

Warren Chapman Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Warren Chapman
Interviewer: Ann Marie Quinlan
Date of Interview: February 8, 2003
Location of Interview: Seattle, Washington
Length: 24 pages

Biographical Note

Warren Chapman served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay from 1966 to 1968 as an English teacher in a consolidated high school (Paraguay I).

Access

Open.

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Suggested Citation

Warren Chapman, recorded interview by Ann Marie Quinlan, February 8, 2003, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Oral History Interview

with

Warren Chapman

February 8, 2003
Seattle, Washington

By Ann Marie Quinlan

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

QUINLAN: [00:00:02] Fifteen seconds. OK, this is Ann Marie Quinlan, starting with Warren Chapman, and can you tell me when when you volunteered?

CHAPMAN: [00:00:12] I volunteered for Paraguay I, the first group to go to Paraguay. We started training and I think September of 66.

QUINLAN: [00:00:24] And what made you decide to join the Peace Corps?

CHAPMAN: [00:00:28] And I think well, that's an interesting question. And I've sort of done an informal survey of everybody else in the group, too. And I think that the reasons why everyone joined are pretty much consistent and pretty much uniform and certainly include me. They primarily idealistic reasons. These are all kids right out of college or, you know, at that age of 100 when they would have graduated from college. They all want to do some good in the world. They were all inspired by the idea of the Peace

Corps going to, you know, less fortunate countries and doing what they could to help them out. So I think that was probably the primary primary motivation for everybody, including me. But there are other motivations, too. And one of them, maybe this is part of the primary motivation, but one of them was just the adventure of it all and the opportunity to to go to another culture and live there the way the locals do and learn the language, get to know them. It's kind of like being an anthropologist, doing field work. So everybody loves anthropology or everyone in the Peace Corps does anyway. So it's kind of that same experience is that that that same kind of intellectual appeal and and and the appeal of the adventure of it all. And then on top of that, pretty much uniformly in my group, anyway, everybody was getting away from something from, you know, personal situations or or I guess I was mainly in my case, I was I just finished college. I knew I wanted to go to law school. I was just totally sick of the academic world. So it was kind of my life interlude between stints in academia.

QUINLAN: [00:02:39] Do you think that volunteers were affected by the Vietnam War heating up and the draft coming into effect?

CHAPMAN: [00:02:48] Sure, I kind of miss that. It's when I applied to the Peace Corps in order to start in the fall of sixty six, I applied in the spring of 66. And at that point Vietnam was not, you know, what it was in the newspapers, but that that was about it. That was before all the escalation. But. You know, as time went by, of course, you know, I didn't really know what was going on, going on, except what I read in the papers. And to the extent papers got to where I was in Paraguay, probably not much of an extent, but I could tell as far as the war was escalating and it got to be a bigger and bigger issue. Sure. I was very glad I was getting a deferment out of it.

QUINLAN: [00:03:31] And what does your family and friends think of you volunteering?

CHAPMAN: [00:03:35] They were all for it. They fought for pretty much the same reasons that the you know, the idealistic reasons and the adventure of it

all. I mean, it was it was fun. It was it was an interesting thing for their friend and son to be doing.

QUINLAN: [00:03:58] Where did you go to training?

CHAPMAN: [00:04:01] In Las Cruces, New Mexico, at New Mexico State University. I guess it was.

QUINLAN: [00:04:09] What what did your training to teach this stuff and how long were you there?

CHAPMAN: [00:04:14] I went on for, I think three months. It was largely language classes with excellent language instruction, absolutely excellent instruction. I had I have three kids now. The youngest is a sophomore in high school. They've all been through middle school and high school language instruction back then. This is back in the 60s, of course, back then. But techniques that were used in the language instruction were thought to be kind of breakthrough techniques that were adopted by the Peace Corps in the Foreign Service to, you know, really, really teach language in an effective way. And these techniques were going to we're going to revolutionize language teaching everywhere, including in high school. So that doesn't seem to have happened. If it did happen to have they backslid, they're kind of high schools are back to where they were when I was in high school. Lots of reading, lots of translating. And, you know, it's boring. And you don't really learn you do learn useful stuff, but you don't really learn, you know, to speak the language the way we did. And in training, we got a lot out of the language training. And then there was on that went on for four hours a day or six hours a day. And I forgot it quite. But there was a lot of language training then on top of that, just sort of, you know, to the extent there was time left over time and energy left over, we learned a little bit about the history of Paraguay and there was some training for the specific jobs we were going to do. I was going to go there as a teacher. And so there was some which was actually sort of a waste of time. There was some some training and in, you know, educational techniques or something or how to be a teacher. And there's

another guy there with me who or the two of us, a guy named George McGovern, Jim McGovern. And I got tutored by this education person and that was, you know, not very productive. An awful lot of the language training was really good.

QUINLAN: [00:06:27] Whether it was it just paraquat volunteers that you were with or whether there other?

CHAPMAN: [00:06:34] Just Paraguay.

QUINLAN: [00:06:35] How many about how many people were in your training group?

CHAPMAN: Thirty something.

QUINLAN: OK.

CHAPMAN: And that's about how many went down there. There were a couple of people who didn't make the cut, but most of them did.

QUINLAN: [00:06:48] So you were training for three months and then you took off for Paraguay?

CHAPMAN: [00:06:53] Yes.

QUINLAN: [00:06:54] Ok, and what was your first impression on arriving in the country?

CHAPMAN: [00:07:02] Uh. Hot, it was hot, it was poor, but somehow or other, it all worked and there are a lot of we first came to Asunción, the capital, stayed in the hotel there. That was you know, I looked at our expense there. There's a whole town, you know, as I say, basically the poor. And that was a problem. There's a whole town full of people speaking Spanish. And that was something of a I mean, that took a little getting used to it and not only speaking Spanish, but everything, you know, they were living they

were there was an economy going on. They were eating. They were kind of doing the normal things people do. And yet it was not in the United States. It was not like the standard of living that Americans take for granted. And yet it all worked. I mean, that was I guess that was from the first impression I.

QUINLAN: [00:08:12] This isn't the best I could at least give us some idea. So this is what I do now. I should be getting bifocals, but in the meantime, I'm taking off and putting out my glasses. Uh. Ok, Paraguay. Oh, OK, so here it is right in the middle. Asunción is right there.

CHAPMAN: Right here. It's on the river.

QUINLAN: OK, so so you were staying in a hotel and did they continue to have, like, orientation and training in Asunción?

CHAPMAN: [00:09:20] You know, I don't really remember. I think that was I think there was we got down there and they weren't quite ready for us. They were the first group. Yeah. Yeah. So it took a while to get everything lined up. I think some of the volunteers had their jobs and their situations are good to go right at the outset, but I was not one of them. So there were not the bulk of the volunteers in this first group were had up on farms, knew about agriculture, and they were they were the agricultural contingent. And they were going to work in the Paraguayan Agricultural Extension Service and, you know, share their knowledge of US agricultural practices with the Paraguayans. And a smaller group was known as a university group. And, you know, we'd all just graduated from college and and we didn't know anything about agriculture, didn't know anything useful. So we were going to we were going to teach it at various levels. And I think just because of the academic calendar or whatever, I forgot what the reason was. But a number of university group folks, you know, had to hang around and it situation for a while before they really got going.

QUINLAN: [00:10:41] And you were one of those.

CHAPMAN: Yeah.

QUINLAN: And what did you do while you were to occupy yourself?

CHAPMAN: [00:10:46] Uh, I don't know. I don't remember. Killed a lot of time, I guess.

QUINLAN: OK, but eventually you received an assignment.

CHAPMAN: Yes.

QUINLAN: And what was that? Where was that?

CHAPMAN: [00:10:59] And in a town called Villarrica, which was.

QUINLAN: [00:11:04] And how do you spell that

CHAPMAN: [00:11:05] V-I-L-L-A-R-R-I-C-A. Villarrica.

QUINLAN: Just like it sounds. Um, what was the assignment?

CHAPMAN: [00:11:15] I went there to, well AID had built a big school building kind of on the outskirts of town that was supposed to be a consolidated high school. And this was back in the days when in the US, anyway, consolidated high schools were thought to be more efficient and more of something, that kind of thing to do in the US at the time. So USAID was exporting this to the countries that are providing aid and doing things like it's project, which is to build this big a very nice school building in Billerica and then have that be the center for a unified school district at the secondary school level. So kids came from the surrounding area and some of them even even lived in Villarrica. So they, you know, didn't just commute from their families in town, but rather came to Villarrica to live and go to this high school.

QUINLAN: [00:12:23] They boarded with a family or something?

CHAPMAN: [00:12:26] Well, a lot of them boarded where I lived. I lived in a it was denominated a hotel was actually more like a boarding house.

QUINLAN: [00:12:33] OK.

CHAPMAN: [00:12:34] There was a kid there who was going to this high school. And there were other hundreds of students who were not living right there, but also making the same sort of arrangements to go to this high school. And I was assigned there first as an English teacher, teaching English as a second language.

QUINLAN: [00:13:02] So tell me about now, did you have to find your own housing or was that arranged for you?

CHAPMAN: [00:13:07] Well, I, uh. I ended up, when I first got to Villarrica, I stayed at this hotel, the name of which was Hotel Luduso, which is a guanine, a local Indian name, and it means something like the blue hills in the background or something like that. Had some colorful translation. And as I said, it's really more of a boarding house than a hotel. Typical Spanish architecture, rectangular shape around the courtyard.

QUINLAN: [00:13:45] Checking, making sure.

CHAPMAN: [00:13:50] The room is coming off the courtyard and I had one of those rooms and I don't remember who set that up or how you got there. I imagine that the Peace Corps was just awesome. And you know what would be a hotel here to stay where, you know, until you find a permanent place. And then once I was there, I looked around for our house thinking that I would, you know, rent a house and be where I where I live. And I actually found a number of places that I could have done that. And I like being in a hotel so much that I decided I didn't want to do that. I did not get to know the locals and not learn the language. I was surprised that. So I stayed in the hotel and as I say, it was like a boarding house and they fed you as well as in my case and in the case of a couple of a couple others, they you know, you had a room there, but there were a bunch of locals

who came there to to eat for the board. And I kind of made friends with them. And, uh, and the, uh, the big meal, of course, is in the middle of the day. So this was like this is our lunch there, dinner. Uh, there were a bunch of us who just eat dinner together all the time. I got to know heaven. They were they were good folks and friendly. So that was that was a good experience.

QUINLAN: [00:15:24] So tell me about your your teaching situation, like your classroom situation was like and

CHAPMAN: [00:15:30] Then physically, the classrooms are very nice. And I say this is a recent aid project. Uh, not a lot of bells and whistles I. At the time, Villarrica had only spotty electrical service, I think once the electricity was on from 6:00 at night till 10:00 at night or something like that, so it wasn't all day long and this was better than than the most towns and most towns had electrical service for two hours once a week, something like that. So Paraguay or Iberico was better off than most. But still there wasn't enough so that the usual things you would expect to find a secondary school like slide projectors, you know, certainly. And that was before computers, of course. But all that was not there. So what it amounted to was a building. I don't even remember whether it was wild for electricity. I imagine there must be some somewhere. And there was plumbing and that was it. That's what you got. That's blackboards and chalk. So the physical surroundings were you know, they were new and the construction quality was good and everything, but. But that was it. That's all it was just just kind of a roof and a classroom. We had teaching materials and I don't remember what they had for English as a second language, although I think I made a lot of a lot of it up myself later. Mimeograph machines or mimeographs things. And that's old technology. I'm sure my kids don't even know what I mean, but I do. Yeah.

QUINLAN: [00:17:22] Now, were there other volunteers teaching at the school?

CHAPMAN: [00:17:26] And not when I was there.

QUINLAN: Oh, really?

CHAPMAN: Yeah, I was there. I was the only American in the town.

QUINLAN: Oh, you were the only American.

CHAPMAN: [00:17:33] I actually. That's not true. Was I was the only American Peace Corps volunteer who was a high missionary. Oh yes. And before her and before I had gotten there, there were a couple of Mormon missionaries who'd come there trying to trying to get converts to Mormonism. And people still talked about that. But they didn't talk about Mormonism. They talked about how well they played basketball. These are, you know, big tall guys and they impress everyone on the basketball team.

QUINLAN: [00:18:06] It's funny. And now what did you do in your your your time?

CHAPMAN: [00:18:16] Well, I had an awful lot happen. And the thing is, so did everybody else. Uh, and that itself was one of the interesting parts about this experience, at least in Paraguay. And I think it's safe to generalize from that to any underdeveloped economy. Everyone's got a lot of time and we've you know, Americans are always they had the Palm Pilots and their cellphones, everything. I was rushing around. No one has enough time. And you kind of think that's the way everybody lives. Well, it's not the way it is. And certainly in Paraguay. Well, including and it seems young, especially in Villarrica, everyone would have been appalled at how little leisure time we Americans had. So a lot of their life revolves around what to do with your leisure time. I mean, I was living there and I was no exception. They eat a lot these and the daily, you know, noon dinner was was a big event. And that went on for, you know, those are kind of long, leisurely meals. There are constant celebrations that are holidays. They Paraguayans had tons, if not three times as many holidays as we do. Every time there's a holiday, there's some kind of civic celebration or at least, uh, the family that ran the hotel or where I was living had lots of friends. And they would had just sort of parties or or feasts or barbecues.

So at the hotel, everyone would sit around a table. All these friends of the friends of the family that ran the hotel are friends of.

CHAPMAN: [00:20:04] Another thing to think about is that or to bear in mind is that this is a very small town, very stable town where everybody has grown up together. They all a lot of people are related. Uh, you know, it's like a primitive village anywhere else. So if I was going to be an Asaba, which means barbecue, if there's going to be an outside of the hotel anytime soon, everybody shows up. And it wasn't clear to me why any particular person was there, because their relationships are especially the beginning to understand our relationship that we're going out. But they were relatives of the family that ran the hotel and friends of ours and family, friends and kids and, uh, you know, parents of of the families kids would come to in anyway. Pretty soon. I was offered for a bunch of people all having this asado at the hotel. Um, and this went on a lot. I mean, they were always having of a celebration or a feast of some kind. Uh, so that was one thing they did in their leisure time. Uh, another thing they did was, believe it or not, was girls basketball. And this wasn't a Latin country, you know, where it's very macho. You know, men had their roles, women had their roles, and it's all pretty much cut and dry. But girls basketball was a great big deal.

QUINLAN: [00:21:39] So how did basketball penetrate into Paraguay?

CHAPMAN: [00:21:41] Beats me. There it was. I got there and there it was.

QUINLAN: You didn't bring it with you?

CHAPMAN: No, no. I can't take credit for that. But it was already there. It was a great big deal. And there were these tournaments going on and, uh, including tournaments. There was one tournament that you had a very high level that was held in the Areca and the American team was playing the team from some other time. I forget what for the championship or something. But that was that was a very big deal. And everybody went to see that it's

kind of, you know, sort of like high school football in Texas. It was it was kind of the local entertainment.

QUINLAN: [00:22:20] I guess it it amazes me because I was in Jamaica. I was a volunteer from 90 to 92.

CHAPMAN: That's right.

QUINLAN: You know, and that's so close to the United States and so many people, uh, Jamaicans immigrate to US and Canada so much. And basketball was just beginning to pass right there in 1990. And so I'm just amazed that in the sixties, somehow basketball got to parent way. So there's a story behind that somewhere.

CHAPMAN: [00:22:53] I'm sure there is. I don't know how the story is over there

QUINLAN: [00:22:56] It's such an American sport, you know.

CHAPMAN: [00:23:00] Yeah, well, another thing that happened was that the the the competitors in the Harlem Globetrotters and there is a team out there like the Harlem Globetrotters, it wasn't it wasn't the Harlem Globetrotters or whatever this other team was, they came to Paraguay and put on an exhibition game.

QUINLAN: [00:23:20] While you were there?

CHAPMAN: [00:23:21] I was there. I went to it. I was it was incredible. It was just the big event the whole town turned out, everybody.

QUINLAN: [00:23:28] But it was a US team?

CHAPMAN: [00:23:30] Yes, kind of the counterpart to the Harlem Globetrotters.

QUINLAN: [00:23:33] Yeah. What a hoot. How did you spend your whole two years there on the same assignment or.

CHAPMAN: Yes.

QUINLAN: You did. And what did you do during, I'm assuming they had some kind of a break, as you know, school break or like three months, like we do here.

CHAPMAN: Yes, indeed.

QUINLAN: What time of year was that break?

CHAPMAN: [00:24:04] It was their summertime, in the wintertime up here. And, yeah, they had they had pretty much the same academic calendar we do for a big, long break in the summer. And I did a fair amount of travel. And that was one thing that kids were volunteers were in a position to do. I think maybe a month at a time I forgot.

QUINLAN: [00:24:27] Did you travel out of the country to travel within the country?

CHAPMAN: [00:24:33] Yes. I went to Brazil on one trip, uh, Uruguay on another. Uruguay and Argentina and Chile on another trip.

QUINLAN: [00:24:47] Did you did you travel by yourself or did you?

CHAPMAN: No, I went with a friend of mine.

QUINLAN: Another Peace Corps volunteer?

CHAPMAN: Yeah.

QUINLAN: How did you find that your language training prepared you? Did I miss really?

CHAPMAN: [00:25:00] Extremely well. There's there's only so much language you can learn in three months, obviously. But I think I don't know how I could have

learned more than that. I did. And I got down there. My language was, uh, I think I you know, the Foreign Service has as a scale.

QUINLAN: [00:25:23] Right. One to five or something.

CHAPMAN: [00:25:26] And I think I was a two plus when I went down there, which means, you know, you can you can get along and you can you are going to start.

QUINLAN: [00:25:35] Right. You can get you can get fed and you can get transportation.

CHAPMAN: [00:25:39] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And carry on a sort of rudimentary conversation. But that's about it. And I think I was about a two plus when I went down there and that that was enough to get me going. Uh, but there's nothing like actually living there and actually knowing the people and, uh, which I, which I did and thoroughly enjoyed. I was just an immensely fun, stimulating experience to do this. And, uh, and a large part of that was was learning the language. I mean, that's the best way to learn is to, you know, get some preparation and go down there live with the language spoken all the time.

QUINLAN: [00:26:16] Right. Um, how did you like your assignment?

CHAPMAN: [00:26:20] Oh, I loved it. Yes. Yes. It was just a wonderful experience. And was it how you felt about Jamaica? But but but yeah. It was just a terrific experience.

QUINLAN: [00:26:32] Um, was it a mixed. So these were high school age, what we would consider high school age kids. And was it a mixed sex school?

CHAPMAN: [00:26:41] Yes, it was a high school, a coed school.

QUINLAN: [00:26:46] OK. So when did you finish up your tour?

CHAPMAN: [00:26:49] I, I, well I left to go to law school and that was in the fall of sixty eight, so I forget exactly that. But shortly before that.

QUINLAN: [00:27:06] What was the most difficult thing about your experience?

CHAPMAN: [00:27:14] Well, I have to preface that by saying that the apparently one group was uniquely fortunate, as opposed to I heard horror stories about groups that went to Africa. Uh. And and other places like where you get there and the car, the deck and sort of stacked against you from the get go. Well, the thing for Paraguay, one that the deck was stacked in favor of the volunteers from the get go.

CHAPMAN: [00:27:48] I think culturally, the Latin American culture is it's easier to get used to that, I think it would be. And from what I've heard about the culture in Africa, it's a lot of the African countries. Paraguay was a very pro-American country to begin with. So, you know, you didn't have to overcome anti-Americanism and you didn't if you want to run in the streets, people who weren't, you know, looking daggers at you because they didn't like Americans or whatever it is that you didn't have the as I understand it, in some countries there, there's kind of a presumption that when you meet somebody that that person is not going to like you because you're an American. And so you have to kind of you have a barrier. Just at the outset, there was none of that. The Paraguayans were more predisposed to like Americans. They're good people anyway. I mean, they, uh. If I don't know if you can generalize, but I will go out on a limb and say that there's something about a difficult history and in dealing with poverty and dealing with political repression, that probably, you know,

QUINLAN: [00:28:58] I guess they still do.

CHAPMAN: [00:28:59] Well, it's turned itself into a democracy. Believe it or not. And that's one of the reasons, one of the or the reason why apparently one didn't go down there until 1966, which is five years after the Peace Corps started, was the government. It was the last remaining strong man military dictatorship in Latin America. And Sargent Shriver just did not want to

send the Peace Corps because the government was so terrible. And there were horror stories that I heard about people that the ruling party didn't like being tortured to death. They would have their arms tied to one jeep and their legs tied to the Jeep. And the jeeps will drive off in different directions, you know, horrible stories like that. So they had that to deal with. They had to weigh in and a burst of romanticism or something in the 80s and 70s and taken on Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia and the Chacko war, I think it was called. I know that was something else, that the war, the triple alliance, little Paraguay taking on these three huge countries.

QUINLAN: [00:30:19] So it was Brazil?

CHAPMAN: [00:30:20] Yes, Brazil, good God, how can you take on Brazil?

QUINLAN: [00:30:24] And who else was it?

CHAPMAN: Bolivia and Argentina.

QUINLAN: Oh, that doesn't seem like a very smart move geographically speaking!

CHAPMAN: [00:30:35] It was a stupid move. The result was either men got killed off. They lost the war, of course. And when I was there, there were the ratio of women to men. Just because of this war was something like six or seven to one.

QUINLAN: [00:30:50] Oh, even a hundred years. Yes, 90 years later.

CHAPMAN: [00:30:53] Yes, yes, yes. And so they had a very tough history and a generally you can find, the people who survived that kind of difficulty tend to be very, you know, very, very nice people, very sane people. The slightest movement gets, if you're not that way, you just get the difficult to get rid of. So.

QUINLAN: [00:31:25] I think also they don't sweat the small stuff, you know, they don't get excited. Over things that we Americans get.

CHAPMAN: [00:31:37] I think a lot of the reason that it was such a great place for American volunteers was was the Spanish culture. So family centered. I mean, the good things about the stability of this small town where I was, where, you know, a large part, just part of Latin culture, very kid oriented, you know, long term friendships are valued highly. Just kind of, you know, the good things about Spanish culture were all there and. And that made it very easy for an American public school volunteer to go on.

QUINLAN: [00:32:23] How big was the town?

CHAPMAN: [00:32:24] About 16,000 population.

QUINLAN: [00:32:29] Really small town. So you left and went off to law school. Where did you go to law school?

CHAPMAN: Columbia.

QUINLAN: One of the things that they wanted us to ask is to evaluate your service in light of the three goals of the Peace Corps, which is one to provide technical assistance, two to help promote better understanding of Americans, and to help promote better understanding of other people by Americans.

CHAPMAN: [00:33:05] Well, I. I have to say, of course, you know, I'm biased and have an emotional investment in the desert. But I have to say that that everything I saw, including my own personal service, fulfilled those goals extremely well. Uh, I think as far as the first the first question, you know, how much technology transfer, so to speak, or how much technically, how much good did I do there? Uh, I think well, I was trained, as I say, I was trained to teach English as a second language. And and I kind of my stock explanation for why the Peace Corps ought to be doing that is in English as a second language is more valuable than to Paraguayans and say French as a second language would be to Americans. And that it's and this is more obvious now than it was, say, 20 years ago. But English is

now the international language. And if you have language skills in English, you can you can market yourself to international companies or your job opportunities. Just sort of open up. Um, I, I did some other things, too. When I after I'd been there maybe eight months or a year, it became clear that they also needed math and science education. And it turned out it took me about a year to figure this out, the National University that since, you know, doesn't even have a math department, you're so extraordinary. They certainly don't have a physics department. And I happen to know something about both of those subjects. So so I started teacher training programs to, uh, to try to raise the level of math and science instruction.

QUINLAN: [00:34:57] Did they have classes at the high school level and those in math?

CHAPMAN: [00:35:01] Well, sort of. OK, and they they tried, but that they were not very successful, but the materials weren't very good. The teachers, you know, had no training at all. They had to go on was what they read into sort of, you know, sort of basic and half the time raw materials there. So I think and so I reported this back to the Peace Corps and tell them what this is, what they really you know, the English as a second language is nice and there is a there is a place for them. But what they really need is math and science instruction. So the next group that came down, I might have been third way through, I don't know. But they they they started recruiting math and science teachers just to, uh. And, you know, just just to fill that gap, that's great.

QUINLAN: [00:35:54] So you had an influence that beyond.

CHAPMAN: [00:35:57] Yeah, well, it was you know, it was so obvious and that's that's what they needed. And, you know, it seems strange that it would take a Peace Corps person spending a year down there for the U.S. aid program to tumble to the mud. But, uh, you know, it did work out that way. And and as far as I know, I was sold anyway before I before I left that the Peace Corps was going to get on that and and, you know, get teacher programs to take that needed to account. And they should also all the aid programs

that are that are centered in it since, you know, and kind of more at the level of aid and the stuff that the embassy does and so forth, you know, that should have a component raise a level of math and science teaching also. And I don't know if they ever did that, but the Peace Corps certainly got on that

QUINLAN: [00:36:57] Good. And the second and third goals, which were to help better promote better understanding of Americans by the people who serve and in reciprocal bring back some understanding.

CHAPMAN: [00:37:08] Sure. I mean, how could that not and what what better way to promote those goals and then go live with the people and try to help them? And they're the the locals are. Well, they had sort of varying reactions. The first reaction to and you know, again, I'm talking as the first Peace Corps volunteer to go to the Villarrica and the subsequent ones, I don't know, again, talk about their experience. But the reaction I got was, first of all, oh, my God, we're so flattered. Here's an American fresh out of college coming down here to devote two years to to help us out. You know, geez, I mean, it was it was sort of a flattering thing for them or from their point of view. And the second reaction was, OK, this can't be right. This guy is really CIA. And I got an awful lot of that. Uh, and actually, I have to say, one thing they wanted me to do before I left was to write up a memo for the file about what I had learned about sort of who's who in Villarrica and the relationships.

QUINLAN: [00:38:24] Oh, the Peace Corps asked you this.

CHAPMAN: [00:38:26] Yes.

QUINLAN: [00:38:27] Interesting.

CHAPMAN: [00:38:28] Yes. I thought was very interesting after telling and telling those folks, no, I'm not CIA for two years. I didn't write the memo, but I you know, I imagine other volunteers got asked to write memos and some of them probably did. So maybe there is a CIA connection. And if there is, I

don't know about it. And I would think that would be a terrible, terrible thing if there is a CIA connection, because if the Peace Corps is not credible, then it's nothing. And that's, you know, what else could it possibly do besides being down there credibly doing what it said it's going to do.

QUINLAN: [00:39:02] Well, and I just have to tell you that you're the first person who has told me that they were asked to do that.

CHAPMAN: Really?

QUINLAN: Yeah. I just it may have been some it may have been an effort by the Peace Corps also to help, you're group one.

CHAPMAN: [00:39:19] And so that's what they said. Yeah. That's what they said. And I hope it was true. Yeah.

QUINLAN: [00:39:25] But I said I did want to assure you that not from any other Peace Corps in the 60s.

CHAPMAN: [00:39:31] I'm sure glad to hear that. But, uh, so these were the reactions when they heard the second reaction was all this guys really CIA? Then the third reaction was kind of more to a personal level. And after I got to know them, you know, after a while, they they stop looking at you as as primarily an American and kind of get to know you on a personal level. And I know you as a volunteer, get to know them on a personal level. There is just like ordinary, you know, one on one friendship. But all this. Yeah, I mean, you're promoting you know, they get to know in America and and and you get to know a whole bunch of Paraguayans and and sure. I mean, that's that's what it's designed to do. And, uh, and and yes, it works as designed. I think that the real question is yes. Whether that's a good thing or not. And I think it's just got to there's, uh and this was not entirely clear to me at the time or to, uh, to other members of the group or at least remember their reactions to all this. But, uh. There's a book out now written by a New York Times reporter called War is a Force that gives

life life meaning or something like that. This is a guy who's been mainly he was in Bosnia and and Kosovo, you know, during the.

CHAPMAN: [00:41:07] All of repression and atrocities that were going on there, so we sort of saw firsthand how it was that that the Milosevic government could get its citizens to do the horrible things they did to the to the Kosovars. And there's kind of a set piece script, if you want if you want to get your citizens to commit atrocities, there's kind of a set, the script you have to follow, and it includes demonizing the victims. You have to get everyone to believe that they're subhuman, that they're not worthy of the concern that you would show to ordinary people. And you do this by by play, by playing to their prejudice, basically, which can be nationalist prejudices or racial prejudice. One thing in another, historical one thing Milosevic did was let's try it out. Historical grievances that. But, you know, no one had known about it now for hundreds of years. And most of us managed to trot these out and getting all exercised about this some, you know, something wrong that was committed in the thirteen hundred or something and how that justifies atrocities against the Kosovars. But anyway, the point is, none of this can happen. This whole script gets blown away to the extent that people have personal relationships with the supposed victims. And I think you can generalize from that. And, you know, war is just not sustainable. And less and less you can generalize unless you can conceive of the enemy as being not human or not worthy of human.

CHAPMAN: [00:42:57] You know, the usual treatment that, you know, he lived another killing. I mean, by not shooting. But from that point of view, yeah, I think I think the Peace Corps it was is is wonderfully successful because that's exactly what happens when Americans get to know the locals and the locals get to know Americans on a personal basis and our basis of mutual friendship, mutual respect, gratitude on the part of the locals for what the Americans are doing and vice versa. You know, but I still feel grateful to the regions for. Being in the hospital was that word, which was very hospitable, another way this comes up, I think that you can see what's going on today is the the importance that the Arab street, but that the Arab opinion in the Middle East is playing in our foreign policy. I mean, it's just,

you know, as much as the administration doesn't I think, you know, wants to, you know, wants to not be constrained by the opinion of the America of the Arab street. It is constrained and it knows that. And it's just got to deal with that. Well, what better way to influence the Arab street or the Latin American street or whatever street more than have the history of the Peace Corps having been there. And it's personal relationships, you know, developed.

QUINLAN: [00:44:36] I agree with you. It was very interesting. When I was in Jamaica, I met had the opportunity to meet someone, but then a Peace Corps volunteer and then went on to work for the State Department, USAID, and always said, you know, after seeing all these different agencies, it's the most effective foreign aid program we have is the Peace Corps. Yeah, that's just you just said that blanket statement and it was like, yeah, it got me thinking about that. So very similar to what you're saying there.

CHAPMAN: [00:45:04] It's the only program that works on a one on one individual level. So. Yeah, yeah, I totally believe that.

QUINLAN: [00:45:10] Have you been back to Paraguay since you left?

CHAPMAN: [00:45:14] No, I corresponded for a while with the folks at the hotel. In fact, I got, this is back in the day of a manual typewriter, like a manual typewriter to go out to law school with and had it modified. So it had an enye, an accent, and things like that instead of a few letters and they wrote back. This went on for a while and eventually petered out, but no way back.

QUINLAN: [00:45:43] How has your experience affected your life after that service?

CHAPMAN: [00:45:51] Uh. I don't know that it's you know, as opposed to how when my wife is gone, if I had not been in the past or so hypothetical, it's really hard to say. But it's you know, it's like I mean, you sort of make some assumptions here that that are sort of self evidently true. It's kind of like

the 19th century. The Victorian idea of the ennobling effects of travel go to a foreign land and you see the sights and you learn something about the culture. And that's got to be good. And I think you can say the same thing about these. And so it's got to be good. You know exactly why I'm not sure I could teach.

QUINLAN: [00:46:37] Is there anything else you'd like to add?

CHAPMAN: [00:46:40] Um. Well, I certainly don't need to tell you what's good about the peace given to the choir, but it is a good thing. Everybody, you know, we've already been over that. And I think a lot has changed in Paraguay. In the meantime, any sort of news of Paraguay doesn't get up here a lot. But when it does get up here, I follow it. And that the Stroessner military dictatorship got replaced, I think, in a bloodless coup by by some other military person whose agenda was to convert everybody to democracy. It's done that. I think recently there's there's there's some there's some trouble going on. And I'm not quite sure what what that's all about, but I don't think it threatens it's it's a system of government. It's certainly come a long way economically. It's one of the kid's teachers and in an elementary school had had been to Paraguay, you know, fairly recently within the last 10 years and not with the Peace Corps, but after that life and for some other reason and was saying that the standard of living has just gone way up their cars all over the place. Their grades are quite a bit. And they were so poor when I was there that then it's hard to believe that any, you know, anything would have been proven, at least economically, over the way it was that they gotten richer. They've gotten kind of more like us, more mobile, more. And I'm sure the pace of life has increased.

CHAPMAN: [00:48:41] And I guess one other thought that that, you know, may be worth noting, it was kind of something that struck me when I was leaving. I had to give a little talk to my brother to get to the friends of the hotel or the or my students at the school or something. Everybody I was getting sort of a farewell tat, and I guess that's what they had a salvo to send me off. And I guess I didn't want to give them a the speech. So I did. And what I told them was that they have a lot of things going on that are very, very good.

They had this I need to back up a little bit and tell you another story. A friend of mine had got a scholarship to go to Washington, D.C. and take some is basically a boondoggle. I forget what it was I'm training deal or something like that. But she was going to go to Washington for a number of months and she was all excited about her chance to go to that. You know, she thought it was a big crystal palace and some other than these inflated ideas of what American life is like. This is also back in the day of records. She had a record, I think, LP record that was broken. And she was going to take that with her to Washington because as soon as she got the United States, she would just get it fixed.

QUINLAN: [00:50:09] I love it.

CHAPMAN: [00:50:11] Ok, so they had these they had these incredibly incredible ideas about, you know, the glories of the United States and what life is like and and and so on and so forth. And these sort of drive their own desires about where they want their country to go. And if you you know, there's a lot of back. In the old West, apparently, there's a lot of thought going on about. About foreign aid programs and what you're trying to get them to accomplish. And you really want to the extent you can control, you know, the economic development of a country, how do you want that that development to progress? Do you really want the country to, you know, develop the way we did? Or maybe there's some other model that's a better one? And kind of this thinking at the time was kind of coming to The View. Well, you have to ask the locals, you know, don't just impose an economic model on them, ask them what they want to do, OK? If you do that or back and interrogate the 60s anyway, if you did that, you ask Papuans how they wanted to develop or what their their economic future should look like. Ideally, they would say we want to be just like you. And I don't see I think if you took a poll, you'd find 90 percent of Paraguayans back then wanted to be like the United States and are as close as they could make it.

CHAPMAN: [00:51:45] So I gave this little speech about what they have going there was really, really good that you don't have in the United States. So in other

words, it's kind of a be careful what you wish for type of speech. And I I, you know, told them that the kind of things we've been talking about, the stability of their their the relationships in the small town and the virtues of Latin culture, the kind of family centered on something, you know, all the good things about, about Latin culture. I told him essentially I figured I would put it, but essentially, you know, be careful what you wish for if you want to become like the United States. You know, a lot of this is going to go by the boards. And I kind of think to the extent they're richer now than they were 30 years ago, a lot of that's happened. And that's probably very bad. And I my guess is to the extent those people I knew were still alive and I'm sure a lot of them would have gone by now to the extent there. So alive, they probably look back at the old days when they were poor and think, you know, we lost a lot by it by doing all this economic development.

QUINLAN: [00:53:04] Ok, thank you very much.

CHAPMAN: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]