, some of us quit of the group of 40. We weren't, the co-operative group wasn't separated from the secretaries, from the health or from the urban planning group at all. As far as I know, they may have got some specialized training, but I doubt it was very much. So the 40 of us were together for 10, 12 hours a day, whatever it was.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:34] Ok, that yeah, so that's the most Milwaukee part of it. Talk a little bit about the in-country training you got.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:18:44] Well, we flew down there and we were put in, um, one of the places we went was a small town, a couple, an hour and a half by

bus from Recife. Recife is the capital at the time. Recife was about a million people, and I believe it was the third largest city in Brazil.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:20] So Recife was the capital of the northeast?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:19:23] It was the capital of the northeast. Well, it was the capital of the state of Pernambuco, and the program was in was a Pernambuco. And Pernambuco was one of the states in the northeast. And there was five or six states in the northeast. Maybe 30 million people at the time. And the country was 90 million, something like that at the time. It's course much larger now. And the northeast was the poorest part of the country, the most backward. That was the sugar cane area primarily. It was also a hotbed of communist activity at the time. And in the mid '60s, Brazil was going through a lot of upheaval. And in '63, '64, eventually the military took over and a lot of people were sent into exile and it was an militaire, became a military dictatorship. And then a whole lot of money from the United States poured into Brazil to try to keep the country safe from communism, and most of that ended up in the northeast. All right, so the northeast portion, Pernambuco, the big city, was the capital state Pernambuco and sort of the main city in the northeast.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:21:29] So in this little town, we got a lot of language training and we would stay with different families. And I ended up with a family of 10 people in a two-room house. I had a hammock. It was very difficult. At this stage, I think my Portuguese maybe was two or two and a quarter or something like that, which isn't very good, on a FSI scale. Are you familiar with that?

GANZGLASS: [00:22:11] If I vaguely remember five?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:22:13] Five is the best. Yeah. Two, two and a quarter was you know, it was something, but it really required people who were somewhat educated and it would help if they had teeth to be able to communicate with them. I had almost no ability to communicate at all with the family. Meantime, we were reading together and we were in, at one point we were in a large dorm that we were all staying in and

we all had our cots and we'd have a mosquito netting and we'd wake up the next day and some of us would be completely covered with bites and other people no bites at all. It didn't seem fair. But we were eating the food and we were getting sick. A lot of the people had a lot of gastrointestinal problems and diarrhea and stuff.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:21] And was that from the food or the water?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:23:24] No, I think it was from the food. I think we were pretty careful about the water. But all the water was, we were supposed to, we had the filters, but we also boiled the water. But maybe some people, they wash from the water as well. But we try to be careful. But everybody was, just a lot of people were in enough pain from all this. Some people left after that. So the bus would come to pick you up and we'd visit, would go to four or five other volunteers and then they wouldn't be there because they decided to go home during this period. And there were some community development classes, I just don't have much memory of them. I just remember that in my notes, they weren't very effective. So at the some point in that period, I do remember that the key was to get, a lot of us did, a lot of us got cut. And remember, I was told, I got this note saying, please report to such and such room just before the trip in in Milwaukee. So I went to the room, nervous. We're all nervous, you know, get special note, please report. And the room was really hot, you know, and the window was closed. I walk over to the window and they immediately rush to get me. And I said, I just went to open the window. I don't want to jump it. Because it's so hot in here. No, sorry. But that was the point where some people were told that they would not go on.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:25:33] So a number dropped out of the training and there were 40 and 33 in the cooperatives we end up with. We're 31 in the cooperatives, we end up with like 20. So one left to get married, one got cut and one left as soon as he turned 26. And I was the first, I believe I was the oldest person of all 40 and I was 25, you know, so all of us for about the sound like the Peace Corps these days, we were all between the ages of 21 and 25. The entire group as far as I know. I think the Peace Corps was like that then. Anyway, I'm

jumping around. So we had a lot more training, a lot more language. And we visited some places that were some of the sites.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:51] What did you think about all of that?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:27:00] Well, I was in a lot of culture shock. I had, again, except for one trip to Jamaica during a summer break, and I think some small trips to Mexico for vacation, I really hadn't been out of the country. And it was, um. Well, I guess I'd also went to Europe one summer. But, uh, you know, I was really, I was worried about the language and how I was progressing. And I was real concerned about how I could adjust. And, you know, why am I here? I should be practicing law somewhere in the United States. But it was sort of exciting and different. You know, here's a completely different culture. And even though I was weak, maybe, seventy fifth percentile language.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:28:11] But yeah, the food was different and it wasn't cold like, you know, in Illinois or Wisconsin. And, you know, I was reading a lot and it's such a fascinating country, that was part of it as well. It was hard for me to imagine two years staying in Brazil. So I think we're now at the point where they put us in sites, unless, you have more questions about training?

GANZGLASS: No, go ahead.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:28:59] So there are the cooperative programs, which is called Fecompipe. It's the, uh. It's F-E-C-O-M-P-I-P-E.

GANZGLASS: F-E-N-

DOCKTERMAN: [00:29:22] F-E-C-O-M-P-I-P-E. Better, I guess a better way to phrase it would be the Federation of Mixed Cooperatives in the State of Pernambuco. There were, I think, 10 to 15 sites in the state of Pernambuco and the state was, I don't know, maybe 200 miles long and 40 miles wide, something like that. But we were in different sites

around the state and everything revolved around Recife, the headquarters was there, training was there. We had meetings there. And we were been put in different cities. I was put in Vicencia, V-I-C-E-N-C-I-A, a town of 3,000 people. In a county of 23,000 people, I guess. So that was, if you could call it a county.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:31:19] I'm not sure why I was put there. Some of the people were put in towns of 20 to 50 thousand. And in some of those towns there were volunteers already, they're not in the cooperative program, but in health programs, education. There were already volunteers there. And I think I was the first American that ended up there. And it was really just one main street, a couple of restaurants, if you want to use that, the term. And some sites had two volunteers.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:13] So you were the only one.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:32:15] I was the only one and in terms of being able to cope with it, because my Portuguese are so bad, I immediately found this kid, 17 years old, and I said, teach me Portuguese. You know, I got money to pay you 20 cents an hour or what it was, to help teach me Portuguese. But it was, you know, it was not a very interesting place and it was hard to find people to communicate with at any level.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:58] Well, where did you live? How did you find a place to live?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:33:10] The head of the program, a gentleman named John Burns, who had been in Brazil awhile, he was a priest at the time. He drove me to the town where I had my footlocker of over 100 books. We all got these foot lockers and my clothing and stuff, my suitcase.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:52] You said he was head of the program. He was head of the co-op program or Peace Corps?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:33:56] He was head of Peace Corps in Pernambuco. There was another guy named Chuck Bosley who was head of the Peace Corps in the Northeast.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:21] So, John?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:34:25] John had the Pernambuco program, which is the co-ops and some of the small health programs and teaching programs and stuff. I don't know how many people.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:40] And he's the one who got you the place to live?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:34:42] Yeah, so he's the one. You know, I don't know, someone probably went there, said where can someone live. So the answer was there was one or two restaurants. It was in the back of the restaurant. So in the back of the restaurant was a room, maybe seven feet by three feet, four feet, something like that, had room for a bed. It was 30 cents a night. I think it was six feet by 10 feet, I wrote down. So six feet by 10 feet, and I ate there. And I think dinner was 75 cents a night. So that's where I stayed.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:46] Did you have a toilet? How did you wash?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:35:53] Well, they had running water, and I personally had nothing except the room. I would go out and there was running water. I do not remember if there was an outhouse or not, or there was a bath, I think was probably not outside. I don't remember.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:36:15] So he had, this guy, he was Olympio and he owned it. And people would come in there to eat. So I would have breakfast and dinner there, or the main meal was lunch, actually. So I think I had dinner and breakfast there, and he had two cooks that I became very close to, who were working for him. And then they would make the meals. So that was the living situation. The co-op was, you know, down the street. I'm sure of all the volunteers, none of them lived as Spartan as I did, and in the moment, in the co-op group. The 33 became 21 and before they came to Pernambuco, they transferred three lawyers to Sao Paulo. And a fourth eventually transferred there because there was a legal aid program down there. And I was not considered to be one of them because I had a degree in accounting

and they thought they wanted someone who knew something about accounting. And so they wouldn't let me go.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:51] So talk a little bit about the co-op program.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:37:59] The co-op had 260 members in Vicencia. Of which like 170 were active or so, and 40 go to the meetings.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:28] And what kind of co-ops were they, sugarcane or?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:38:31] Yeah, there was one in each in these 15 cities, although some were just starting up. This I think had been going on for a few years, I believe, but it never had a volunteer there. And they sold products, seed, food that you might buy and stuff. And whatever profit they would distribute to the to the co-op members.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:39:19] Of the 270 members, maybe 100 or 100 and a quarter, they had some land, hectares, which they would be they might have some corn or beans or sugarcane. And most of them worked. If they didn't have that, they would work on the major plantations, which is primarily sugar cane. That whole area is a huge sugar cane area called the Zona da Matcha. And a lot of the members, who didn't have their own land to produce stuff, worked on the plantations, and a lot of them would buy stuff at the at the store owned by the plantations and the whole script program where they go into debt to the company store, then they ended up having to buy stuff from the program there. I never learned a whole lot about that, and part of it was my weakness in Portuguese, I think made me pretty, pretty limited. The leader of cooperatives, a pretty dynamic guy, couple of years younger, and I got to know him a little bit, but I mean, no one spoke word of English.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:09] And what were you supposed to do in this co-op?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:41:12] Well, I was supposed to, I did a number of things. In the beginning, I would just go there and try to talk. And this was going on, used a little bit of Portuguese. One of the things you're trying to do is

get new members. And I was educated in Milwaukee about the seven principles of cooperatives. And we got some training about that, which is pretty rudimentary. But, you know, I learned something about the cooperative movement. And so I would we would walk out to the rural areas, you know, walk a mile or two and sometimes we would use the truck to some of the places and I would make a speech. And that was pretty entertaining for everybody to hear the mata colonel speaking in Portuguese. And then I would. And I guess as I was doing this and I had a good dictionary. I was expanding my vocabulary and I was getting lessons from this student. I was sort of telling him what I do.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:42:34] So you know, I would make my speech and there might be five or 10 or 20 people that would gather at one of the member's homes. You know, I'd bring out the matchsticks and break one easily. But when I tried to break three of them, I couldn't do it, you know, proving that one person it's easy to overwhelm him. But if you have a number together, union makes force, you know. And so these were sort of successful.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:19] They felt sorry for you so they joined, is that it?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:43:23] Yeah. They joined. But so I was doing that. There was an accountant who came once a week and I tried to learn some accounting and talk about accounting with her. And again, it was all in Portuguese, but now I'm dealing with someone with some education, and I was developing the vocabulary and stuff and I was doing some talks, doing some of that work that was pretty rudimentary.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:44:04] So that's what at another point we're doing what we call the eleventaments. E-L-E-V-E-N-T-A-M-E-N-T-I-L-S which are surveys. And everybody, all the volunteers were doing that. And their purpose was to, again, there was a written question which I read, and I could usually understand their answer. And of course, I was developing a vocabulary to some extent. The purpose of these was to try to figure out the needs of the people that were working and to

provide that as the basis for which they would be able to access funds for the co-op program. I don't know how successful that is or how exactly how it was used.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:45:17] But I taught English at the class, at a classroom, at the school, and I had a number, I think I had like 40 students and had some classes. And that was sort of interesting, I mean. I think the last thing these people needed was to learn English, but it was a way to have an in in the community and get to know people. And I would give exams and, you know, we could talk a little bit and I got to know the students. And, of course, that was good. Yeah, I could talk Portuguese so that was good in that respect, too. So I was involved in that. There was no effort at all to get us involved in any planting or anything, which was. And there really wasn't anyone to learn from. And I had no background in farming at all.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:39] So did you make friends in the community?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:46:41] I did. I did. The two cooks who were in the restaurant I really grew to like them a lot. They became friends and neither could read or write. Eighty percent of the people in this area, Nazaré da Mata, can't read or write. So one of them was teaching English to. The student that I found was the nephew of the person who ran the restaurant. And he was very sharp. And he was three or four years younger than me, maybe more than that. Maybe he was 17 or 18 or something, and I was 25. But I got you know, I got to know him. And he was he was a good teacher, you know. And he eventually ended up in Recife. He went to college and stuff like that. And so he was a good friend. From the cooperative itself, the head of a cooperative who was very sharp and particularly I became friendly with him and a couple of the leaders of the cooperative, I became friendly with them. And just walking, I saw, I became you know, I think these are people who were friends and stuff and, you know, at some at some level.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:21] Were you lonely, though, or not?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:48:22] Sure. I mean, it's quite lonely. And it was just my days I wrote about what my days were like. You know, I'd wake up, usually read the Portuguese paper. I think he was getting the paper, so I'd read the Recife paper, you know. And I did a lot of reading. Most people who have a good ear for language, they talk a lot and they pick it up listening to it. I think I pick up languages better through reading it. So and then I converted. So that gave me a pretty large vocabulary. I don't know. After two years, I ended up with three and a half. It was pretty good. And one of the reasons is going to the big city, which we can talk about later, and spending time and dating. You know, that's a great way to learn Portuguese. And of course, I was dealing with the legal aid program, much more sophisticated people. In the meantime I was reading a lot. So I was three and a half.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:37] That's good. So your daily routine was, you went?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:49:42] Well, I would say I would get up and have breakfast, which was eggs and the manea flour on rice, maybe some beans, and juice or a piece of fruit. I'd have that, I'd read the paper, then I'd sort of go for a walk and talk to people, you know, and then I'd wander into the into the co-operative and talk to people there and spend time. Maybe I'd be teaching the English class. And it was 2:00 and I'm starting to get tired. And I'd come back and have the main meal, which is rice and beans again, manea flour and maybe some little meat with it or something like fish or something like that. Very little. And that would be the meal every single day of my existence there. And then it was somewhat monotonous. And that was everybody's fault. And that was that was meals.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:50:58] And I might go back to the cooperative or I might wander around community talking to people and then sometimes there'd be activities at someone's house or something. But that was my day. And every week or two we go into Recife. And there there'd be other volunteers there and there'd be meetings. It was really hard to figure. Of course, I talked to other volunteers and sometimes I would visit them. There were some that were, there was one who was maybe an

hour away, which is really only maybe 20 miles away. And he was there. And there was a volunteer before him, it was a big city and there was restaurants. And I think he by then he had a house, so they had maid who did cooking and stuff. So I would spend time in visiting some of the other volunteers.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:07] And you went out by truck?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:52:10] No, we went by bus. And the bus that went, there was two a day. But it would stop in two or three other cities. And one of the volunteers lived in way outside of Recife, and he was fluent in Spanish. So near the end of my eight months there, I would visit him and learn Spanish because I was learning Spanish as well. And so that was sort of my life.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:52:46] We would have meetings and it was hard to figure out what was going on with the co-op because of the head of the federation was very, everything was in Portuguese pretty much. And it's hard to follow what's going on. But he really wouldn't tell us much about what was happening.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:53:10] And we knew the political situation in Brazil was really precarious because of the things that were going on and the people who were in jail and the students and stuff, but we couldn't get much information about that. But that was sort of, none of the volunteers, as far as I could tell, were doing much different what I just told you in the first three or four months. They were relating more to the community because there were in larger communities and in a lot of these towns there was another volunteer or there was another volunteer, you know. In one town I went to there were two volunteers, two women that were involved in health education projects, who would be leaving soon. So they were fluent, their Portuguese was strong and stuff. And they had.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:12] And they had each other.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:54:14] They had each other. And they had my friend. And I think some went much further out and they had horses and there's some with rural, not lawyers, but there was this other group that had, some with more agricultural backgrounds. Not really a lot. But, you know, they had government that got involved in that to some extent. I think that was a real flaw. I think if we're going to be there, I think we ought to learn something about their culture. I think we should be involved in some of the planning stuff, planting, doing that stuff. And in fact, those who stayed for the second year and at the end, I think only 11 of the 31 made it for two years. The others. I ended up at another legal aid program. Some went home, some went on other programs, etc. But the 11 or so who stayed, they got involved in agricultural projects, and they had a much more meaningful experience. And they did a terrific job of setting things up for the next group. And the group that replaced us really was in a much better situation.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:55] Because they were involved in agriculture?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:55:58] Yeah, and because they could. One of the group that came after us, which was and I'll talk a little bit about them, and try to talk one of them into who lives in Arlington is a good friend who maybe you'll end up talking to. But they, you know, they had the benefit, sometimes they try to have overlap and they had a much more meaningful experience and they learned a lot more and they really hit the ground running, so to speak. They also get together all the time and have programs and stuff now, 50 years later. And so that's sort of the experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:53] So how did you end up leaving? You said you left after eight months, is that it?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:56:59] Yeah. From the first month or two, I mean, I just understood that, you know, I wasn't going to make it two years. I understood that.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:09] And because of the loneliness?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:57:13] Well, there's the loneliness, the failure, I'm not accomplishing much. The fact that, well, this town was so small. There wasn't a whole lot to do in it. I thought maybe if I went to Recife and got involved in the accounting program there and lived in Recife, which was a town of a million people, an exciting place, and with a lot of foreigners, you know, that that might work out. And I looked into the possibility of transferring there. And the head of the program seemed like, you know, here's a guy with a degree in accounting. Of course, I have no practice accounting, went straight to law school. And the last thing I wanted to do was be an accountant in my life. I wanted to be a lawyer.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:58:08] I thought we might be able to do something, but he wasn't interested. And in fact, they weren't interested in developing a marketing program either. Now, that might have been really interesting for the co-ops, but he vetoed that. None of us ever figured out why. So the information, I mean, I think director of the program, John, I think he tried to get information from the leadership in the cooperatives. I don't think they were getting it, which means they couldn't provide it to the volunteers. That may have changed to some extent in the program that followed.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:53] Ok. So you requested to change or?

DOCKTERMAN: [00:58:56] Oh, sure. Well, I requested. I said, hey, I'd like to go there, too. And they brought someone from Brazil. They wanted to show what was going on. And they had gone to Vicencia, one of the leaders in Rio with the headquarters program. And he said to them, you know, this is one of our most successful volunteers who's doing this, this, this. And I said, you know, I'm not successful at all. And, you know, so that it was obvious after four or five months.

DOCKTERMAN: [00:59:27] Meantime, you know, I took vacations and, you know, and I got involved in some projects there writing stuff up with other volunteers and trying to do some of that and in the newspaper doing some things like that. So I was doing more stuff in Recife, most of the administrative aspect. But I was trying to get eyes to look, you know,

got to do, this is our role. Let's look into a legal aid program. But you can't, we're not, there's four in Sao Paulo. There's three others, you know. But would you like to go to Fortaleza? Which is, or Natal, which are two major cities in the northeast in different states. So I visited Fortaleza and the director there was favorable, and I got a letter from the legal aid saying he could come and work with us.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:50] And there was a legal aid program there already?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:00:53] There was a legal aid program, not a Peace Corps, there was a legal aid. In Sao Paulo, there was a legal aid program, which the Peace Corps volunteers worked in it. At Fortaleza, there was one as well. There were no volunteers in it, I was the first one. Gee whiz, I could live in a city of a million people and you know, that's pretty exciting news, some major. It was almost as big as Recife. It was on the beach, and it was an interesting place. And it was a progressive or relatively progressive state. Fortaleza, those cities are now, Fortaleza and Recife, are two, three million people. So I went there and said that sounds great.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:01:45] While I was living in Brazil, the only reason I was really unhappy with Vicencia is, my 6 by 10 cubbyhole was pretty limited. So I got a house. And it took forever. And they finally found me, I finally found a house and it was eight dollars a month rent. And I had a, it didn't have running water, but it did have electricity and it had a you know, a hole in the back, so it had facilities there. And then I bought furniture for 50 bucks or so, so my life was a little better. One of the leaders of the co-op wanted to stay with me, I had two rooms. So he wanted to stay with me. He said, well you got all this extra room, I'll just live here. I said, no, no, no. So my life improved. I still ate. I really didn't have the capacity, I could have bought a little propane thing to cook stuff on, but it was trouble, and it was 75 cents a meal. We have 55 dollars was our per diem.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:03] So you ate in a different place?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:03:06] No, I ate at the same place.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:08] Well, wait, you left town though?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:03:10] No, no. I stayed in the town.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:12] In Vicencia?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:03:13] Vicencia. Yeah, I stayed in the town, but I had a house in the town now, which was three blocks away.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:18] Oh I thought you had moved to?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:03:20] No, I'm not. I haven't met. I'm down there. And three months later, like in March. I got there in February. Peace Corps training ended in February, and I got there in February and then it took six weeks to two months to get a home. And that was nice. You know, I had a hammock. I don't think I had a bed. Everybody had hammocks. Most people had beds, I sort of liked the hammock, I think. And so I had the hammock, but no bed. But, you know, I had a dresser and, you know, desk or something. Anyway, it was it was much more comfortable. And that was that place.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:10] And then you moved to Fortaleza?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:04:12] So, I went to the program there, which is a legal aid program. And prior to going there, I spent a couple of weeks with, maybe it was just 10 days, I don't know, to Sao Paolo where I saw the program down there and I saw what the volunteers were doing. Many of whom were good friends from Peace Corps training, and remain so.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:04:49] So then I came to that legal aid program and the state headquarters in the office was there. The shower was there. So I had a shower and I had a key and I lived in a little, like, one of the volunteers, the secretary was leaving. I took over her house and I guess most of her furniture, whatever it was, and that was in a real

poor community about 20 minutes away. And I would take the bus into the center of the city, and there I was involved in the legal aid.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:36] And what was the legal aid program? Whom did it help with what?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:05:45] You want the Portuguese name of it?

GANZGLASS: Sure.

DOCKTERMAN: It's probably somewhere here.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:52] Well, you can give that to me afterwards.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:05:56] It was similar to the legal aid program in Sao Paulo. But people would come in who were low income or poor. Some of them had documentation problems getting on welfare. Some of them had family problems and they wanted separations. There was no divorce in Brazil. I don't think I'm not sure if there is now or not. But some of them had domestic relation problems and they were trying to get support. There was sometimes property disputes. And I was, there was forms to fill out.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:06:43] So I would watch attorneys and what they did and what they said. And by now, my Portuguese is, we're at almost a year. So it's you know, it's creeping up to a three. Maybe it's much better. And so I'm talking to the people. I'm filling out the forms and learning stuff. And I went to a few law school courses just to make the people. It's interesting. And I am doing some stuff socially with the people that were working at the legal aid program. And there were a few small projects I got involved was a few small projects I was trying to work with. The director's wife was trying to develop stuff, and I was involved in a few of those projects.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:07:40] In the community itself, there was a school, a block or two from where I lived, and it was run by a Protestant church there with close ties to the United States, which is what. Oh, there weren't a lot

of Protestants in Brazil at that point. Now there's a huge number, but Almer from the missionaries coming in, huge number came to Brazil. Now, of course, it's maybe the third Protestant or something. Anyone she had a church and she was awfully nice person, the woman that ran the. Maybe it wasn't her church, actually. It was just a church school, but anyway, she had the school there. So I taught at the church. I taught English, and I think I've taught some Portuguese there, too, at that point. So I had a bunch of students there that had come to know them. And I did a lot of things with them socially, which was nice. And I think I had some of the classes were in Portuguese, which I was able to work with.

GANZGLASS: [01:09:07] And so you felt much better about it?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:09:11] It was much better, it was what I expected. The projects didn't go very far. I don't know why the ones that that try to develop. I was involved in developing with the people so that it was a completely different program to the volunteers. There was just a few in the capital. The rest of them were spread all over the state and the state was much bigger, whereas we were all sort of pushed together in Pernambuco. So that made a different kind of dynamic because I was an outsider and I didn't have that. But, you know, I got the volunteers and with my friends from my first site, in Pernambuco, when they came through and a lot of others came through, my second hammock got a lot of use and stuff. So it was just a, it was just a lot more fun.

GANZGLASS: [01:10:12] And you felt you were contributing.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:10:14] Yeah, I mean, the legal aid was sort of contributing and it was interesting and I was learning stuff and it was a much more interesting place.

GANZGLASS: [01:10:26] So how long did you do that?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:10:28] Well, I lasted to the end and then I was hopeful that I would train my replacements or there would be replacements.

Apparently they had trouble finding other lawyers to go there. And there was talk when I left that I would be part of a training program in the Virgin Islands to train lawyers to, uh, for legal aid programs in Sao Paolo or other programs in Brazil. And I got a phone call three or four weeks later saying, you know, we're not going to do that. As far as I know, that never happened. So the legal aid program died in the state of Ceara, in the city of Fortaleza, at that time. I don't know what happened to the one in Sao Paolo. One of the lawyers in that program who I knew a little bit ended up as a federal judge here in P.G. County. He's been involved in some of the major immigration cases and stuff there, I see his name.

GANZGLASS: [01:11:59] So you finished your two years. You mentioned you dated?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:12:04] Oh, yeah. In in the north. I dated in the north when I went to Ceara. I dated a one woman, and I realized it wasn't working out for any reason. And I introduced her to another volunteer and they ended up dating and getting married and she still lives here in this area. And some other volunteers, there was one in our group. There was a lot of social life. And there are a lot of the volunteers ended up marrying Brazilians, and especially the group that followed us in Pernambuco, a lot of them ended up with Brazilian wives.

GANZGLASS: [01:13:07] So the men married women, not the other way?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:13:10] Yeah. There were some women who married Brazilian men, but it was less common. And some of them ended up going back to Brazil, some of them ended up teaching at colleges there, and some of them end up divorced, the men and women, and some of them didn't, you know. But there was certainly a lot of, maybe 10 or 15 percent ended up that way.

GANZGLASS: [01:13:48] Did you travel a lot while you were in Brazil?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:13:52] I went, well, I traveled a lot around the state, and I went up from Fortaleza. We had something like 30 days a year or something

like that for travel. I went up for a week to Manaus and Belem, which is on the Amazon. And I think I went up with a volunteer, but I came back on my own, back on the boat that was a Brazilian, everybody or just about everybody in the boat was Brazilian. But that was really, really interesting. And I also. My aunt, uncle and sister came down and flew to Recife halfway through my four or five months down there to visit me. And we got on a boat and we went all the way to Argentina and Uruguay. And I took a bus back. And that was, of course, a fabulous trip and seeing Argentina and Uruguay and I ended up visiting one of the volunteers, that was in another state called Bahia, Salvador is the city, which is which is a terrific, fascinating place, which was halfway between Rio and Fortaleza. And then when I left, I went to Rio, which is when I went through whatever the term that you end your service there, and spent Carnival there. Carnival in Rio, which was a fun experience. Sitting playing bridge in a hotel, and a strange group of people wandered in and started talking to us and stuff, and they were there for Rio for Carnival and we got together that afternoon with them to the beach. And sort of a wild group of people. That's when I met Janis Joplin.

GANZGLASS: [01:16:55] Oh! She was part of that group?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:16:56] She was part of that group. So I spent an afternoon with her and then with her friends who were there to check out the music there. And one of the people in our group, I knew who she was, but they had no idea who she was. We told them, and after we told them, said so I don't know who she is, who's she? I said, you're not ready. And anyway, that was sort of interesting.

GANZGLASS: [01:17:24] So what did you do after the Peace Corps? You then flew home from Rio back to the States?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:17:31] Yeah. Yeah, I went through, I went to Bolivia after Carnival. I went to, well, we somehow ended up in Sao Paulo for a day or two. Then we flew to, three of us volunteers came back, flew to La Paz. And it had volunteers from La Paz who were on the flight with us. They spent their vacation in Rio at Carnival. They flew back

with us. One of the guys stood up and said, all right everybody, turn your clock back one century. So I dealt with the time difference. We spent a few days in La Paz with some volunteers there. And then we went to Lima and Cusco and Machu Picchu. A week later, I was back home. And that was the experience.

GANZGLASS: [01:18:42] And then what would you do? Was reentry hard?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:18:49] Reentry was hard. I mean, there was a lot of culture shock, and in return, all the people seem tall and all the people seem white, very white. I came back and I eventually ended up in a legal aid program in Chicago. And I came back to the small town in Illinois and then I moved to Chicago, which. You know Chicago at all?

GANZGLASS: [01:19:26] Not well.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:19:28] Where are you from?

GANZGLASS: [01:19:30] New York.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:19:32] OK. Anyway, so I ended up a legal aid program in Chicago. One of the people in our group was already in that program and that helped me get the job. And he was a close friend in Brazil and remain so and remains in Chicago. And I ended up at a legal aid program there in a neighborhood office. And for a couple of years on the south side of Chicago in Inglewood, which is Michelle Obama's home neighborhood. And then there became an opening to run an office in the Mexican area of Chicago called Pilsen, and so I applied for that job, to be the head of the office, and it had four or five lawyers and a staff of four or five. And I had, I think I mentioned I took Spanish lessons down there and I sort of kept up the Spanish. I used it in Argentina and Uruguay and more lessons, and I kept up Portuguese, but a lot more people spoke Spanish. Anyway, that helped me get the head of that office, my Spanish, and I kept on lessons and stuff. And I think my Spanish was maybe a three level, maybe 80 percent of the Portuguese. And of course, neither is any good now, and I have no idea what's going to come out of my mouth

was Portuguese or Spanish. But, you know, I used Spanish there. And I stayed in the legal aid program. So that and then I ended up getting a position in the federal government here when Jimmy Carter became president and then I ended up in private practice in Alexandria after I left the federal government.

GANZGLASS: [01:21:58] So what was the impact of Peace Corps on your life as you think about it?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:22:04] I think it was extraordinary. It was the two most interesting years of my life, to a great extent, it charted the rest of my life.

GANZGLASS: [01:22:20] Go ahead, continue.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:22:22] To a great extent, set my life on. It gave me a lot of confidence, the experience in the little town in Brazil alone and being unable to speak the language, convinced me I think that I could get on, I could exist on my own. And it gave me a lot of confidence in that respect. And I think learning the language, which I eventually did, was very exciting. It probably helped me get a job in legal aid. Certainly helped me get a second job. That's something I wanted to do. I wanted to do legal aid. I spent my whole life in liberal causes one way or the other. And on boards, different kinds of activities. And I think it set that tone. Of that group of 12 or 13 legal aid people that lasted, I kept up with most of them. It's now 50 years. One has died, but kept up with most of them, four or five are my best friends, and remain so. And the one in Chicago I see all the time, and some of them, I still have family in Chicago and we get together. One went to San Francisco and I've visited him on a number of occasions and connections out there. And there's one in Arlington who was in the subsequent group and I'm very close to him and his family. His group gets together all the time. And I think we have a lot of Peace Corps reunions, I'm going to one in upstate New York in October, which will have four of our group, and we'll have his group, who I don't know that well, but it would be at the place who the guy who succeeded me, although he came eight months after I left, but he continued the

program in Vicencia. He lives in a little town in upstate New York. So in terms of a set of friends, you know.

GANZGLASS: That's great.

DOCKTERMAN: That I planned that some might come to my funeral.

GANZGLASS: [01:25:05] And any other thoughts about Peace Corps' impact on this country or on Brazil?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:25:13] Well, clearly I've thought a lot about that. I don't think the corporate problem continues on. The legal aid program didn't. I think they're now getting volunteers who have skills that match what the needs are in the country. I don't think you could say that about the co-op group, even though half of them were lawyers, that that was certainly the case. I think those who stayed the second year had some impact on their programs. But the Peace Corps left Brazil because Brazil, I think, supposedly, they left I think in the early '80s. They were asked to leave. They wanted to stay, that Brazil no longer saw itself as a third world country. It was either that was one of the rationales or it was because of conflict between the governments. I'm not sure.

GANZGLASS: [01:26:16] So there is Peace Corps there now? No, it's gone.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:26:20] And it never, never went back there. And I think to the volunteers, my understanding is that a third of the programs, a third of AID and Food for Peace and those different groups, and a large number of State Department people, are Peace Corps volunteers. And that's got to be a good thing for the United States and for, you know, for the little bit of money that per diem we got. Plus, I think we got a hundred dollars a month. It was set aside for us, so we were sure we got that money, that amount of money was nothing compared to the cost of food and stuff. So that certainly and still going on, I think, is great. And I think it's getting older volunteers now who have a lot more to contribute. It's hard for me to say, I tried to get one of my failures, I guess, and part of it's from splitting it two

different places, is those friends that I made in Brazil. You know, we'd exchange a letter or two, but my letters would get lost or that's what just happened. Some of the other people have come to the Peace Corps reunions.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:27:49] We would have the food of Brazil that everybody likes, *feijoada*, the bean dish. I don't know if you've ever had it, but we used to have two or two or three years we'd get together and have that. And some of the reunions, some of the people who were in the cooperatives, Brazilians, came to some of the problems. I mean, I think people kicked in and flew them to come up. And we still, to some extent, get together. But in terms of our impact on Brazil, I think at least in the co-op program, I think it's limited. But you really need to talk to someone who didn't abandon them after eight months. And in terms of even the legal aid problem, you know, I think that was minimal as well. And, you know, we had our personal relationships and what it was like doing American stuff and people wiser than me can probably address those issues.

GANZGLASS: [01:29:01] Well, there are three goals. So everybody I've interviewed has been really clear about impact on themselves and impact on the United States. And less sure about impact on the country in which they served, except for the personal relationships. And those personal relationships are really important.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:29:26] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:29:27] They changed attitudes towards the United States, especially during the Vietnam War.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:29:34] Yeah. There's a lot, we talked a lot about the Vietnam War, and especially in a place like northeastern Brazil, where the money, which I didn't say, but the cooperatives, most of the money was from the United States. And the building for the cooperative, state cooperative, was AFL-CIO money. And the money came from the co-op league of the United States. And supposedly there was a lot of CIA money that was put into that group. But we had to learn

about that on our own. That wasn't something that we or anybody talked about those two years. But that's how I spent those two years.

GANZGLASS: [01:30:30] That's great. So anything else you want to mention that we haven't talked about?

DOCKTERMAN: [01:30:34] No. I mean, are there any questions that you all have?

GANZGLASS: [01:30:37] No, it's been a really interesting interview. Important perspective. I'm glad we had a chance to do that.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:30:44] It was nice meeting you and maybe we'll talk about Somalia.

GANZGLASS: [01:30:47] Well, that's a different interview.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:30:50] That would be a different interview, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:30:52] Ok, thank you.

DOCKTERMAN: [01:30:53] Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]