

Gerald R. Jones Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Interviewer: Julius Sztuk
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Biographical Note

Gerald R. Jones served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia from 1967 to 1971 in an education program.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Gerald R. Jones

August 29, 2019
Washington, D.C.

By Julius Sztuk

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

SZTUK: [00:00:03] My name is Jay Sztuk. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji in 1974 through 1976. Today is August 29, 2019, and I'm going to be interviewing Gerald Jones, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia from 1967 through 1971 in the education program. Gerald, tell us a little bit about your youth, where you grew up, and how you heard about Peace Corps and why you decided to join.

JONES: [00:00:36] I grew up in Philadelphia and I actually remember quite well how I heard about Peace Corps. It was the presidential election in 1960 and candidate John F. Kennedy had made several speeches talking about his desire to form something like the Peace Corps. And I remember being home one Thanksgiving, and I would have been in high school then, and the subject came up of what we were going to do. And I remember saying I heard about that thing that candidate Kennedy is talking about. And it sounds really interesting to me. I want to do something like that. And I remember this evoked shrieks of laughter from my brother and sister, who

both screamed, what could you do in any of those countries? And I sort of said indignantly, well, I don't know, they'll tell me what I could do.

JONES: [00:01:38] So that's actually how I heard about it. But I was very fascinated by this. And actually, then as I proceeded through university, when people asked what did I want to do after graduation, I said, oh, I wanted to join the Peace Corps. It sounded like really like it was going to be exciting and great. And so when I was home for another Thanksgiving, we get this letter from the Peace Corps and it's a letter saying you have been accepted into the Peace Corps and you're going to be sent to Ethiopia. And I remember my response was, gee, I never thought of Ethiopia. And my mother's response was, Ethiopia, that's Haile Selassie. And my sister said, oh, they've been around for a long time, I wonder what you're going to do there. And of course, the letter said it was going to be a teaching program.

JONES: [00:02:33] And so I had several more months of university left and knew that, well, this is what I was going to do. And finally, summer after graduation, I had gone to Georgetown here in Washington. Graduation rolled around and I headed up, got the shuttle from Philadelphia, where I had returned to pack, up to Boston. And the training program was in Boston. Now, it wasn't in Boston proper. There had been a long history of training programs with the Peace Corps in Cambridge, at Harvard and maybe at other universities. But actually we were outside of Boston and the training group, there was a very large training group in Utah. There were two groups going. There was a very large training group in Utah, and then there was the group in Massachusetts. It also was fairly large, probably a hundred or so people.

JONES: [00:03:31] However, we were divided into four different sites. Some people were at an American youth hostel facility. We were, and I think we probably had about 30 people at my site, and it was an apple farm. Actually an old, beautiful old apple farm in Harvard, Mass., Harvard being a suburb of Boston, a rural suburb in those days, probably a suburb today. And we lived in the migrant workers' quarters, so we lived in, men in one, women in the other. Big, but not that big place with a single room downstairs and upstairs was like a dormitory. We all, you know, bed after

bed and showers at the end of the room, and the woman had similar facilities. And then we had a building on the grounds of that apple farm where we went for language and other instruction.

SZTUK: [00:04:31] Now how were you divided up? Was it by the sector that you were working in?

JONES: [00:04:34] No. Almost everyone going to Ethiopia in those days were going to go into education programs. There were a very small number who were lawyers in various ministries, but that was a very, very small number. There were some nurses who taught in dresser programs, dresser being fairly low level of the very important medical personnel.

SZTUK: [00:05:03] Oh, dresser as in dressing wounds?

JONES: [00:05:05] Yeah, dressing wounds and things like that. But overwhelmingly, it was a teaching program. And I think of the 30 people who are in my site, we were all going to be teachers, except one person who was going to go to a ministry and he had been a lawyer. So that's how the training was there. We were the first group, we were told, I think for Ethiopia, I don't know if this was for all countries. We were the first group that was going to have some in-country training. Prior to that, all people going to Ethiopia had always had their country training in the U.S. So we had two months of training up in this on this apple farm or these three other sites. And we had one month in Ethiopia.

JONES: [00:05:54] And I guess, like any training program, because a lot of it was devoted to language training and we had a large number of Ethiopians who were language instructors, and then we had former volunteers who were also staffing the training. And of course, inevitably we're all frustrated because we'd say to the volunteers, now tell us what it's like. What's it going to be like? And they to our, adding to our frustration, but actually in retrospect 100 percent right, said, you know, it's really different for every volunteer. And it's hard to explain that and you'll find out when you get there. This used to drive us all nuts, but it's a very proper and correct response. So we were there for two months. It was good getting to know

people, both Ethiopians and the people who were going to be with you for the next couple of years.

JONES: [00:06:50] And then in August it was, we went down to Kennedy Airport, JFK, in New York, and they had chartered a KLM flight. I don't know how we escaped the Buy American rules, but it was a KLM flight and we went first to Amsterdam, stopped there, and then down to Addis Ababa. And of course, we were all very excited and this was really a big thing. And we had a layover for several hours in Amsterdam that did not leave the airport and then went down to Addis Ababa. I remember as we were approaching Addis Ababa, maybe we had gone over Cairo and were going down towards Addis Ababa. And the pilot said, um, we're trying to make time because the airport doesn't have lights. And so if we get there after dark, we have to divert to Jeddah or to Nairobi or something like that.

JONES: [00:07:51] We all sort of looked at one another and said, well, we hope he gets there on time. And he did. And of course, I guess we all have these memories that just are burned into your mind. I remember landing in the country, and it was the rainy season in Ethiopia at that time. The rain is June, July, August, and probably half of September. The country was so extraordinarily green. And as you landed you just looked out at this enormously green country, farmland and hills, mountains, everything like that. Everything. It was not what I was expecting.

SZTUK: [00:08:27] You were expecting?

JONES: [00:08:29] Jungle.

SZTUK: [00:08:30] Desert?

JONES: [00:08:30] And everything, all American stereotypes.

SZTUK: [00:08:32] OK.

JONES: [00:08:33] And then we landed. They put us in a hotel. Actually, the airline put us in a hotel, which we were told is not the kind of hotel volunteers live in. And you're only there because you don't have time to look for proper

accommodations, proper meaning much less expensive and much more in line with where we're going to be for the next two years. So we stayed there. I remember all of us looking out the window very cautiously, sort of saying, well, I guess we should go out there and see what it's like.

SZTUK: [00:09:07] Go and explore.

JONES: [00:09:07] So we sort of walked around very cautiously. I can imagine what we looked like. You know, a hundred or probably hundred of us walking around all new, very green, very young. And then we all were told to find accommodations for yourself, which we did.

SZTUK: [00:09:28] Really.

JONES: [00:09:29] So we scattered, and most of us ended up in about three different hotels. We were both having language instruction for half of the day and then the morning, half of the day was spent in a practice teaching situation, which was really very wise because overwhelmingly the people recruited in those days were 21 or 22 year olds who were going to be in a classroom. And I would say probably 90 percent of the people ending up in classrooms had never been in a classroom other than on the other side of the desk.

SZTUK: [00:10:04] Right, but they had never taught.

JONES: [00:10:05] Yeah, we had never taught. So we had practice teaching at a very old high school, actually the first modern western type school founded by a former emperor back in the 1900s. And that was a very important, very valuable experience you would have. It was 50, 60 kids looking at you, and you're first learning how to speak to them. We were teaching in English, schools in Ethiopia were English, but still you had to be careful what you said, how you said it, and things like that. How to control the classroom and all of the other things that a new teacher has to learn. And of course, always in a totally different culture where the expectations on the kids' side and probably on our side were very different.

JONES: [00:11:03] Ethiopian classrooms tend to be very orderly, very probably favoring a lot of rote education, and actually very respectful for teachers. It's not a hard place to teach. So we did that for a month. The end of the training program was right around Ethiopian New Year's, which is on September 11th. And, of course, there were vast parades. And then a couple of weeks after that, there's also a very big national holiday that's a religious holiday that's extremely colorful and very interesting for all of us to see. So we had two, we ended with two major holidays.

JONES: [00:11:51] One thing I should mention. The first day that we arrived, we wandered tentatively out of the hotel to look at Addis Ababa and everyone. No one had reminded or told us that it was an informal holiday geared towards children. And it's a bit like Halloween. People did not dress up, but what would happen is groups of kids would roam the streets and they would surround you and sing and dance and, of course, ask you for some money or something so they could buy some candy or something like that. And none of us knew this and we sort of wondered, is it like this every day? What is going on here? I mean, you can't walk down the street without being surrounded by kids who are quite joyful and happy. But what's all this about?

SZTUK: [00:12:41] Yeah, must have been quite an experience.

JONES: [00:12:41] We finally figured it out. And so we came to end of the training program and we got our assignments. Ethiopia was a very large program. When I was there that first year, we had over 500 volunteers. And the school system, especially the high school and the junior high school system, was quite small outside of Addis Ababa. It was essentially one high school per province. Junior high schools were a bit more widespread. So there were very few of us. And in fact, I saw a study several years later saying that in that period, we provided, Peace Corps, half of the teachers in the school system, junior high school teachers and high school teachers, who had a college degree. There were a large number of other foreigners and of course Ethiopians also.

JONES: [00:13:40] But we really were a very integral part of the school system, a very important part of it, just by our numbers. And when we got our

assignment, I was assigned to a comprehensive high school. But people were assigned to a wide variety of high schools. One thing they did ask you beforehand when they were thinking of where to assign people, they would say, would you like or mind being assigned to a village where you would be the only volunteer? Do you think you would like junior secondary school, it would be seventh and eighth grade kids? Or would you do better in the high school? And would you like to be in a provincial capital? There were 13 provinces, so roughly 12, 13 provincial capitals. Or would you like to be in a village or where would you like to be?

JONES: [00:14:37] And I remember saying to the staffer who's posing these things to me, I said, well, gee, what's the difference? Because we'd spent most of our time in Addis Ababa, in a third world capital. And he said, well, I don't know. If I could sum it up, I guess a provincial capital has a high school and usually has water and electricity. I said, well, that doesn't sound bad to me. It's kind of nice. So I said, well, I wouldn't object to a provincial capital. I was assigned to a provincial capital a day's journey north of Addis Ababa, to a large, probably 1,500 comprehensive high school.

SZTUK: [00:15:22] OK, so you lived in a town?

JONES: [00:15:25] I lived in a town of about 50,000, and I lived in, you know, not in any way luxurious, perfectly nice housing. I mean, we had a wooden floor and actually I had a bathroom inside.

SZTUK: [00:15:39] Had running water?

JONES: [00:15:40] Running water, electricity. And so, yeah, it was nice. It was, I can't say it was. We were not, at least I was not a poster volunteer. In other words, I, you know, but that we had lots of them in Ethiopia. So I remember the big day came and Peace Corps had hired a bus to take us up. They had thought of just letting us go and find a bus, go to the bus terminal, get on the bus ourselves and go to hither and yon. But I think maybe they thought that might be overdose. So we were all in this bus. Not all of us. The country is big. So I mean, you're probably had six or seven busses going to different parts, north east, south, and west. So I remember being on the bus with other Peace Corps volunteers and what

struck me most on that trip is that as we went up. Now I was going the provincial capital. Was that more or less, well there are a couple of towns beyond it, but it was towards the end of it.

JONES: [00:16:38] And I must admit I would look and people were getting off at towns that were barely towns. I mean, and it was just. I remember the first ones to get off. Even today, I've seen it recently and there's nothing there. There is nothing there. It's just a bunch of rundown houses.

SZTUK: [00:16:56] Now was there anyone there to meet them?

JONES: [00:16:59] No, actually there wasn't.

SZTUK: [00:17:01] They would have to find their way to school?

JONES: [00:17:03] Well, what would happen is. I watched the first one, it was this very. We were all 21, 22 years old. First was this marriage couple, married couple, and I remember they got to the door of the bus and they looked back and they looked forward and they looked back again at all of us. And they said, well, goodbye, see you at Christmas. And they stepped down and we all sort of looked at them and thought, boy, I wonder how it's going to go. Now that we did watch them go a few yards and there would be some young students there who would be saying, oh, we can find you a house or we know where Peace Corps volunteers lived before, we can, we can find something. So we waved goodbye, and this repeated itself as we went along the road. Because many are very small towns. Peace Corps existed, especially in the junior secondary schools, in very, very small towns. They weren't remote because what I'm describing took place on a road.

SZTUK: [00:18:01] Right.

JONES: [00:18:02] So right away you'd say, well, therefore, you get a lot more remote in Ethiopia than these towns. But to us watching them, you sort of think, what will they do all day other than teaching? So then we went on. The beauty of the countryside was just striking. That was the other thing

that struck me, you know, having grown up on movies where Africa was hot and covered with forest and.

SZTUK: [00:18:28] Mountains, jungle.

JONES: [00:18:28] Monkeys making noise and everything like that. Here comes this country that is absolutely beautiful, very mountainous, cultivated for the last three thousand years. So sort of, you know, totally unlike any stereotype I may have had. So we ended up in the town we were going to. There were seven of us, the seven of us assigned to that provincial capital.

SZTUK: [00:18:52] What was the name of the town?

JONES: [00:18:53] Dessie. Well, I had two assignments. So there was one, was the first one, was a place called Dessie. And we got off the bus and there was a departing volunteer who had done his two years in country and he was there to meet us. That was very helpful. So we all went to his house and he, you know, sort of gave us the lay of the land and said school had not started then. But he said, well, the director and the assistant director at school, they expect to see you tomorrow. So we. And then he said, well, regarding housing, one of you can have this house. And we drew lotteries for the house. Actually, I got that house. I was very lucky on this first round. And then we walked up the next day to the school.

JONES: [00:19:51] The school was on an elevated area overlooking much of the town, and it was an old school by Ethiopian standards, built before the Italian war. So built probably in the thirties, late '20s, early '30s. And nobody was there at that point, except some of the administration getting things in order. So I met the school director and the assistant school director, and I remember the assistant school director had been there for a long time. He said, well, yeah, we like we need having Peace Corps volunteers. He said, now the only time you people run into trouble, you people being us, the only time you people run into trouble is when you forget and you think you're running an American classroom. And you are not running an American classroom. And I will tell you right now that if you

try to run this as an American classroom, you will have problems. You will have major problems.

JONES: [00:20:53] He was more or less right, except for the fact that the Ethiopian government and the Ministry of Education had worked to get American teachers in there whom they knew were not going to run classrooms quite as strict or maybe as top-down as traditional classrooms were. And they, that's what they wanted. And so it was a matter of walking that sort of fine line. Some things were different than the assistant director told us, and this was actually true. He said, you're going to have three types of problems here. One, because you're too friendly with the kids and, two, you don't run a disciplined classroom. And then he said, oh, and strikes, he said, we have three types of strikes here. We were all very surprised to hear this. He said, now one type of strike is when the teachers don't like their teacher and they will just walk out. They will complain and they expect the director come in and somehow solve this.

SZTUK: [00:21:55] The students will walk out?

JONES: [00:21:56] Oh yeah. They'll just walk out. And then the other kind of strike is that the students don't like the director and the administration, and then the whole school will go on strike. So that can last several days. And then there are the political strikes when the whole country is on strike, all the schools are on strike, and you don't want to get near that. He said, you will not get involved with that. So. And he was right. Over my time there, I saw all three, though I never had kids walk out in my classroom, but I saw volunteers who did. And so in some ways, you did have this balance. I was probably more strict than I would be in an American classroom, but not as strict and top-down as traditional classrooms. I thought I was having some success when a kid raised a hand and said, all you do is ask us questions, ask us questions. I said, well, that's true. I tell you something happened. I was teaching history and English.

JONES: [00:22:53] And I said, you know, I tell you some event happened. I ask you what you think of it or if you think it was a good idea or bad idea. He said, why don't you just tell us what we should say? And I said, well, that's, you have to decide. And I don't think they were used to that, but I think they

actually liked it. You could even start Jeopardy style quiz things and things like that. So that was kind of fun. And I will say it was that very first year we did have the second type of strike, which actually turned into a very nasty riot. It was directed towards the director of the school. It was quite, uh, quite frightening and ended with the government sending up troops, police, federal police keep everything under control. It eventually ironed itself out, but it was difficult.

SZTUK: [00:23:44] So how long had Peace Corps been in that town? Do you know how many volunteers there were before you?

JONES: [00:23:52] Since I think from the very beginning, since 1962.

SZTUK: [00:23:55] So they were used to having volunteers.

JONES: [00:23:57] Oh yes. And they were used to having foreign teachers. The faculty was very, very mixed. So in addition to the seven volunteers we had, Peace Corps had, U.S. Peace Corps had, we had Swedish volunteers. We had a couple of French volunteers and we had a large number of Indian contract teachers. So the faculty was extremely international. And we have, of course, Ethiopian teachers. But the largest cohort of teachers were Indian contract teachers. Then there were a couple of French teachers. We had three or four Swedish teachers. We had a South African teacher. And then you had the Peace Corps teachers and the Ethiopian teachers, so you had a very mixed group of people.

SZTUK: [00:24:53] So your typical day there. Kind of describe what you did from a typical day, from the time you woke up.

JONES: [00:25:05] Yeah, sure. You'd wake up. You'd have breakfast, then you'd walk up to school. I guess that would take about 20 minutes probably to get to school, maybe take 20 minutes to walk up in the morning, 20, 25 minutes. The day would open with an assembly of students and teachers. Announcements would be read out and the students would go off to their classrooms. We would follow them. And people, when the students went home for their lunch, as did teachers. So you would repeat the trip home and then walk back. Walk back was always hot. Ethiopia's, you know, very

high. It was eight thousand feet, the town where I was even higher than that. Usually the temperature is beautiful. Very healthy, cool, cold at night.

JONES: [00:26:06] At lunchtime, the sun was hot. I remember it was very hot walking up that hill. There was a hill to get up to the school. And it was a typical school day curriculum. Lots of interface with teachers. We also had at the school among the, I was telling you the different cohorts of teachers, different nationalities. Among the Ethiopian teachers, there were the permanent Ethiopian teachers who had been trained as teachers. There were also what were called national service teachers. These were teachers who were at the university. They weren't necessarily training to be teachers. They could be training to be anything, major in anything. But between their third and fourth year, they were assigned by the government to a high school to teach. And they quickly became among your best friends. They all had very strong English language fluency. The university was in English.

JONES: [00:27:03] And in fact, I remember we had to be very careful because we were so earnest in those days. We were literally very earnest. We wanted to be good volunteers. We wanted to have contact with the Ethiopian staff and really know everyone, to know our counterparts. And I remember one day we had a dinner. We usually didn't. We tried to meet with our counterparts, teachers and things like that. But we had a dinner and one volunteer is very strong on this. But I think we all agreed with him, and said, you know, I noticed that in the staff room, we spend too much time talking to the national service teachers because they're just like us. They're in university, they speak English. They all want to go to the U.S. for their master's, and they're very easy to relate to and everything like that. But over in the corner, somewhat more shy, afraid to speak, are the some of the Ethiopian teachers who may not have ever gone to university. They've gone to teacher training institutes. They might be, though they speak English and speak it quite well, they're much more intimidated, maybe, to use it and things like that. So we have to be more open to all kinds of people on this faculty.

SZTUK: [00:28:16] More proactive.

JONES: [00:28:16] And so we were, in fact, a criticism maker. I saw you talking too much to those national service teachers, you better mix with some of the other teachers. And we did. We had a couple wonderful young women working, young, they're as young as I was, working there who, you know, would go and meet with the home ec teacher, go to her house, whose English was not especially strong, but really, you know, really made the effort to sort of say, no, we're not just university graduates who want to talk to other university graduates. So that was very important.

SZTUK: [00:28:51] You think there was a distinction there between the Peace Corps volunteers and how the Peace Corps volunteers interacted with the local teachers and how some of the other teachers from other countries? Like you said you had volunteers from other European countries. Was there, you think there was a difference?

JONES: [00:29:10] I can't say that. I wouldn't want to say that. Simply because the volunteers from the other nationalities were good, they were fine, and they mixed with their counterparts. I don't, I can't do a comparison. Night school was a big thing. We taught night schools. That was different because you were teaching adults, and in some ways that was both easier and harder. You didn't have to worry about discipline in a night school class.

SZTUK: [00:29:43] Sure.

JONES: [00:29:43] They're all adults. They were, they didn't have to be there, so they wanted to be there. And that was interesting. It was totally different. And because they didn't have to be there and they wanted to be there in order to get that high school diploma, which then opened up more opportunities for them. I remember once being sick and I couldn't go to my night school class, and the next day. We had in the night school class, we had two police officers, high ranking police officers. The next night, they showed up at my house to make sure I was really sick because they said they didn't want me dropping out of night school teaching because they needed to get my grade and approval. And actually, it was very funny. They came to the house and there were some other volunteers visiting because I'd been, I had a horrible hacking cough and I felt horrible. I was sitting in a chair, all wrapped up and everything.

JONES: [00:30:40] And I'm sure when they pulled up to the house and they came in the compound, coming to the door, they hear all these voices. They probably thought we're having a party or something. And they knock on the door and they look in and they see me. I looked awful, I'm sure. And so they were very solicitous and said, oh, we're only here because we're concerned about your well-being. I thought, yeah, my well-being, your grade. I know why you're here. But that was actually nice. I liked that and I liked both of them quite a bit. And so school was pretty much a round of the normal teaching that any of us did. And the night school teaching, hiking with students and things on weekends. There are lots of places to hike, countryside to go to. That was fun. And getting to be quite comfortable in the environment.

JONES: [00:31:31] As I said, Ethiopian students are very polite. The school system was so small in those days that they were very eager to be there and, you know, they realized this was so important for their future. Lots of them are much older. I'm surprised how old some of the kids were. We were 21, 22.

SZTUK: [00:31:51] Almost your age?

JONES: [00:31:52] I had one kid once say to me, I'm going to be out for two days because my wife just had a baby and I just said, oh, fine. Congratulations. So they were a lot older than you would be. Not all of them. Some of them were over what we would say was an appropriate age, but they were a mixture and they tended to be on the older side. And summers were once again, they sort of replicate it, because they need people to teach in summer schools. Because teachers had to go to summer schools, especially the ones who had not gone to university, so they had to go. But a bit of a change because I was able to go to another part of the country, which was very nice. And it was also a provincial capital but on a whole different scale, much more rural, much more. No electricity. Water during the day, but not 24 hours, and things like that.

SZTUK: [00:32:50] And this was your second year?

JONES: [00:32:52] In between first and second year, during summer vacation.

SZTUK: [00:32:55] So wasn't permanent?

JONES: [00:32:56] No, it wasn't permanent. That was like a two-month assignment. And so that was great and exposed me to a different part of the country and very interesting, exposed me to people who were teaching. And I enjoyed that, and it was a very good seeing another part of the country. When I finished at the comprehensive high school, I remember I was staying on in Ethiopia and I always remember this. The program was overwhelmingly education, overwhelmingly education. Towards my last two years there, they were exploring other things. Now I actually liked education. I didn't mind that. I enjoyed it, it was something I knew I felt I could do. I remember when I was in the Peace Corps office in Addis Ababa and I said, you know, I'm planning to stay on. And they said, that's OK and everything like that. I remember walking into someone's office who was involved with assignments and everything like that.

JONES: [00:33:54] And I walked in and he looked at me and said. He reminded me of that movie, The Graduate, with the guy at the beginning who says plastics. And I walk in his office. He looks at me. He goes, windmills. I said, windmills? Windmills. You could do windmills. I said, I'm from Philadelphia. I went to school in Washington. I don't know anything about windmills. I've never seen a windmill. I don't know what windmills do. And he said, wouldn't you like to learn? And I said, no. I said, no, I don't care about learning about windmills. I don't like heights. Do you have to go up high? And he said, well, I mean, yes. I said, well, why would I want to do that? I like what I've done for the last two years. Why would I want to go and change to windmills?

JONES: [00:34:47] He says, all right. We'll reassign you to a teacher training institute where we teach kids who in those days, they were people who had, kids who had gone to 10th grade, and then they would go to 11th and 12th grade training to be elementary school teachers.

SZTUK: [00:35:06] OK.

JONES: [00:35:06] They were boarding facilities. The kids would live there. They were very nice, very well-maintained, small. And so I was back there. I liked it. It was a different cast of characters, both on the teaching faculty.

SZTUK: [00:35:21] Was this back in Dessie?

JONES: [00:35:22] This was in Debre Birhan. It's a different town, north of Addis also. In fact, you passed through that town when you were on the way to my first assignment. And that was, uh, I liked the town very much. I actually really enjoyed, actually to tell the truth, I liked those last, the time in Debre Birhan more than I enjoyed. I enjoyed both. But the friendships I made in Debre Birhan were stronger, maintained for a longer period of time. And I really I did enjoy that quite a bit. The teacher training institute was fine. Um, the best part of it, the part that I really enjoyed and I think anybody would enjoy this, was the practice teaching. Because the practice teaching was always done in rural areas. So you would walk with a usually maybe with another teacher or with the student who was being assigned to teach there. Usually he was already there.

JONES: [00:36:24] So you would walk out, not enormous. Maybe walk for an hour or two hours, or if you were lucky somebody would give you a ride. There is a road there. And so you would go into the classroom. And of course, like any practice teacher, you would sit in the back. You had a form and notes on how to encourage the very young person who was up teaching there. And that was great fun. I learned so much.

SZTUK: [00:36:50] And then you got to visit a lot of villages.

JONES: [00:36:51] Visit a lot of rural places. Visit, you know, sit in a classroom of first and second graders, see how they were dressed, how far they came to go to the school, and things like that. That was absolutely wonderful. And as I said, the counterparts, my counterparts who were teaching at the teacher training institute, or some of them were at the local high school in that town. We were not at the high school, we were at a separate campus. But I got to know them and it was a great feeling. It was a very good experience.

SZTUK: [00:37:31] So were there also other Peace Corps at that place or were you?

JONES: [00:37:34] There was one other Peace Corps volunteer in that area. There were two Brits. There were two Swedes. The faculty was more Ethiopian and not so much the national service teachers, but the regular people who graduated from the university education faculty who were teaching young people who were going to teach in elementary school.

SZTUK: [00:38:00] So in your off hours, what did your social life involve? Kind of a mix of teachers?

JONES: [00:38:08] Usually involved other teachers.

SZTUK: [00:38:10] Both locals and some of these other ex-pats?

JONES: [00:38:11] Oh yes. Yeah, well, some of the, yeah, I was very friendly with a couple of the Brits, but I got to know. For some reason there were a large number of Ethiopians from Eritrea, not now Ethiopians, but Eritreans in the town. And they were extremely friendly and we would. We had a wonderful time. We had a very, very good time. And I know several of them still to this day, but that was good. It was interesting to see how being a teacher began to change. What happened was, remember I told you at the very beginning that there were three types of strikes?

SZTUK: [00:38:47] Mm hmm.

JONES: [00:38:47] A strike against an individual teacher in that classroom. Strikes against a director, a school administration. And we had a very nasty one. Those were happened. And then the countrywide strikes. And what was happening towards my last two years was an enormous increase in politicization of the student body and radicalization of the student body. Now my philosophy, I think the philosophy of all Peace Corps volunteers, is your politics is your business. We are not here to get involved in politics. You go on strike about politics, that's your business. We don't want to get involved in it.

SZTUK: [00:39:30] Right.

JONES: [00:39:30] That was the wisest thing to be. Inevitably, it tended to be as happened finally in Ethiopia, the revolution. It tended to be on the left, which inevitably put volunteers and the United States in general in sort of an awkward position. The U.S. had always been a very friendly country to Ethiopia and to the emperor's government. And so there was increasing at the university, tension, strikes, riots, tear gas, that sort of thing. The Peace Corps office, there's my third year, in Addis Ababa had to move from where they had been for many years, which had been near the university campus, because students always would rally and march to the Peace Corps office and throw rocks at it and break windows and things like that. So they end up getting a new office way, way, way out on the edge of town. The theory being the students will never walk all the way out here, and they never did.

SZTUK: [00:40:38] Why would they target the Peace Corps office? What was their perception?

JONES: [00:40:42] Oh, because we were American in Ethiopia.

SZTUK: [00:40:45] OK.

JONES: [00:40:45] And I mean, we were. If you asked the average Ethiopian how he ever encountered American. There was a U.S. military base up in Eritrea. But other than that, you met, um, you didn't meet the USAID people. I'm sure their technical counterparts did. But I mean, in terms of actually in the grassroots interacting with other, with university students, national service teachers, and things like that. I mean, it did not end friendships, but it certainly, you began to think this is going to be very difficult to maintain. Certainly at my, what was it called? The final conference you have when you're exiting the country.

SZTUK: [00:41:28] Close of service.

JONES: [00:41:28] Close of service conference. The volunteers voiced great pessimism about the ability of newly assigned volunteers to function in

that environment. Because if you had been there for a while, all right, everyone sort of knew you and everything like that. But if you were new, it was going to be very difficult. And so that evolution leading up to and towards the eventual revolution, it did not make it easy for Peace Corps. It made it much more difficult. Schools being closed for enormous amounts of time led to enormous frustration for volunteers. The country director at that point, who was someone I liked, actually, I liked all of our country directors. I didn't, I wasn't, didn't know them extraordinarily well. But I, actually, as you know, any country director, he was fine.

JONES: [00:42:32] One country director, when the disturbances and student riots were going on, I remember that was also going on in the U.S. So there was sort of this, uh, you had it at both ends of the pipeline. And certainly that country director, whom I liked and I thought was a very good country director, encouraged the many volunteers who chose to terminate early then simply because he did not see it ending. And there were a lot of questions about the role of volunteers and of the U.S. in the country at that time. So it became difficult. The volunteers did stay there right up to the revolution, though in much smaller numbers. I think they left, I think they were told to leave the year after the revolution.

SZTUK: [00:43:31] What year was that?

JONES: [00:43:33] The revolution was in '74. The volunteer program ended in '75. But you could see that coming, not the details of how it worked out, but the strikes were going on every year. You would lose enormous amounts of the school year.

SZTUK: [00:43:53] And then while these strikes were going on, what did you do? You couldn't teach. You weren't at school.

JONES: [00:43:57] You couldn't teach. You stayed away from mobs, crowds. You stayed at home. You read a book. Sometimes you, if it looked like was going to go on for some time, you might go to Addis Ababa. You might go to parts of the country as a tourist who, uh.

SZTUK: [00:44:17] So that must have been frustrating.

JONES: [00:44:19] That was frustrating for everybody, staff, Peace Corps staff and Peace Corps volunteers. Also, the uncertainty, I think, was difficult. And the people were alarmed at the potential for security problems. There had been a security problem in one town where people had been beaten up, so this, it was changing. Volunteers were not opposed to that, as inevitably were said at meetings, we're all university students in America. We know how students get involved in politics. So no one on the Peace Corps side was saying, you shouldn't do this, to their students. We were apprised and I think correctly that, well, whether they should do it or they shouldn't do it isn't our call. We are volunteers and we're foreigners.

JONES: [00:45:20] So that became, it was becoming increasingly difficult. I never personally had a difficult time because of politics, though the national service teachers who were assigned to the schools were sort of the engine of student unrest and disruption, and you did see a change in attitude. So that was a very big change in Ethiopia. And it certainly affected Peace Corps. I also worked in two training programs for volunteers in Ethiopia.

SZTUK: [00:46:00] For new groups that came in?

JONES: [00:46:01] Yeah, for new groups. And that was also, I enjoyed that a lot. And we did that in two towns in a coffee producing area. And that was interesting watching. And at that point, all training took place in-country. They had a preparatory week or something in the States, but everybody came and did their entire three months in country, which was different than our experience. And that, I enjoyed that tremendously. It was great meeting new volunteers. It was great listening to the same questions on the certainty that we had all had and seeing reactions. Some people went home as happens in any training program. Others stayed and were wonderful, and that was very enjoyable. And that would be three months. I did that two summers in a row. So I really, I did like that a lot.

SZTUK: [00:46:58] So you liked the country enough that you extended for a year?

JONES: [00:47:02] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:47:03] It must've been hard when you finally had to leave.

JONES: [00:47:05] Yeah, I was ready to leave, you know.

SZTUK: [00:47:08] Decided you probably needed a change?

JONES: [00:47:08] Can't go on forever. It's just not healthy for me. I have a life to live and it's not there. So I was very, you know, I was ready to leave. I enjoyed coming back. There's all the, I think, and one of the things I think the National Peace Corps Association is good at is reaching out to returned volunteers because I think it is very disorienting when you come back. And you have a two-year period or longer, in some cases, that's very, very meaningful to you and allows you to come right out of, in those days, right out of college. It's different today. Peace Corps is different, and I think better today in that sense. But you come out and you have this intense experience and it's wonderful and everything like that. And you come back, and I'm sure the first experience you have is life isn't measuring up. I mean, this is not. I'm supposed to be always on.

SZTUK: [00:48:06] Try and get back to the routine.

JONES: [00:48:07] Yeah. So I actually returned to the States and what did I do, what so many volunteers do? I go back to school. So I went and got my MBA and after that went to work with a large American corporation, that point was the 32nd largest corporation in America. I did finance work for them for a couple of years, which I did not like. I didn't like financial work, wasn't especially good at it. And then I transferred down to their government relations office. I was a lobbyist for like 13 years, which I did like very, very much. I'd been a government relations, a government major in undergraduate school. So I really enjoyed that. I thought that was great fun. And in the beginning. So I did that. I enjoyed and liked my colleagues very much. I liked what we were doing.

JONES: [00:48:54] In 1980, at the very end of 1984, I was sitting at home and I got a phone call from an old Peace Corps friend of mine who had been a volunteer and then had also worked in training programs. And he calls up

and I said, hey, how are you doing? And so we chat. We had kept in touch, but I didn't know exactly what he was doing. And he said, I'm calling about Ethiopia. Now Ethiopia had just been on national television right around Thanksgiving of '84 because of the enormous famine that had broken out. And he said every NGO in America was flooded with money, more money than they had ever imagined coming in. And he was at that point working with Save the Children. And he called up. He'd been working with them for a couple of years. He called up and said, Save the Children has never had a program in Ethiopia, and we need to staff up with some people who know something about Ethiopia because no one here knows anything about Ethiopia.

JONES: [00:50:00] He said, would you be interested in the job? So I said, well, you know, I have a job that I like and I'm not really sure that I want to leave it. And um, I just don't know. And I said, let me think about it. So I thought about it. And I thought, well, let's see, the great compromise. So I thought, hmm, I wonder if I could just do this on a leave of absence basis. So I went to my boss, actually had a very good boss at that point where I was working, and I said, well, of course, you saw the television about Ethiopia. He says, oh yes, it's horrible, horrible, horrible. I said, well, I have this opportunity to go to Ethiopia, and I'd like to go for a year to 18 months just to help them start their program there. Do you think I could get a leave of absence?

JONES: [00:50:55] Uh, this is really a stupid idea. Why do you want to do this? But he was a good boss. He said, I can give you a leave of absence for a year or two, maximum 18 months. That's it. So I call up my friend and say I can take it for a certain period. He said, that's fine. We just need to get the thing working. So I went out and I was the assistant director. I was the field office director. I was the assistant, the AFOD, as we called it, the assistant field office director. And it was wonderful to be back in the country. That was such a difficult time. The communist government was very difficult. The famine was horrible. I remember connecting with old friends and everyone was so frightened and nervous in general, talking with you and things like that. And I always remember people would say, I don't know if you follow Ethiopia, but there had been the whole period of

the red terror, the white terror, and the government had been very, very tough. There had been enormous killings and things.

JONES: [00:51:56] And I remember all conversations. It was a bit exhausting. I would see people who I had taught with, friends of mine and things like that, and they would say. They would always start the conversation by saying, do you know what's going on here? And I would say, well, yes, I have been reading about this. And they would say, it's horrible. Did you hear what happened to so-and-so? So-and-so and so-and-so. They were all horror. People in jail, people killed, things like that. And, you know, I had to talk about, you know, what was my. So that was a wonderful being there for almost 18 months, over a year. You know, being able to help in some small way with that was very, very important. In some ways, it gave me, I think Peace Corps put me on the ground and introduced me to the Third World, the importance of education and things like that.

JONES: [00:52:55] Save the Children introduced me not just to relief, but to issues of development that we had not dealt with in the Peace Corps. I think that's probably different today, but we were an education program. We were not a development organization. And so I learned an enormous amount from that period with Save the Children. And learned enormous amounts from Peace Corps. The Peace Corps was more or less putting you on the ground and saying, do you like it? Can you function? Do you see how people live? Do you see what their needs are? And things like that. Save allowed me to see things in a more sophisticated developmental context. And that was extremely valuable. So I did that. I returned to the. And I was saying how, you know, the difficult time that everybody was having.

JONES: [00:53:54] And I would certainly say it led to enormous numbers of students either ending up, people I had taught all over the country, an enormous number, ending up in jail. Several people from the school I taught in being killed during all the upheaval. And large numbers being refugees. In Washington, you see that everywhere. And I would say probably one of the, you know, you go to a country hoping these people who are educators or you're working with are going to push the country forward. It got so involved in the difficulties of the revolutionary period and

some of the horrible things that happened, that so many of your best students ended up maybe dead or in Europe or North America. It was very disappointing. I don't blame them, I mean, what would I have done in that situation? Probably the same thing, but it's a disappointment.

JONES: [00:55:00] But going back and seeing it, you know, what was that, in 1984? So I was there for '85 and a little bit of '86. That was wonderful. That was good. I returned to my job and my old employer in the government relations office, which I still liked. But I thought, gee, there's a different world out there.

SZTUK: [00:55:24] Now that you'd seen Save the Children.

JONES: [00:55:25] One can do other things, which I was not really very focused on before. So being fairly conservative and vesting in those days was a 10 year process. So I got through my 10 years of corporate life, a little bit more than 10 years. And someone brought to my attention that the American Red Cross did things other than blood services and domestic disaster response, had an entire international program. And they were looking for someone to run their international operations. Actually, the person who brought this to my attention was an Ethiopian.

SZTUK: [00:56:10] Oh, somebody that you'd known from your Peace Corps time?

JONES: [00:56:12] I had known relatives of his when I was in Ethiopia. I did not know him directly. I met him here. Very nice guy. And he brought that to my attention. At first I thought, hmm, I don't know. I looked at it. I thought, what the hell? I might as well try this. So I went and had an interview. And they interviewed several people. So I got the job and I love that, I loved. I was with them for like 15 years, always doing international stuff. Some things in Ethiopia. I got to know the Ethiopian Red Cross quite well. But mainly a lot of things in Latin America, a lot of things in Asia. And I just, I enjoyed it. Eventually went from being director of operations to being the vice president for the whole thing, which was good. I felt very great about that ego satisfaction.

SZTUK: [00:57:03] Yeah.

JONES: [00:57:06] A lot of time in, uh, boy, if you think your life is bureaucratic? Peace Corps, um, Red Cross can be very bureaucratic. A lot of time in Geneva working with the other Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations, but it was wonderful job. But at that time, by that time I was married. How Ethiopia keeps popping up in my life. I married an Ethiopian. One of the best decisions I ever made.

SZTUK: [00:57:36] But this wasn't while you were volunteer, this is years after?

JONES: [00:57:39] No, someone I met in New York.

SZTUK: [00:57:45] OK.

JONES: [00:57:45] So we had always talked about spending some time in Ethiopia. My wife's family was there. She had not been there for a very, very long time. She had left Ethiopia and gone to Russia and then came to the U.S. So this was something always on our radar screen. So I had decided that 15 years was enough at Red Cross. As much as I liked it, it was getting to be the same thing. Get a grant, do this. Get some money. Run a program. When you feel like that, it's time to move on. And so I had been a modest donor to a NGO, and I had alerted a large number of people on my listserv, my email listserv, that I was leaving the stage, leaving the American Red Cross, and I would be going to Ethiopia.

JONES: [00:58:47] And the organization contacted me because they needed a country director. That was a very fortuitous, very, uh, a stroke of good fortune. And so we went back to Ethiopia and we, uh, I stayed with that job for seven years. And it was great coming back to a very different country in many ways, a much better country, a country that had much better social indicators than it had years ago. Everybody was in school, so it seemed. Health indicators were better. Development was a number one priority. It was not, you know, it wasn't Switzerland, but it wasn't an oppressive place. I have to be careful saying that because some Ethiopians would say it was, and I don't want to get involved in that, but it was not a horror show as it had been during the communist period. So that was a great fun.

JONES: [00:59:52] Obviously, all of these subsequent events would never have happened had I not joined Peace Corps and been sent to Ethiopia. The subsequent time with Save the Children during the great famine, the many years with Red Cross, I would not have dreamed of doing that, and that really got me into relief and development work in the Third World. And then finally, my last seven years in Ethiopia with this other organization, which exposed me once again to a lot of education type things. So it would be, and of course, marrying someone from Ethiopia and continuing to have family there. Um, it would be difficult to overstate the role that a Peace Corps has played in my life.

SZTUK: [01:00:48] One decision back, that one decision you made back in 1961.

JONES: [01:00:53] Yes, I didn't listen to my brother when he shrieked with laughter and said, number one, it's never going to happen, meaning the Peace Corps, and number two, what would they do with you when they had you there? So it did work out.

SZTUK: [01:01:08] Great. Looking back at the days of your Peace Corps service, now we're going to wind back the clock. What do you think were some of your main accomplishments there?

JONES: [01:01:24] Well, I think the accomplishments that any teacher wants to make, and it was an education program, so we were part of a structure. You can't claim, and I would not pretend to, that I somehow, you know, helped develop Ethiopia. In fact, as results occurred, large numbers of the people I probably taught have not been involved with that due to circumstances beyond their control. So I think simply being part of, as I said, 50 percent of the teaching staff in Ethiopian high schools who had college degrees. Teaching in a very different manner than probably was the custom, not as top down, not as rote memory, not as maybe passive on the student's part, as was traditional. I think the, um, I think the interaction with peers, with other teachers, counterparts, was meaningful, and it's probably something that Peace Corps wanted to accomplish.

JONES: [01:02:55] I was really delighted when I was there in '85 during the big famine, the number of people I had talked with who found the Save the Children office and said, I heard you were in town. We have to, you know, get together and talk and everything like that. And I thought, well, there's a connection, a link there. So I thought that was very, very important. So the most, the biggest accomplishment was seeing through the mission, the job description, doing it, liking it. I hope they liked it. So that was, that was a big thing.

SZTUK: [01:03:31] Biggest disappointment?

JONES: [01:03:33] Probably the subsequent events that probably made the life of my, both my counterparts and my students, very, very difficult, and that's beyond your control. It's the country working out its future, which you are an observer. You're not a participant. And that, you know, had some things that were disappointing I think to all the volunteers that were there. But whether it's disappointing to us or gratifying to us, that's not really the bottom line. It's how did it work for the people in the country and they have to make the decision on that. But that was maybe a shadow over the whole thing, the way situations ended.

SZTUK: [01:04:23] Yeah, yeah. Well, it's unfortunate that happened. Yeah. All right. Well, OK, if there's nothing else.

JONES: [01:04:30] The NPCA is doing a great job. I really appreciate the National Peace Corps Association. I think they're getting that. But that has reinvigorated the returned Peace Corps volunteer community, and I'm tremendously appreciative of the work they do.

SZTUK: [01:04:51] I'll pass that on.

JONES: [01:04:52] Yeah.

SZTUK: [01:04:53] All right. Thanks very much.

JONES: [01:04:54] Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]