

Ruth Ann Van Hala Oral History Interview
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Biographical Note

Ruth Ann Van Hala (nee Stanonik) served as a Peace Corps volunteer in India from 1965 to 1968 on a poultry project.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Ruth Ann Van Hala

November 17, 2001
Moreno Valley, California

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:04] This is Bob Klein. Today is November 17th, 2001. I am speaking, interviewing Ruth Ann Stanonik.

VAN HALA: [00:00:15] Stanonik.

KLEIN: [00:00:15] Stanonik Van Hala, who lives in Moreno Valley, California. She was a volunteer in India, 1965 to '68. The way we usually start is I ask people to go back to the time, oh, six months or a year before you joined the Peace Corps and give us some idea of what you were doing. You can go back into your own background at that point and then we'll come up toward your deciding to join.

VAN HALA: [00:00:47] Okay. I was attending college the years before I joined the Peace Corps and I, I had met President Kennedy when I was touring with my senior high school group in the White House so.

KLEIN: [00:01:00] Where did you go to high school?

VAN HALA: [00:01:04] I went to high school at, in Ohio, and Mantua Corners was where we lived. But the school was called Crestwood High School. It was a conglomeration of several of the cities around. I had been raised in Hiram, Ohio, and I just moved over to this area.

KLEIN: [00:01:20] And what kind of area was it, farming or?

VAN HALA: [00:01:24] Um, Hiram, where I spent most of my years was a small college town, but Mantua Corners more or less was an agricultural cum bedroom city becoming bedroom city for the outlying cities of Streetsboro, Akron, Cleveland. We were in a triangle between Cleveland, Akron, and Youngstown.

KLEIN: [00:01:44] What was the occasion for your meeting President Kennedy?

VAN HALA: [00:01:48] I was on our senior trip. We had raised money for our trip to Washington, and we were touring the White House and we were just at the end of the tour, a friend of mine, a girlfriend and I. And she turned around and I turned around. And President Kennedy had come down from the elevator from up above. And all of a sudden several of the other tourists were turning around and running after him. We came over more slowly, and of course, we were very much in awe.

KLEIN: [00:02:17] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:02:18] And I managed to get a little thumb shake in there. So it was very, it was a very important occasion. And since when I went to college, I decided I would major in social studies and history and look for.

KLEIN: [00:02:35] What year was it, the senior?

VAN HALA: [00:02:37] This occurred in 1961. I graduated in '61. So it was the spring of that year.

KLEIN: [00:02:43] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:02:44] And, um.

KLEIN: [00:02:44] Had you studied the Peace Corps? At that point, had you heard of it?

VAN HALA: [00:02:48] No, it was just, I don't think I had, I don't remember at that point whether I had heard about it, but I think I heard about it a few years after that. And I had been thinking about joining.

KLEIN: [00:03:00] Yeah, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:03:01] Of course, I was still in college. And so I did take a, I was able to get a, it's not a scholarship, but an award to go to do a three month study in Washington, or no, a six month study in Washington called Washington Semester Program when I was a junior in college. And I went to Hiram College.

KLEIN: [00:03:22] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:03:23] And in that program, we were sent all over Washington, and that would have been in 1960. Actually, it was right after President Kennedy was killed. I had asked to be in that program hoping, you know, we'd get back in there and get some government work done and so forth. But then he was killed and it was in the, uh, from January till June of '64 that I attended that program.

KLEIN: [00:03:47] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:03:48] I became very interested in that type of work. And because we had had seminars with a lot of government officials and we were sent around to many, many different departments.

KLEIN: [00:03:58] And what were you majoring in?

VAN HALA: [00:04:00] Political science and history.

KLEIN: [00:04:03] Any long-term goal at that point?

VAN HALA: [00:04:05] I, at that point, I had hoped to go into government work of some type. I didn't know what kind. But, um, then I heard about the Peace Corps and I thought, well, after I graduated, this would be a good thing to go into before I make up my mind about going to graduate school or whatever I was going to do.

KLEIN: [00:04:24] Do you particularly remember how you, how you heard about it?

VAN HALA: [00:04:29] I can't remember. I think it was just advertisements, probably.

KLEIN: [00:04:33] Okay. Anyone would come on campus and talk?

VAN HALA: [00:04:36] No, no. No, I didn't hear anything like that. Hiram was pretty conservative. At any rate, I was very interested in traveling, so I thought this would be good.

KLEIN: [00:04:51] So you were coming close then to your finishing?

VAN HALA: [00:04:54] Right. And I didn't ask for any particular area.

KLEIN: [00:04:57] Do you recall the application process?

VAN HALA: [00:05:00] Oh, pages and pages and pages and pages.

KLEIN: [00:05:04] Uh huh.

VAN HALA: [00:05:04] And then we took a very long test.

KLEIN: [00:05:07] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:05:07] And I still remember part of that test today.

KLEIN: [00:05:10] Right, which part?

VAN HALA: [00:05:11] I remember the part where they had words on paper that were only partially seen. Well, this was easy because, of course, in school we had been reading dittos, which we can never read. And when I was, you know, since I've been teaching, we still used dittos for years later. And the kids would always say, we can't read this. Pft, you can read it. Just look at it a little more carefully. What do you think those letters might be?

KLEIN: [00:05:36] And did you study any foreign language?

VAN HALA: [00:05:39] In college, well, in high school, I studied Latin two years, and then I also studied French in college, two years of French and one year of Russian. And when we, when we went to India with the Peace Corps training, we had training in learning Hindi.

KLEIN: [00:05:56] Yeah, well we'll get to that. So as of completing college, you had your bachelor's degree.

VAN HALA: [00:06:02] Right.

KLEIN: [00:06:02] And had you applied at that point before graduation?

VAN HALA: [00:06:07] Yes, I think I started the application process in January of my last year.

KLEIN: [00:06:13] Did you have any fallback? In other words, if I don't get in the Peace Corps then?

VAN HALA: [00:06:17] Right. I had gotten, despite not wanting to, my high school certification for teaching.

KLEIN: [00:06:23] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:06:24] As a fall back.

KLEIN: [00:06:26] Well, since you mentioned, you characterized, you said that Hiram was somewhat conservative.

VAN HALA: [00:06:31] Very.

KLEIN: [00:06:31] How did people, friends, family, colleagues react to your wanting to join the Peace Corps?

VAN HALA: [00:06:38] Well, I was very surprised that I had been selected to go to India because I didn't even know India was part of their program. And when I found out I was going to be working with a poultry project, I told people, oh, I'm, I'm going to India to work with a poultry project. And they thought I said poetry project, because coming from a liberal arts college, they hadn't expected anybody to go into that type of thing. And I really hadn't had any experience with poultry raising other than the fact that when I lived in Mantua there was a chicken farm near us and I did wash eggs. That's as close as I got to them.

KLEIN: [00:07:15] Do you remember whether you had put that down on your application?

VAN HALA: [00:07:17] Yes, I did. I did. That must have got them. So I had washed eggs for several years, earning pennies.

KLEIN: [00:07:27] Yes. Yeah. But did people think you were absolutely crazy or did they think that, you know, what in the world are they doing, sending you to India?

VAN HALA: [00:07:37] They, once I explained it, I think they thought I was a little crazy.

KLEIN: [00:07:40] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:07:41] And what are you doing that for? But I've always been a person that likes to do different things so.

KLEIN: [00:07:48] How about your family?

VAN HALA: [00:07:49] My family. I have three brothers and two sisters and my mom's a nurse. And my dad was at that time, he was working for the Ravenna Arsenal as he's a steamer. He was a steam fitter, pipe fitter. He was in charge of his group there. And they always let me do what I wanted to do as long as I was really definite about it. I mean, they didn't put clamps on me.

KLEIN: [00:08:14] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:08:15] I mean, I was not a person that was going to go do some weird thing.

KLEIN: [00:08:20] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:08:22] They, um, they had had a little experience in that because of what, when I was a freshman in college, I, I applied for this job that said Maids for New York. And they had thought this was arranged through the college and it wasn't. It was some fly by night operation that was going to lock us in a room. We got there, we took out a bus ticket to New York, and they were going to, if we didn't get a job, they were going to lock us up because they had paid for our tickets. And so I was the only white person in the whole group.

KLEIN: [00:08:53] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:08:55] And it was a little scary there. But I did get hired and.

KLEIN: [00:09:00] As a maid?

VAN HALA: [00:09:00] Yes, as a maid. I worked as a maid one whole summer.

KLEIN: [00:09:04] In the city or out?

VAN HALA: [00:09:05] It was in the New Jersey side of New York City.

KLEIN: [00:09:09] Okay. Was it someone's summer home or?

VAN HALA: [00:09:12] No, it was a kind of a fanatic family. They, they were extremely concerned about everything being nit-picky clean.

KLEIN: [00:09:22] Oh, my goodness.

VAN HALA: [00:09:23] And the husband and wife didn't really get along, but they were quote unquote friends. So, at any rate, I just. She would come around with a white glove and everything. I mean, she was. I was on my hands and knees for hours scrubbing out waxed floors that had been waxed for years and never cleaned off.

KLEIN: [00:09:44] And how long do you last at that job?

VAN HALA: [00:09:46] Three months. When she found out I was going back to college, she had a fit.

KLEIN: [00:09:49] Yeah. She didn't know that?

VAN HALA: [00:09:51] No, she didn't ask me.

KLEIN: [00:09:53] Oh.

VAN HALA: [00:09:53] They were so glad to find a white person.

KLEIN: [00:09:55] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:09:56] I mean, they were very bigoted.

KLEIN: [00:09:57] Yeah, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:09:58] Prejudiced. So they didn't ask me that and I didn't tell them. At any rate, I told them after a couple of weeks being there that I would be leaving to go back to school and they had a fit, so they just stomped and raged and then they reduced my, my fee and kept me locked up more. I mean, my payment, my salary.

KLEIN: [00:10:24] So you survived?

VAN HALA: [00:10:25] Yeah, I survived that. I mean, they rationed the food and everything. I only got a little teeny bit of food every day and.

KLEIN: [00:10:30] Oh, funny.

VAN HALA: [00:10:32] These rich people.

KLEIN: [00:10:34] Yeah. And this was when, when in your college career?

VAN HALA: [00:10:39] I was at the end of my freshman year going into sophomore summer.

KLEIN: [00:10:45] And by the time you graduated college, had you done any travel outside the United States?

VAN HALA: [00:10:52] I think when we were, I was very young, we went to Canada, but mostly my parents didn't go anywhere.

KLEIN: [00:10:57] Right. Right. And then during college, you didn't, you went places but within the United States?

VAN HALA: [00:11:03] I, okay, let's see. Yeah, I know I'd been in Washington and, of course, lived in Cleveland for a while. I worked in Cleveland during my junior year in an internship program there. But I had not traveled anywhere, I don't think, outside the United States.

KLEIN: [00:11:16] Do you recall getting the notification that you were being invited to India?

VAN HALA: [00:11:21] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:11:21] With the Peace Corps.

VAN HALA: [00:11:22] Very excited about it.

KLEIN: [00:11:24] Did you did you have any idea where India was or what?

VAN HALA: [00:11:27] Oh, yes. I had studied Indian religions, just that, not knowing I was going there.

KLEIN: [00:11:34] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:11:34] And I had already studied that and I was very interested in the country already and it had quite a history. So, and since being a history major, I, I don't know if I took a history of India, but I was reading up on it.

KLEIN: [00:11:46] So you had no hesitation about.

VAN HALA: [00:11:47] Oh, no. I know people told me that it was going to be terrible in terms of the poverty and all of that.

KLEIN: [00:11:53] Yeah. People back.

VAN HALA: [00:11:57] I think that we were, we were very well. During the training, we were very well prepared for that.

KLEIN: [00:12:00] Yeah. So then you're accepted, you finish your degree.

VAN HALA: [00:12:06] Right.

KLEIN: [00:12:07] And how soon after did you report?

VAN HALA: [00:12:09] Immediately. I think within a week or two of the end of my school, graduating, we went right to training.

KLEIN: [00:12:18] Did you go into training with the expectation that you would go from training directly to India or that you would have a chance to come back home for a leave? Do you recall that?

VAN HALA: [00:12:30] It didn't really matter to me because I really had lived away from home when I was in college. But, um, I think they told us we were going to have a short leave before we went.

KLEIN: [00:12:43] I mean, you have to pack up and stuff like that.

VAN HALA: [00:12:45] And I also remember I was trying to get my driver's license.

KLEIN: [00:12:49] Mm hmm.

VAN HALA: [00:12:51] And I had tried several times, but I, at that, when I was young, I was so nervous that every time I went in there to take that test, I couldn't do it. I was so cautious. And finally, this last time, I ended up driving a car that was not even mine, and I wasn't familiar with it even. And I was just determined I was going to get it. And I think the guy finally got tired of seeing me there and he said, well, you can learn how to drive in India. And I told him I was going to India. That's probably how I got my license. I didn't realize I wasn't going to be driving a car in India.

KLEIN: [00:13:24] Did the local paper make note of the fact that you had joined and it was Peace Corps in India?

VAN HALA: [00:13:30] Uh, probably did, but I, I don't know if. My parents cleaned out most of my stuff and threw it out, I think.

KLEIN: [00:13:39] Yeah. It's interesting, you're of the early generation of people who joined the Peace Corps after Kennedy had died. And, of course, in the early days, joining was always somehow related to President Kennedy.

VAN HALA: [00:13:54] Right. I saw him as quite a role model at that time.

KLEIN: [00:13:58] Uh huh.

VAN HALA: [00:13:58] He and his brother, having worked so hard with the civil rights and everything. Of course, that really came after we were over in India but.

KLEIN: [00:14:05] Yeah, yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:14:07] Just his ideas were so different from what, and of course, my parents were Democrats. They were solid Democrats so.

KLEIN: [00:14:14] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:14:15] This was, uh. And to have such a young president.

KLEIN: [00:14:20] Yeah. So, I mean, go in '65 when you went in, there was there was still some association.

VAN HALA: [00:14:26] Oh, yes. I mean, just the idea of the Peace Corps, I thought was such a great idea. And I knew he had started and Sargent Shriver was carrying it out.

KLEIN: [00:14:36] You reported for training.

VAN HALA: [00:14:39] Right.

KLEIN: [00:14:39] To?

VAN HALA: [00:14:40] Well.

KLEIN: [00:14:41] Tell me where.

VAN HALA: [00:14:42] We went to Annapolis, Maryland. St. John's College.

KLEIN: [00:14:46] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:14:46] And I was assigned, of course, the women's dorm. And our training consisted of getting up early in the morning for exercise

program. We did a Royal Canadian Air Force exercise program and then we did running.

KLEIN: [00:15:03] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:15:04] We were running the mile by the end, which to me was a lot. Nowadays it's nothing. But those days nobody jogged.

KLEIN: [00:15:11] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:15:12] So at any rate, we went to classes all day long, had a little break for dinner, of course, lunch and dinner. And then we went on in the evening till like 10:30, 11:00. So it was very intensive training.

KLEIN: [00:15:29] How long was it scheduled for, the?

VAN HALA: [00:15:32] It was, I believe, about 12 weeks.

KLEIN: [00:15:35] Okay. And do you remember the number of approximate number of trainees?

VAN HALA: [00:15:40] There were about 103 or so.

KLEIN: [00:15:43] Do you recall the male female break on that?

VAN HALA: [00:15:47] I think it was half and half, but I'm not really sure. I don't.

KLEIN: [00:15:50] And at that point, did you know that you were about to become India 16? It was there?

VAN HALA: [00:15:58] I think so. We were, I think we were called India 16 from the beginning.

KLEIN: [00:16:02] Okay. Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:16:03] And I really can't remember how many women there were compared to men.

KLEIN: [00:16:07] Yeah, that's, that's okay.

VAN HALA: [00:16:10] I didn't pay attention to that, I guess.

KLEIN: [00:16:12] Were you on a seven day a week schedule with the training or did you get?

VAN HALA: [00:16:15] I, it seems to me we were, because we always had to take care of the chickens.

KLEIN: [00:16:21] Was that from day one?

VAN HALA: [00:16:22] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:16:23] And tell me about taking care of the chickens.

VAN HALA: [00:16:25] Well, our classes consisted of learning Hindi, of course, which was usually in set conversations to memorize, for learning how to take care of chickens. And also we had to do cultural classes. And of course, the physical training part, just getting ourselves in shape. And, um, let's see. And then just, I think some history classes about India just to give us information.

KLEIN: [00:16:56] Was there anything in the name of American studies, learning about U.S.? You mentioned Great Books.

VAN HALA: [00:17:03] Oh, yes. We, um, we used the Great Books to, as a guideline to. We did a lot of reading in those areas and then discussed them in relation to some of the things we might meet as we got to India.

KLEIN: [00:17:17] Oh.

VAN HALA: [00:17:19] Now you had asked about whether we have seven day a week training. I know we must have had some let-up on Saturdays and Sundays, but I don't can't recall exactly.

KLEIN: [00:17:30] Do you remember when you're first checking in or during the first week or two, how you measured yourself up against the others who, you know, who were trainees? Here are a bunch of people who had joined.

VAN HALA: [00:17:42] I would have, I was. At that age, I was very, very quiet. I never said anything. And I think this was a drawback. They were concerned about me because I didn't speak up much.

KLEIN: [00:17:55] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:17:57] It's just that I was very shy and I had been raised to be seen, not heard. Six kids in a house.

KLEIN: [00:18:06] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:18:07] And I was in the middle. So at any rate, I was not accustomed to speaking my mind about things.

KLEIN: [00:18:14] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:18:16] I didn't learn how to do that till the end. I was almost 38.

KLEIN: [00:18:19] But then that must have related to the selection process.

VAN HALA: [00:18:24] They were a little concerned at the end whether I might make it or not, because.

KLEIN: [00:18:29] Do you recall what the selection process was? I mean, how? Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:18:34] Well, part of it was, of course, we had to learn how to take care of the chickens. That was easy for me and running and all the physical part, that was easy. And I had no problems with anything, um, grading and writing. I've always been very good at writing and anything that was required for grade wise, that kind of thing. But speaking was

not something I did. I would speak up once in a while, but I was very shy about that.

VAN HALA: [00:19:01] But during the final process I remember we had to completely clean out the chicken houses and take care of all of that. And then these returned Peace Corps volunteers told us we had to break the neck of a chicken in order to pass. Now, I think that was, they were just pulling our legs, but that was pretty gross. And some of the girls wouldn't do it, but I did it. And then another part of it was I remember there were a group of professors that were questioning me about being in India and they were going on and on about different things. And would I be worried about not seeing my family and not dating and all of this type of thing?

KLEIN: [00:19:44] Was it a group interviewing you?

VAN HALA: [00:19:46] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:19:46] Oh, it was?

VAN HALA: [00:19:48] About three. I think a couple of the returned volunteers and about two or three other people.

KLEIN: [00:19:55] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:19:56] It might have been the project coordinator and somebody else.

KLEIN: [00:19:58] Were the returned volunteers built into the training from the very beginning

VAN HALA: [00:20:04] Yes. They did a lot of comical things to show us some of the situations in India, skits and things. And we had a, we did some talent show type things too, as we went along.

KLEIN: [00:20:15] Were there any Indians involved in the training?

VAN HALA: [00:20:19] I believe there was one man at least who was working with us on the Hindi and some of the cultural aspects.

KLEIN: [00:20:25] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:20:25] And I'm sure when you interview my husband, you'll get more along those details.

KLEIN: [00:20:31] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:20:32] I was a very naive person at that stage of the game.

KLEIN: [00:20:37] Right. Uh. Did you have any training? So you. Was there a level of Hindi fluency you were expected to reach?

VAN HALA: [00:20:49] We had our final testing in that and I think I got an S plus or something like that, whatever, on the.

KLEIN: [00:20:58] Do you know of any in the group who were who flunked out because of the Hindi?

VAN HALA: [00:21:01] I, I don't, I don't recall anybody who flunked out because of the, the Hindi problem. There were some that either had family problems or something like that. We didn't lose too many.

KLEIN: [00:21:18] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:21:19] There were. There was one other thing I remember they did with us as part of our final training, our selection. They took us to, let's see, I guess it was somewhere around Annapolis. They took us out in the boondocks. There was a couple of different things. They took us out in the boondocks and dropped us off and wanted us to make our way for a day or two. Out in these country roads, dirt roads somewhere. And it seems like we ended up just going to some churches or something and getting some help from them. And somehow, it's kind of foggy. I can't remember everything, but I know there was another instance where they dropped us off in downtown,

some slum area. I don't know if it was Annapolis or some city right near there. And they wanted us to make our way at night in that area.

KLEIN: [00:22:15] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:22:16] And those didn't bother me any because our group worked together in small groups and we took care of whatever it was we had to do.

KLEIN: [00:22:25] It's very, I guess it's variations on the Outward Bound concept of, you know, there are points where you're challenged to face the problem.

VAN HALA: [00:22:32] Right.

KLEIN: [00:22:34] Do you recall if there were African Americans in the training?

VAN HALA: [00:22:40] Yes, I think there were. I mean, I should get out my old Peace Corps book and look through. We, we used to keep tabs with it up until about '82 when we moved out here to California. After that, we kind of lost track.

KLEIN: [00:22:53] So training went on. Was it, did it last 12 weeks?

VAN HALA: [00:22:59] Oh, yeah. As I recall, we were finished sometime near the end of August or early September, and then we went home for a week or so. That's when I got my driver's license. And then then we were told to report to New York City.

KLEIN: [00:23:12] Okay. Now let's go back to the language training. Was it your understanding that you would be working in Hindi or?

VAN HALA: [00:23:22] We were told that it would be to our benefit to know Hindi. Most of our people were going to areas where English was well spoken, though.

KLEIN: [00:23:31] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:23:32] But it's a good thing we did get the Hindi training because we were dealing with a lot of very poor people out in the rural areas and they didn't speak English.

KLEIN: [00:23:42] Now, is Hindi the common language throughout India?

VAN HALA: [00:23:46] Yes. India has at least 16 major languages.

KLEIN: [00:23:50] Yeah, that's what I thought.

VAN HALA: [00:23:51] And thousands of, hundreds of dialects. So Hindi was, and English are the universal languages in that country.

KLEIN: [00:24:01] Did anyone, did you have any sessions talking about, you studied the culture, in which you were prepared to deal with Indian English, which is not quite the same as American?

VAN HALA: [00:24:17] Right. I believe that sometimes in the skits they used the Indian English.

KLEIN: [00:24:22] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:24:25] But I can't recall it after that. It took me a while to pick it up and to talk like they are talking.

KLEIN: [00:24:31] Yes.

VAN HALA: [00:24:31] And I will listen to you. You are coming now and.

KLEIN: [00:24:34] And tuning in to the pattern, I mean. So overall, what was the role of the returned volunteers? Was it helpful? Did they overdo it? Were they like veterans trying to scare?

VAN HALA: [00:24:47] I think they were blazing a trail and I don't think anybody had given them much guidance.

KLEIN: [00:24:52] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:24:53] They weren't, you know, people who had been trained on how to teach other people or anything, but they did, it did help us. And it was encouraging to see they were still alive after the whole thing.

KLEIN: [00:25:03] Had they been in a chicken project or?

VAN HALA: [00:25:07] I can't remember what their projects were. One of them might have been, because they knew how to do the chickens.

KLEIN: [00:25:15] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:25:15] So maybe somebody must have been in one, in the chicken project.

KLEIN: [00:25:20] At the time you were going, do you have any idea what the total number of volunteers in India was, say, as about '65?

VAN HALA: [00:25:28] No.

KLEIN: [00:25:29] Did you, did you have any sense of the project?

VAN HALA: [00:25:31] I'm sure we did at the time.

KLEIN: [00:25:33] You knew.

VAN HALA: [00:25:34] There were several groups in India at the time.

KLEIN: [00:25:36] Okay. So you had a sense it was a big project.

VAN HALA: [00:25:38] Right. And there were different. There were several people in the poultry project, several different groups in that and several. Of course, we're India 16, so there were only that many totally. Um.

KLEIN: [00:25:50] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:25:51] That had been in the country in the history anyway. But I know there were some projects that were in health areas too.

KLEIN: [00:25:58] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:25:59] We were fortunate with the poultry project because that was one the state or the country of India really supported. They didn't always support the other projects.

KLEIN: [00:26:11] Do you recall final selection that, did they announce you're going and you're not or anything?

VAN HALA: [00:26:20] I don't recall that it was anything mysterious.

KLEIN: [00:26:24] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:26:26] I, I was so naive. I just figured, why wouldn't they let me go?

KLEIN: [00:26:30] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:26:31] I, it didn't bother me.

KLEIN: [00:26:33] Did you have any sense of who might be going with you? In other words, were you clustered?

VAN HALA: [00:26:36] Oh, I know that when they finally, when we finally got to India and they told us who my partner was going to be, I was disappointed. It was not one of the, they put me with a very strong-willed other girl.

KLEIN: [00:26:49] And it may have been because she was so strong.

VAN HALA: [00:26:50] Because they thought I was too meek and mild. They just didn't know me.

KLEIN: [00:26:53] Yeah. Yeah. So was there a graduation exercise?

VAN HALA: [00:26:59] We probably did have one.

KLEIN: [00:27:01] Did anyone come, do you remember anyone coming out from Washington during your training?

VAN HALA: [00:27:06] There were probably some bigwigs there.

KLEIN: [00:27:09] You didn't meet Shriver.

VAN HALA: [00:27:11] I don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:27:12] Okay. You went home for a couple of days. Did you come home as a hero? Did people?

VAN HALA: [00:27:20] Oh, my. I just came home. Nobody.

KLEIN: [00:27:25] Your folks try to discourage you at that point?

VAN HALA: [00:27:28] No.

KLEIN: [00:27:29] Or they knew you were for it.

VAN HALA: [00:27:30] My parents, my mom was a nurse. She's just always accepts what's there. Six kids. You get used to it.

KLEIN: [00:27:38] And your siblings? They must have kidded you some.

VAN HALA: [00:27:42] Meh, probably. I don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:27:44] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:27:45] Most of them were gone, were not home. I think only my younger, well, even my younger sister and brother were probably gone by then so.

KLEIN: [00:27:52] You reported to New York then. Do you remember approximately when this was?

VAN HALA: [00:27:59] We reported about, I think it was either the second or third week of September of.

KLEIN: [00:28:04] 1965.

VAN HALA: [00:28:06] '65.

KLEIN: [00:28:06] Okay. And at that point, your expectation was you were on your way to India?

VAN HALA: [00:28:10] Right.

KLEIN: [00:28:11] Do you remember where you staged in New York? Was it at a hotel?

VAN HALA: [00:28:15] We stayed at one of the hotels in New York. I don't know which one.

KLEIN: [00:28:18] That, that, yeah. So it was a hotel.

VAN HALA: [00:28:20] Right. And we were right downtown somewhere.

KLEIN: [00:28:25] Yeah. And you had a few days to.

VAN HALA: [00:28:27] Yes, we, um, when we got there, we found out. Actually we went first to the airport.

KLEIN: [00:28:34] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:28:35] And I had flown from Cleveland to the New York airport, and we were supposed to be taking off from there directly to India. But then we got the news that China was threatening to invade India in the northern areas where our Peace Corps volunteers were going to be

sent. So they decided that that would be too unsafe to send, I think there were 300 of us at that time, three different groups going in.

KLEIN: [00:29:01] Oh, so you all had gathered at the airport?

VAN HALA: [00:29:03] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:29:04] Was it going to be a charter flight then? Several charter flights?

VAN HALA: [00:29:07] Two or three flights. And so they were all canceled. And they put us up for a week in New York until they decided where to send the groups.

KLEIN: [00:29:17] All 300?

VAN HALA: [00:29:18] Yes. Oh, big bill.

KLEIN: [00:29:20] Yeah. And so there were people who had trained at other places?

VAN HALA: [00:29:24] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:29:26] For other projects?

VAN HALA: [00:29:28] I'm not certain now what their numbers of their group was. They were not, um, they were not located near our training area.

KLEIN: [00:29:37] Right. Were they all chicken people?

VAN HALA: [00:29:42] I'm not sure. My memory fails in that respect because I didn't pay much attention to those groups. I do know that we were sent, after a week in New York, they finally decided to send our India 16 to Israel.

KLEIN: [00:29:57] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:29:58] And the other groups, one was sent to Guam and I'm not sure where the other one was sent.

KLEIN: [00:30:03] Guam?

VAN HALA: [00:30:04] Yeah. And at any rate, we went to Israel and we were given a tour of the country for a week by bus, which was really nice.

KLEIN: [00:30:17] Was that just a gesture on the part of the Israeli government?

VAN HALA: [00:30:20] I don't think they knew where to send us. They were probably working out the details with the.

KLEIN: [00:30:26] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:30:27] And finally after that they sent us to the kibbutz to work, the different. We were split up on three different kibbutzim and then we just filled in their summer labor group.

KLEIN: [00:30:41] When you went, when you were assigned out to a kibbutz, was it, well, you'll be here for six weeks, eight weeks?

VAN HALA: [00:30:48] They had no idea how long.

KLEIN: [00:30:50] It was open ended?

VAN HALA: [00:30:50] It was open ended. We ended up being in Israel 40 days and 40 nights. So that was a very unique experience. And actually that's where I first suffered food shock.

KLEIN: [00:31:05] Oh.

VAN HALA: [00:31:07] Because they only served us certain things to eat. And we were working really hard in the fields, picking, weeding, all very physical labor. So we were up at 5:30 or 5:00 in the morning and.

KLEIN: [00:31:18] Wow. Where was the kibbutz that you were?

VAN HALA: [00:31:21] Um, we were near the northern part of Israel.

KLEIN: [00:31:24] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:31:25] Ramat.

KLEIN: [00:31:27] Yeah. You weren't down in the Negev?

VAN HALA: [00:31:30] No, we were near, um, Haifa, I think it is. [tape break] Well, anyway, our food. I was talking about that. I had been used to drinking milk. I always drink milk with every meal and no milk to be had anywhere. In fact, no water either. The only water they served was seltzer water, which I couldn't stand. And so liquid was a big problem because we were working so hard and I guess their water wasn't pure enough or something.

KLEIN: [00:32:10] Wow.

VAN HALA: [00:32:11] At any rate, or maybe it had too much salt in it, I don't know. So we ended up drinking a lot of tea, and that's the first time I ever had tea. And there was some kind of cream, I think, to put in a tea. So I did get a little milk that way.

KLEIN: [00:32:26] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:32:26] And the other thing that they always served every meal was cucumbers, tomatoes, and eggs, hard boiled eggs. I liked hard boiled eggs and sour cream on it. They called it laban.

KLEIN: [00:32:39] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:32:40] And I had never had sour cream like that before or whatever. It's kind of like a yogurt, a thick yogurt.

KLEIN: [00:32:46] Right, yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:32:46] At any rate, that was, the food was really hard to get it used to, I mean, because we were starving. And the best time of the day was when about 4:00 in the afternoon when they had tea and we could have bread. They had really good bread and butter.

KLEIN: [00:33:02] During this time, was there a Peace Corps? Did Peace Corps stay in touch with you while you were on the kibbutz? And like every week or so say, well, we're working on it or?

VAN HALA: [00:33:15] We inquired, but we didn't hear a whole lot.

KLEIN: [00:33:20] Did you, were you beginning to get discouraged, I mean?

VAN HALA: [00:33:23] No, we were enjoying it. We, we loved.

KLEIN: [00:33:27] How many of you?

VAN HALA: [00:33:27] There were about 30 of us on this kibbutz, and we got together and did some singing with the Hebrew people and in the evenings and participated in some of their activities, although they only spoke Hebrew. And of course we had no.

KLEIN: [00:33:46] Oh.

VAN HALA: [00:33:46] So we had a real language problem. But yeah, they were, they were very helpful as best they could. And considering we couldn't speak.

KLEIN: [00:33:55] There were no Hindi speakers.

VAN HALA: [00:33:56] No, of course. But.

KLEIN: [00:33:58] Did you begin, you must have begun to lose your Hindi then?

VAN HALA: [00:34:02] Um, we probably lost some.

KLEIN: [00:34:03] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:34:04] Because you know, if you don't keep at it, boy.

KLEIN: [00:34:06] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:34:08] At any rate, um, we did do a lot of cultural things as I recall. There were some things we watched them do and they used to have entertainment in the evening of some kind. There was no TV or anything like that. We were just in little shacks with, in fact, we had bedbugs. I mean, it was pretty bad.

KLEIN: [00:34:27] But it was an introduction.

VAN HALA: [00:34:29] Right.

KLEIN: [00:34:29] To another part of the world.

VAN HALA: [00:34:30] Yeah, I mean.

KLEIN: [00:34:31] Finally, after.

VAN HALA: [00:34:34] After 30 or 40 days and 40 nights, we were sent to India and we went to New Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:34:41] And you flew in as a group?

VAN HALA: [00:34:42] Yes, we flew in. They had gathered all of us together. It was good to see everybody again. And yeah, the one thing I really remember about our whole group is that it was the first time I was ever with a lot of people that thought the same way I did. I mean, they must have selected us by personal psychological characteristics, I'm sure.

KLEIN: [00:34:59] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:35:00] And it was amazing that there were so many that thought the same way. At any rate, we were sent to India and New Delhi and I think we were just there a few days and then they sent us out to our sites.

KLEIN: [00:35:14] While you were in New Delhi, did you, you got your assignment?

VAN HALA: [00:35:17] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:35:18] And you became aware of who your partner would be. Did you have, were you at all familiar with the area you were being sent to?

VAN HALA: [00:35:29] No, um, I was sent to Satara, Maharashtra, which was south of Pune, and it is in central India about a day and a half trip from Bombay.

KLEIN: [00:35:42] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:35:44] Um, the area was once the, I guess, the capital of the kingdom in that the Maharaja, the Marathi kingdom. But it was a very difficult area to get to. We had to go by train to Pune and then by bus to Satara and it was very windy up mountains, around hairpin curves and things like that. So very isolated.

KLEIN: [00:36:10] How many of you were at that point, when you're on the bus?

VAN HALA: [00:36:13] There were, there were just two of us. Another girl and I were sent to serve in Satara.

KLEIN: [00:36:23] At what point did you meet an Indian counterpart who was going to guide your way through this?

VAN HALA: [00:36:28] As soon as we got there, we were greeted.

KLEIN: [00:36:32] Got to where, there?

VAN HALA: [00:36:33] Got to Satara. We were greeted by a mister, Dr. Bhave, B-H-A-V-E. He was the poultry officer there, and he showed us where we were going to stay. He had temporary housing set up for us.

KLEIN: [00:36:52] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:36:52] And as I recall, I'm not sure if we stayed in one of their little hotel, and they don't call them hotels, hostels or something like that for a couple of days.

KLEIN: [00:37:04] Guesthouse.

VAN HALA: [00:37:04] Guesthouse or something like that, until they found a place for us.

KLEIN: [00:37:09] They, they found the place where, they being just Dr. Bhave?

VAN HALA: [00:37:12] Yes, the government was required to supply housing for us.

KLEIN: [00:37:15] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:37:15] That was part of the deal.

KLEIN: [00:37:17] Yeah, it's a gift from Dr. Bhave. And, um. The, uh. So you had a week or two to settle into the setting, or did you go to work?

VAN HALA: [00:37:32] I don't think either. We went to work right away.

KLEIN: [00:37:34] You didn't?

VAN HALA: [00:37:35] We went to, we went to work right away.

KLEIN: [00:37:37] Where was work?

VAN HALA: [00:37:39] We would go down to the poultry office. And at that point, they had, they not only had poultry, they had Brahma bulls and several other things. They did artificial insemination with the bulls.

KLEIN: [00:37:52] They had an office and they had bulls in the office?

VAN HALA: [00:37:55] They had a, you know, the stable. I mean, the whole. The office was on several acres of land, and they had their main interest at that point was agriculture in terms of artificial insemination for building up the breed of Brahma bulls.

KLEIN: [00:38:13] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:38:13] Because they used those to pull their carts still. There were no poultry.

KLEIN: [00:38:19] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:38:20] We were to start it.

KLEIN: [00:38:21] All right. You didn't, did you. you didn't know that going in or you did? And was it a Ministry of Agriculture substation or was it a regional, provincial?

VAN HALA: [00:38:34] Poultry project office. They, they were stationed throughout India.

KLEIN: [00:38:41] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:38:42] Because later on when I moved up to Udaipur, it was the same setup. You have a poultry project. I guess Dr. Bhave had just been stationed there. I'm not certain how long he had been there. At any rate, as I recall, we were, we were supposed to go out and meet people and talk them into raising chickens.

KLEIN: [00:39:00] All right.

VAN HALA: [00:39:01] There were no chickens to be had yet. There were. And there was nothing in sight. So we had to start from scratch there to try to get people interested in raising the chickens.

KLEIN: [00:39:13] Were there any chickens anywhere in the neighborhood?

VAN HALA: [00:39:16] No, just *deshi*, wild chickens, of course, were nothing like the breeds that would be the good egg layer.

KLEIN: [00:39:23] But when you, I don't know what the Hindi word for chicken is, but when you went to a, when you went somewhere and began talking about it, people at least had some preconception of what you were talking about?

VAN HALA: [00:39:38] [coughs] Sorry.

KLEIN: [00:39:39] All right, let's try.

VAN HALA: [00:39:40] All right, I. When we went to try to begin training people to raise chickens. First of all, we were introduced to some fairly wealthy people or people that Dr. Bhave thought might be interested in raising chickens. And it was our job to try to convince them it would be worth their while to do so. And see, eggs were selling for like a rupee apiece.

KLEIN: [00:40:08] Yes.

VAN HALA: [00:40:09] And that's like a dollar in our money apiece. So people could see that they were worth, it was worth getting into, but they didn't know anything about how to raise the day old chicks to the later stage, etcetera. And it was our job to help people with that transition.

KLEIN: [00:40:30] Did you have any incentives you could offer?

VAN HALA: [00:40:33] The government was supposed to give them day-old chicks at a fairly economical price. A very economical price. And the, the people that were interested in raising them were supposed to go through a training program.

KLEIN: [00:40:51] Run by?

VAN HALA: [00:40:52] Run by the state or the government. At any rate, we, it was our job to just convince them that they would be able to make some money out of this. And then if they did raise, start the chickens, then we would do the vaccinating and the animal husbandry that went along with trying to keep them alive.

KLEIN: [00:41:16] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:41:16] The problem in that area was, of course, nobody had any chickens and they weren't used to any other chickens other than the wild ones that ran around and just fed themselves. So they, our program taught people how to use a deep litter system in enclosed, well ventilated houses. Chicken houses that allowed you to keep several hundred chickens at a time. And you could make a pretty good profit from that.

KLEIN: [00:41:45] Eggs were used for food?

VAN HALA: [00:41:48] At that time, eggs were used as an antiseptic to put on a cut.

KLEIN: [00:41:53] Really?

VAN HALA: [00:41:55] Most Indians did not eat eggs.

KLEIN: [00:41:57] So there was a double agenda. I mean, not only, not only raising chickens, but convincing people to eat the eggs.

VAN HALA: [00:42:04] Yes, I spent a lot of time, especially later on, up in Rajasthan, working on teaching people how to cook with eggs. And I wrote some cookbooks that are, compiled some cookbooks and things like that.

KLEIN: [00:42:19] So within the culture of the area you were in, did eggs have any function?

VAN HALA: [00:42:24] Yes. Maharashtra was more advanced because the English had been there. So there were restaurants that would serve scrambled eggs and omelets. They were very good at making omelets. And some people ate those, but they still thought of eggs as having life because they used *deshi* eggs, which were the eggs that the male would have fertilized the female. And the people that were pure vegetarians did not feel they could eat those types of eggs. So part of our job was to convince them that a chicken gives an egg every day, just as a cow gives milk, and that we called them vegetarian eggs. And the chickens were not allowed to run loose. They were kept inside a house. So it was more pure.

KLEIN: [00:43:12] Well, it's kind of interesting because you're carrying a double burden. I mean, one is to teach people to raise chickens, but two is to convince people that they're worth eating, integrating into diet.

VAN HALA: [00:43:25] That was part of the reason they wanted us to go to India with this project, because so many people in the rural areas had such poor nutrition, their protein in their diet was nil and an egg would give you a lot of protein as well as be a way to get money in their pocket. This, the other thing about marketing eggs was that it didn't fit into the caste system. Anybody could do it and anybody could make money from it. And you wouldn't be criticized or condemned by your caste because you were doing it.

KLEIN: [00:44:02] And the government of India had committed to this kind of program.

VAN HALA: [00:44:06] Right, they had committed to it. They, they felt it would be a very worthwhile program.

KLEIN: [00:44:11] Why didn't they have Indians doing what you were doing?

VAN HALA: [00:44:15] That, it's an interesting concept. They don't trust them, their own people. They trusted us more than they trusted their own people.

KLEIN: [00:44:23] Did Dr. Bhave know your background?

VAN HALA: [00:44:28] If he did, he probably wouldn't have ever taken us. But they, the Indians were very open to people from other countries, at least in Maharashtra. I have to say this.

KLEIN: [00:44:41] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:44:41] Very different up in Rajasthan. But in Maharashtra they were very open. And they really enjoyed having foreigners, quote unquote, come to their house and talk to them. They, they just, I know that they said several times that they just didn't trust so-and-so. Da da da da da.

KLEIN: [00:44:59] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:44:59] About doing these types of things. But if we are telling them it is true, then this must be so.

KLEIN: [00:45:05] Yeah. Let's just talk generally about your living conditions, the kind of housing you had, what you did for meals, I mean.

VAN HALA: [00:45:16] Well, we had a rough time at first. I just could not stand Indian food.

KLEIN: [00:45:20] Uh huh.

VAN HALA: [00:45:22] The only thing I could eat is rice.

KLEIN: [00:45:23] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:45:24] I couldn't stand curry or anything and I lost so much weight. I was down to skin and bones. Finally, I got used so I could eat some of it. In Maharashtra they put so much spice in it. When you ate it, your

eyes would water, your stomach would jump and everything else. So we had a lot of problems with amoebic dysentery and of course they gave us gamma globulin shots and all kinds of things and tetramycin and antibiotics all the time. But the whole time we were there, three years, we had the dysentery.

KLEIN: [00:46:03] Did you get direct medical support from the Peace Corps?

VAN HALA: [00:46:06] Yes. Every three months they took us in and doctored us up.

KLEIN: [00:46:09] Oh. How far were you from the nearest Peace Corps office?

VAN HALA: [00:46:12] Uh, we had to go all the way to Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:46:14] Can you turn your mike just a little like that? Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:46:19] We had to go all the way to New Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:46:22] How far is that?

VAN HALA: [00:46:22] And that would have been, let's see, about a day's trip to Pune. A day's trip from Pune to Bombay, another day's trip from Bombay up to New Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:46:33] If you were ragingly ill, you weren't going to do that trip.

VAN HALA: [00:46:37] No. Well, we got used to it.

KLEIN: [00:46:42] To the trip?

VAN HALA: [00:46:43] No, to being sick.

KLEIN: [00:46:45] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:46:50] Um, it just was something you lived with.

KLEIN: [00:46:53] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:46:54] The, um, the main things we had problems with were giardia and amoebic dysentery.

KLEIN: [00:47:01] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:47:02] But our housing itself, we started out, we had very poor sanitary conditions. A hole, a hole in a little hut. And, you know, the old outhouse business. And we did move into finally a house that was, it was solid clay walls. It was cooler. And we just had very simple furniture and tin plates. And we didn't, we didn't ever fancy anything up, we just.

KLEIN: [00:47:32] What did you do for water, I mean?

VAN HALA: [00:47:34] We boiled the water and we had clay pots and we strained the water. We'd boil it first, strain it and put it in a clay pot.

KLEIN: [00:47:43] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:47:43] And it always tasted horrible but.

KLEIN: [00:47:45] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:47:45] We got, they used to have something called Nimbu Pani, which was a lemon, a lemon sweetened lemonade thing that you could put in water. And that helped us to.

KLEIN: [00:47:58] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:48:01] Uh, survive because I couldn't stand the water. And a lot of times we had to put iodine in it, too.

KLEIN: [00:48:06] Let's go six months after you were in town. And was there a point at which you began thinking? How did your job evolve, I should say?

VAN HALA: [00:48:18] After I got used to the food and got a little more strength, we had to ride bicycles everywhere. So we had to get our physical strength up to be able to do that.

KLEIN: [00:48:28] Was most of what you did in conjunction with the woman, your partner?

VAN HALA: [00:48:32] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:48:33] So the two of you?

VAN HALA: [00:48:34] Yes. We pretty much went together every place we went. And she was from Texas and she had a slow Texan drawl.

KLEIN: [00:48:42] Yes.

VAN HALA: [00:48:43] And for some reason, they could understand her much better than me. I spoke too fast for them. So eventually, after about six months, I did learn how to slow way down and speak very carefully and it was easier for them to follow me. But I, uh, I think every three months, as I said, we went in for medical treatment. Sometimes we went to Bombay also, as I recall. Other times we went to New Delhi.

KLEIN: [00:49:16] When did the first chicken arrive in the town?

VAN HALA: [00:49:20] It took us a while to get chicken started. We did a lot of talking and they were starting to come. It took us almost several months though, several months to get that particular project going. And then I think we had about ten people that were interested in doing it.

KLEIN: [00:49:38] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:49:39] So, and I wasn't there. I moved up to Rajasthan.

KLEIN: [00:49:45] After how long?

VAN HALA: [00:49:45] After about a year.

KLEIN: [00:49:46] Okay. So at the end of the year.

VAN HALA: [00:49:51] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:49:51] What had you accomplished?

VAN HALA: [00:49:53] Well, we had about ten people that were very interested in doing, raising the chickens, and they were our model.

KLEIN: [00:49:59] But it hadn't happened yet?

VAN HALA: [00:50:00] I don't remember whether, I think we at least had some of them with the chickens. The others were on order.

KLEIN: [00:50:07] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:50:08] So whether they had finally gotten, I can't remember Maharashtra as much as I do Rajasthan because that's where we.

KLEIN: [00:50:15] Was anyone evaluating, I mean, whether it was from the Indian side or Peace Corps side, to give you a sense of whether you were moving appropriately or achieving?

VAN HALA: [00:50:27] We had people come to visit us from time to time and try to give us encouragement. I don't think they were worried so much that it was taking a while to get this done, especially here where nobody ever, nobody even had chickens.

KLEIN: [00:50:42] Yeah, yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:50:44] It takes a while to do all the convincing and the government was slow in getting the chickens and all that type of thing.

KLEIN: [00:50:49] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:50:50] So before you go through all that red tape.

KLEIN: [00:50:54] Other than Dr. Bhave, did you have any Indian counterparts?

VAN HALA: [00:51:01] I believe there was an Indian fellow who was supposed to also be working in that project, but I'm not sure if he was in the poultry area.

KLEIN: [00:51:10] Did he have a job title? It's very important in some structures.

VAN HALA: [00:51:20] Poultry trainee? Poultry expert? I don't know. They called us poultry expert.

KLEIN: [00:51:26] How did people in the village perceived you, I mean?

VAN HALA: [00:51:30] Actually, it was a big city.

KLEIN: [00:51:32] Okay.

VAN HALA: [00:51:32] We were, we went to the outskirts of the city, but the city itself was very big, very primitive but big.

KLEIN: [00:51:39] The people with whom you worked, I mean, what was their sense?

VAN HALA: [00:51:43] They seem to, as I say, in Maharashtra they were used to the English and they, they thought of us as celebrities practically.

KLEIN: [00:51:50] Oh.

VAN HALA: [00:51:51] We were the only show on the block.

KLEIN: [00:51:54] Because of who you are?

VAN HALA: [00:51:56] Right. They weren't, no other foreigners were there I don't believe.

KLEIN: [00:51:59] Some people going into another culture find what's called an informant or a mentor or, you know, someone from that culture with whom they can communicate more readily. And then was there anyone who played that role that you recall?

VAN HALA: [00:52:20] Hmm. Dr. Bhave tried to answer as many questions about things as he could.

KLEIN: [00:52:26] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:52:27] But I don't recall anybody else helping us in that respect.

KLEIN: [00:52:31] But you wouldn't go out and drink beer with Dr. Bhave?

VAN HALA: [00:52:33] Oh no, I don't drink beer.

KLEIN: [00:52:35] Well, I mean, or.

VAN HALA: [00:52:36] But, no.

KLEIN: [00:52:39] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:52:40] We kept very much to ourselves.

KLEIN: [00:52:42] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:52:43] We didn't, we didn't want to get into that kind of thing, not in those days.

KLEIN: [00:52:47] Okay, yeah, but you still felt comfortable in the setting you were in?

VAN HALA: [00:52:53] Right. It was strange having two women, for one thing, alone. I mean, that's, that's not a very usual thing in India.

KLEIN: [00:53:04] In India.

VAN HALA: [00:53:05] Right.

KLEIN: [00:53:05] All right.

VAN HALA: [00:53:06] So we were very careful. I don't.

KLEIN: [00:53:12] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:53:12] I don't remember whether my roommate drank beer or anything like that, but I don't even know if beer was, I guess it was available.

KLEIN: [00:53:18] Yeah.

VAN HALA: [00:53:19] But I didn't drink beer. I don't remember. I can't remember her drinking it either.

KLEIN: [00:53:23] Peace Corps had no hesitation, though, about putting the two of you together up in this obscure area, remote area?

VAN HALA: [00:53:30] I guess not. They did have a couple of other volunteers come out to see us every now and then, just to see if we were alive.

KLEIN: [00:53:39] To show them how bad it can be.

VAN HALA: [00:53:41] See how it's going.

KLEIN: [00:53:43] So were you considered to be on the, on the cutting edge, you know, a hardship kind of post?

VAN HALA: [00:53:51] Um, actually I thought it, Maharashtra was, as I say, a fairly, at least they had a fairly good attitude towards foreigners. So we didn't have it as hard as we did in Rajasthan when I went up there. But the hard part in Maharashtra was simply the fact that nobody had done the

chickens and we had to get somebody to prove it could be done. So that was hard. We had to do a lot of visiting. We went to a lot of social functions to try and talked and talked and talked about it.

KLEIN: [00:54:20] Well, what kind of social functions?

VAN HALA: [00:54:21] Oh, weddings. If somebody was having a dinner at their home, we would, they'd invite us. A lot of people invited us to places.

KLEIN: [00:54:32] Now, most of your day, including the social events, you were working and expressing yourself in English, not Hindi?

VAN HALA: [00:54:42] In Maharashtra, we didn't have to use as much Hindi because they spoke, a lot of people spoke English.

KLEIN: [00:54:48] Right.

VAN HALA: [00:54:49] And they had quite a group of the Parsis or Zoroastrian religion that were very educated and very wealthy in their, in that area. And they were thinking of starting a project.

KLEIN: [00:55:04] And so as you came to the end of the first year, had you, did you feel you would made progress in the use of Hindi or was it just sort of there?

VAN HALA: [00:55:13] Um, we used Hindi, and I think. I'm trying to remember the difference between Rajasthan and Maharashtra because I, most of my positive things I think of in Rajasthan, that was our two years up there. At any rate, um, I'm trying to think whether we had a poultry fair. Sometimes we did displays like that where we had a poultry fair or an agricultural fair, where we would display ways to raise chickens and graphs on how to make money with it and all that type of thing. And do some, uh, get, put out literature and so forth of explaining about eggs and how to raise chickens. And we would also try to get people to sign up to take training classes. And sometimes I know at these fairs we would do cooking demonstrations and things. Show people how to use the eggs.

KLEIN: [00:56:12] Just the eggs? The chickens, no?

VAN HALA: [00:56:14] At that time we weren't into meat. Later on, we did get into that.

KLEIN: [00:56:19] Do you recall your first Christmas? I mean, it must have been a tough time.

VAN HALA: [00:56:25] Well, growing up with six kids.

KLEIN: [00:56:30] But did you attempt to have a Christmas celebration?

VAN HALA: [00:56:31] I think we did. I can't even remember it.

KLEIN: [00:56:34] Oh, okay.

VAN HALA: [00:56:37] I don't remember it. It was, things like that didn't bother me that much.

KLEIN: [00:56:42] So you don't recall being homesick or?

VAN HALA: [00:56:44] No. It wasn't. No. I was in love with my husband-to-be. That was my big thing.

KLEIN: [00:56:51] Yeah. Anything else about the first year? And did, did you feel the training had prepared you for this or that they had thrown you curves or?

VAN HALA: [00:57:05] They had taught us from the beginning to be flexible. They said, you really need to be flexible. You don't know what you're going to encounter. Every situation is different. So we just rolled with the punches.

KLEIN: [00:57:18] And did you have any sense of the role that Peace Corps was playing in your life at that point, I mean?

VAN HALA: [00:57:25] I don't know if I got the sense then or I have gotten it later, that I think they mainly wanted us to just experience another culture and come back and share what we had learned with Americans here, because so many people have never been in another culture like that.

KLEIN: [00:57:40] There wasn't any sense of a push to see that you ended up with 1,000 chicken farmers?

VAN HALA: [00:57:46] No, no. Uh uh.

KLEIN: [00:57:47] You know, it's kind of an American sense of a number achievement.

[END OF INTERVIEW]