

**Mary Parsaca Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Mary Parsaca  
**Interviewer:** Robert Klein  
**Date of Interview:** April 29, 2003  
**Location of Interview:** Velarde, New Mexico  
**Length:** 90 pages

**Biographical Note**

Mary Parsaca served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya from 1968 to 1970 as a secondary school teacher.

**Access**

Open.

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**Suggested Citation**

Mary Parsaca, recorded interview by Robert Klein, April 29, 2003, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Oral History Interview

with

Mary Parsaca

April 29, 2003  
Velarde, New Mexico

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:00] Today is April 29, 2003. This is Bob Klein, and I'm talking to, interviewing Mary Parsaca, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, secondary education, 1968 to '70. Usually we start just by, oh, go back maybe a year before you joined and talk about where you were and what was going on.

PARSACA: [00:00:24] Okay. Well, I graduated from college in 1967 and had to do a 12 month internship, which I could do anywhere in the country. So I looked around different places, wanting to get out of Michigan and go to a big city. So I ended up in Washington, D.C.

KLEIN: [00:00:41] Let's go back. What degree was it that you got?

PARSACA: [00:00:44] A Bachelor of Science in medical technology from Michigan State University.

KLEIN: [00:00:49] Had you grown up in Michigan?

PARSACA: [00:00:50] Yeah, I grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and really hadn't, had not experienced much of the country, let alone the world until I went off to college and was very intrigued by these students from all over the country and, and the world, but primarily just there were people from New York and California, Wyoming. And so anyway, I found that pretty interesting. And when I had this internship to do, I decided on Washington.

KLEIN: [00:01:21] Let's go back to when you were in high school. Did you do any special activities, volunteer work? What did you do with your summers?

PARSACA: [00:01:31] My summers, for the most part when I was a little younger than high school until I was about 14, I spent every summer doing classes at the local museum all day every day because my parents both worked. And that was a wonderful, wonderful thing for me and really developed my interest in science. And, um, and I think had I been of a generation or two later, I might have pursued a career in the natural sciences in some way, but didn't even think that was something a girl could do, right? And there were teachers and nurses, and I knew I didn't want to be a nurse, but I loved medicine. And so that led me to medical technology.

PARSACA: [00:02:14] And in high school, in the summers, I, I, I guess I just did all those typical high school things. I think I worked a little, but it wasn't real compelling to work until I got out of high school. And then, then the first summer I went to work in a mattress factory where my mom worked and sewed mattress covers. And, uh, anyway.

KLEIN: [00:02:34] Did you do any travel at all during?

PARSACA: [00:02:36] No. My family, my family always camped around Michigan, but we really never. We took one trip to California, the obligatory trip to California. But no, I mean, my parents were very working class and they certainly didn't have money to travel abroad or anything like that.

KLEIN: [00:02:51] Then when you were in college, same thing?

PARSACA: [00:02:54] Oh yeah. Oh yeah, in summers while I worked the entire time I was in college and all through the summers to pay for it, and my parents helping with what they could. But I was typical in that I left with student loans and all of these things. But I had this internship to do. So that led me to Washington, D.C., which, well, number one, when I got to college, I was thrilled. I spent the whole time smiling. I mean, I just thought this was the most amazing new environment.

KLEIN: [00:03:25] You were the first in the family to go to college?

PARSACA: [00:03:26] Yeah, I was the first in the family to go to college. And I'm a baby. So I had these older brothers and, older brother and two sisters and who never had any interest, and they went right to work and all that. So I just thought this was the best thing since sliced bread. So when I, but when I got to D.C., it got even better because it was this world I had had absolutely no exposure to. Politics was certainly nothing that was ever discussed in my family. My father, working class Catholic Italian, had been an acquaintance of Gerald Ford in their, when they played football in the 1920s and therefore became a Ford supporter and therefore a Republican, which made everybody else in the family crazy. And so my mother would never, she just would not allow any discussion of politics in our home because it always ended up in an argument with my dad.

KLEIN: [00:04:23] So during the early sixties, do you, do you have any recollection of John F. Kennedy or?

PARSACA: [00:04:27] Oh, sure. Yeah, actually I have a strong recollection of it because he came to Grand Rapids in the campaign for the '60 election and I was a sophomore in high school. And earlier that year Richard Nixon had come and a lot of kids, not myself, but a lot of kids had skipped school to go downtown to see Nixon. And there were no repercussions for these kids. So when Kennedy came, myself and Jim and some of our friends, we skipped school and went downtown. And I

then got an F for the day in my geometry class because I missed it. And it only occurred to me years later that this woman probably was a Republican.

KLEIN: [00:05:09] Yeah. So during the years of high school, did you have any awareness of the Peace Corps?

PARSACA: [00:05:16] Yeah. Actually, I did. And I, you know, I can't. Well, no, not during high school. During college I did, yeah, because I graduated from high school in 1963, and I really wasn't aware of it at that time. But in college, I became aware of it and very interested. And then when I went to D.C., I was just, I mean, this was absolutely what I wanted to do.

KLEIN: [00:05:38] Were there recruiters on the college campus, do you recall?

PARSACA: [00:05:42] There probably were, because I know that Michigan State has provided, at that time it was the, it had the largest number of Peace Corps volunteers of any public university.

KLEIN: [00:05:52] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:05:53] And so there must have been recruiters, but I just wasn't aware of it. I was either studying or working.

KLEIN: [00:05:59] Okay, so your head was elsewhere.

PARSACA: [00:05:59] Yeah. And I, you know, honestly, I can't say how I became aware of it. It must have been through the news and whatever. Yeah. So by the time I got to D.C. in August of '67, of course, the political scene was pretty intense with the war protests. And, and I'd never been involved in any of that. And remembering the first march on the Pentagon, being in my room. I lived in a nurse's dorm because it was all I could afford in Washington making \$75 a month.

KLEIN: [00:06:35] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:06:38] Just wanting so badly to be there and not even having a clue how to go about making connections with people and not daring to go alone.

KLEIN: [00:06:47] Yeah, yeah.

PARSACA: [00:06:47] And that sort of thing. So it was kind of this definitely significant political awakening in D.C. and I got involved in the McCarthy campaign after some time.

KLEIN: [00:06:57] Now where was the internship?

PARSACA: [00:07:01] At the Washington Hospital Center in Northwest Washington.

KLEIN: [00:07:04] And this was part of a master's program?

PARSACA: [00:07:07] Well, it was to become a medical technologist, you had to have a degree and an internship. And many universities who had their own hospital systems combined that in the four years. But Michigan State required that you get a degree and then do your internship that fifth year. So it really didn't lead to a master's, but it led to being qualified to take the exam to.

KLEIN: [00:07:32] Now was the exam national or by state?

PARSACA: [00:07:34] National.

KLEIN: [00:07:34] Oh, okay.

PARSACA: [00:07:35] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:07:35] So it didn't have to all be done in Michigan.

PARSACA: [00:07:39] Right. Exactly.

KLEIN: [00:07:40] So and it was a one year?

PARSACA: [00:07:42] One year, one full year.

KLEIN: [00:07:45] Did you, what else did you do during the year in Washington?

PARSACA: [00:07:48] Oh, gosh. All kinds of things. I mean, I visited, you know, did the whole tourist thing. And actually Jim moved there after about six months and we did everything free in Washington.

KLEIN: [00:08:03] So Jim grew up?

PARSACA: [00:08:05] In Grand Rapids.

KLEIN: [00:08:06] And just tell me quickly who Jim is.

PARSACA: [00:08:09] My husband.

KLEIN: [00:08:09] Okay. Yeah. All right, let's go on.

PARSACA: [00:08:14] Okay.

KLEIN: [00:08:14] So he came to Washington.

PARSACA: [00:08:15] So he came to D.C. and I started badgering him, well, we were engaged at this point.

KLEIN: [00:08:21] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:08:22] And so I started badgering him about Peace Corps. And he was just kind of, well, yeah, whatever you want to do. And I had really always been very intrigued by international travel and other cultures. You know, I mean, I can remember in high school going right to the National Geographic, and that was about my, you know, the extent of my exposure. But it really did turn me on to this. So anyway, he got a job. When Jim came to D.C., he got a job with EEOC, and his job was. How did this work? I can't remember how it all worked. But anyway, he ended up evaluating VISTA applications, and we had already put in our Peace Corps applications. And so then through his experience, we learned

what the process was. So we kept going to Peace Corps and saying, we need a decision, you know, when are you going to tell us if we're.

KLEIN: [00:09:22] Do you remember actually going to the Peace Corps office?

PARSACA: [00:09:24] Yeah, once. And Jim went several times because he worked in the area. So he kept badgering them. But you can ask him about that.

KLEIN: [00:09:31] Do you recall the application process at all?

PARSACA: [00:09:35] Yes, I do. And I was, well, related to our conversation earlier about writing. I was completely traumatized, traumatized by having to write a motivational statement. And I had this huge stress about it. And I think now if I were to see it, I'd probably be embarrassed. But I'm glad it's destroyed or lost or whatever. But it worked, whatever I wrote that I don't really remember. I just felt that, I know I felt I had this skill that would certainly be very useful anywhere in the world.

KLEIN: [00:10:06] So while you were in Washington, you just sort of it, your next step you felt was going to be Peace Corps?

PARSACA: [00:10:14] Oh, yeah. We were getting married in September '68 and we were, you know, at that place where, where are we going to live? What are we going to do? And I knew I could work at the hospital where I trained in D.C. and we loved D.C. So the plan was to stay there unless we got into Peace Corps. So I went home.

KLEIN: [00:10:33] Did Jim have overseas experience?

PARSACA: [00:10:34] No, no, no, no.

KLEIN: [00:10:36] So to match up to yours.

PARSACA: [00:10:37] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, very much. We grew up, we went to the same high school.

KLEIN: [00:10:41] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:10:41] So anyway, I went home a month before our wedding, after graduation, and Jim stayed in D.C., and he called me a week or so later and said, well, Peace Corps says we're accepted, but they don't have a placement for us yet. Great. Okay. So then it was, well, what are we going to do? I mean, we need to get jobs or whatever. Well, anyway, about a week before he came home for our wedding, he called and said, they want to send us to Kenya. I freaked out, of course.

KLEIN: [00:11:21] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:11:22] So emotional. Oh, sorry. Anyway. It's really stupid. So he called and said, how about going to Kenya? And I completely freaked out. He didn't know anything about it. I said, oh my God, the only thing I know about Kenya is it's really close to the Serengeti. This would be wonderful.

KLEIN: [00:11:55] Had you applied as a married couple?

PARSACA: [00:11:57] We applied as a couple who would be married when we went in. We were engaged at the time and we didn't, weren't available until after we got married. Um. So I was really excited going on and on about how wonderful this would be. And he said, but you have to be a teacher. Which stopped me dead in my tracks, because of the two of us, Jim was what Peace Corps called a BA generalist.

KLEIN: [00:12:24] Right.

PARSACA: [00:12:24] He had no applicable skill.

KLEIN: [00:12:27] What was his degree in?

PARSACA: [00:12:29] Sociology and political science.

KLEIN: [00:12:31] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:12:32] And he was not a trained teacher. And of course, I wasn't either. But I felt I had this incredibly useful skill.

KLEIN: [00:12:37] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:12:38] So that kind of took the wind out of my sails and I said, well, yeah, you know, this sounds wonderful. And it was going to start two weeks after our wedding and it all fit. And we really hadn't even requested Africa. Back then, remember, you could request three countries.

KLEIN: [00:12:55] Yeah, yeah.

PARSACA: [00:12:55] But we didn't know anything. I mean, we were very ignorant, and so. [phone rings] I can just let it go.

KLEIN: [00:13:00] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:13:01] And so we, um, we, uh, we just were thrilled. We were thrilled to be accepted and whatever so.

KLEIN: [00:13:09] What preferences had you put down, do you remember?

PARSACA: [00:13:10] Yes, we put down Chile and Thailand and I can't remember the third. I mean, we were just all over the place because we really didn't. I had a friend who was Thai.

KLEIN: [00:13:20] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:13:21] I don't know why we thought Chile would have been very interesting at that time. But anyway.

KLEIN: [00:13:33] Did you have any friends who had joined the Peace Corps up to that point?

PARSACA: [00:13:39] No. We knew no one who had joined the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:13:43] How did the, how was the family dealing with your plan?

PARSACA: [00:13:47] Oh, they just thought it was really kind of crazy. My parents really thought anything I did was great, but they just were kind of in shock about this. They would never have said, you know, we don't want you to do it or anything like that. But, um, but I did have an aunt who made it very clear that she thought we were wasting two years of our lives when we could be making money. So it was, um.

KLEIN: [00:14:11] Was your father silent, I mean?

PARSACA: [00:14:13] Yeah, my father was almost always silent.

KLEIN: [00:14:16] I mean, this is a Democratic thing.

PARSACA: [00:14:18] Yeah, right. Oh, yeah. I don't even, you know, honestly, I don't even know that, that he connected it to politics or to Democrats. It was, it was not that thought out a process, I don't think. But, you know, I'm going to have to turn, go ahead and turn off a sec.

KLEIN: [00:14:37] Yes.

PARSACA: [00:14:37] So our families, alright, our families were just kind of silent, a little bit shocked, but they knew darn well that there wasn't any point in telling either of us what to do. So they got into the spirit of it. And, and so we, we got married September 21st and we started training. We didn't know when we were going to start training, but we were camping on our honeymoon. And friends drove up to where we were camping with the packets that had come from Peace Corps with all of our travel arrangements.

KLEIN: [00:15:08] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:15:09] And we were to leave in about two and a half weeks. And so we went home and tried to figure out what to pack.

KLEIN: [00:15:16] Now where were you told to report?

PARSACA: [00:15:21] New York City.

KLEIN: [00:15:22] And where was training going to be?

PARSACA: [00:15:26] Training was in New York City at the Paris Hotel, well, we stayed at the Paris Hotel and then, um. And had all, if I remember, oh, training was at Columbia Teachers College.

KLEIN: [00:15:36] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:15:37] Yeah. And that's where we had all of our, our courses and such. And then we right away went for the month long language immersion north of the city, where we were ensconced in a closed hotel with about 170 trainees and 25 East Africans as our language instructors. So it's a huge group.

KLEIN: [00:15:59] Yeah, I hadn't heard of that.

PARSACA: [00:16:00] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:16:03] Had either of you ever spent time in New York?

PARSACA: [00:16:05] No.

KLEIN: [00:16:06] So it's kind of a.

PARSACA: [00:16:07] Oh, everything was new.

KLEIN: [00:16:08] A special honeymoon.

PARSACA: [00:16:09] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, the whole two years was a honeymoon really, I mean, you can't ask for anything better.

KLEIN: [00:16:15] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:16:15] Yeah. So we spent that three months there.

KLEIN: [00:16:17] Now, when you left home, you had, you packed up. Was the expectation then that you were going to go to training and directly overseas, or that you would have a chance to come back home?

PARSACA: [00:16:29] We did go back home because we were to leave on January 1st, and so we took a few days at Christmas time and they allowed people to go home if they wanted. And so we did. We went back to Michigan.

KLEIN: [00:16:41] Let's talk about the training now. Okay. So you reported to New York, to the Hotel Paris on 96th Street?

PARSACA: [00:16:48] Yes, that's right. And West End.

KLEIN: [00:16:52] And was it just a group for Kenya or was it?

PARSACA: [00:16:57] It was just a group for Kenya. It was combined secondary education and a few nurses who are going to be doing nursing education. I think there might have been maybe 20 nurses out of the group.

KLEIN: [00:17:10] So when you first gathered, what was your impression of the others? I mean, now you're see people who were doing the same thing that you were doing.

PARSACA: [00:17:18] Yeah. Well, of course, everybody was nervous and excited and just watching people. One couple we became good friends with. I can remember seeing them walk in and. I think I was pretty intimidated by most of these people because I always felt like everybody had more experience and was far more together than I. But like many of us feel.

KLEIN: [00:17:41] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:17:42] But it was, it was a great group. It was the fall of 1968. And so there was always the gathering around the TV station, TV to watch the news at night and.

KLEIN: [00:17:55] Right. Were there other, there were other married couples?

PARSACA: [00:17:58] Yeah. We had a lot of married couples. Out of the 170 or so, I would say there were probably at least 30 couples.

KLEIN: [00:18:07] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:18:08] There were a lot of married couples.

KLEIN: [00:18:09] That's a big program, 170.

PARSACA: [00:18:10] Yeah. Yeah, it was. And we sent 150 finally. But one of the things that happened with that group, of course, it was during the draft.

KLEIN: [00:18:20] Yes.

PARSACA: [00:18:20] And so there were, practically all of us, although Jim had a deferment because he had a pin in his leg that deferred him. And we planned to get married on September 21st. But there were, there were all these couples. [coughs] Excuse me. With September anniversaries, because they just quickly got married when they found out they could get into this Peace Corps program to keep the guy out of the draft.

KLEIN: [00:18:45] Yeah. Okay.

PARSACA: [00:18:47] Yeah. So it was very funny. Many of us share the same anniversary.

KLEIN: [00:18:54] You were put up at the Hotel Paris.

PARSACA: [00:18:56] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:18:57] For how long?

PARSACA: [00:18:57] Well, we were there for, I think about a few, just a few days. And then we went up to Monroe, New York, where we did this language

immersion for a full month, and we were not allowed any English between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. And, um, and then after that, we could.

KLEIN: [00:19:16] What was, how was the language training structured?

PARSACA: [00:19:18] Oh, it was great. Somehow they placed us into, into classes based on our ability. So maybe the first week or few first few days we were just randomly selected. I don't remember. But then you were in a class with a similar, similar level of students and, um, and the instructor spoke Swahili the entire time.

KLEIN: [00:19:40] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:19:41] And they were great. They used a lot of body language and gesturing and, and, um, it was really, for me, the first time that I had ever been successful at learning a language.

KLEIN: [00:19:54] Had you taken language at the college?

PARSACA: [00:19:56] I had taken one semester of Italian, and I did that because I really regretted not having learned Italian from my grandfather but we weren't allowed to do that when we were kids. It was considered not being Americans.

KLEIN: [00:20:11] Yes.

PARSACA: [00:20:12] And so that was the only language I had taken. Oh, I took Latin, of course, in high school.

KLEIN: [00:20:20] Yeah. So it was, it must, it was very intense.

PARSACA: [00:20:24] It was very intense.

KLEIN: [00:20:26] You were in a relatively isolated location.

PARSACA: [00:20:28] We were very isolated. We were only with the group.

KLEIN: [00:20:31] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:20:31] We could walk into town or whatever, of course, but we still all stuck together.

KLEIN: [00:20:36] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:20:36] We were newly married, as were most of the couples. So there were all those adjustments. I can remember one morning having a huge fight with Jim because it was before, it was after 6:00 in our room, we were getting ready for the day and I said something to him in English, and he corrected me.

KLEIN: [00:20:56] In Swahili?

PARSACA: [00:20:56] Yes, in Swahili. And I went nuts. But it was, that was what, it was so intense. Like for about the first two weeks, I felt like I didn't know anything. I think a lot of people felt this way. And then all of a sudden it started to fall into place and then we could communicate.

KLEIN: [00:21:12] Was he in the class at the same level as you?

PARSACA: [00:21:15] Yeah, we were about, about the same level actually. So he was just being a brat.

KLEIN: [00:21:19] Yeah. Had anyone indicated that selection depended on your ability to learn Swahili?

PARSACA: [00:21:28] Yeah, there was that implication. Um. I don't remember it being stated because we didn't have to work in the language.

KLEIN: [00:21:37] Right, that's right.

PARSACA: [00:21:38] We had, you know, we were working in English and, and I just, well, I just think I know I felt like I just wanted to do everything as best I could because we really wanted to go to Kenya. And so learning Swahili was part of it. That was great.

KLEIN: [00:21:54] And that was a four week period?

PARSACA: [00:21:57] Four weeks, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:22:00] Was there any other training going on?

PARSACA: [00:22:02] Yeah, there were evening sessions. There were, um, there was some cross-cultural training going on. And then there were these awful T groups that were being led by, I'm thinking back on it, probably pretty unqualified people. I mean, they may have had the credentials, but I don't know if they were playing with us, I think. And that was very emotional, very traumatic for a lot of people.

KLEIN: [00:22:24] Were they trying to get married couples to probe whether?

PARSACA: [00:22:29] Separated them.

KLEIN: [00:22:30] Oh.

PARSACA: [00:22:30] But what they did was put partners, like Jim was in T groups with spouses of people who were in my T group.

KLEIN: [00:22:40] Right.

PARSACA: [00:22:42] Which was kind of interesting.

KLEIN: [00:22:43] Yeah. And were they trying to push as to whether you both wanted to go or one? Because that was an issue at times, because one of the couple were clearly committed, but the other wasn't and that led to problems once they got overseas.

PARSACA: [00:22:57] Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:22:59] I don't know if they were very explicit about it or not.

PARSACA: [00:23:01] They weren't at that point. Well, I don't remember it at that point. And I think perhaps they didn't address it in the T groups because most of the people were not married couples.

KLEIN: [00:23:12] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:23:13] But when we had the meetings with the psychiatrist, again, he didn't approach anything directly. And I had never been in the presence of a psychiatrist. I mean, this was not part of my family scene, number one. Well, there were probably plenty of crazy people, but nobody could afford a psychiatrist. So, I mean, I was so intimidated by this experience.

KLEIN: [00:23:36] It was a one-on-one interview?

PARSACA: [00:23:38] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:23:38] It wasn't the two of you.

PARSACA: [00:23:39] No, no, one on one.

KLEIN: [00:23:39] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:23:41] And a very funny thing that Ann Albright still remembers.

KLEIN: [00:23:46] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:23:49] We talked about my childhood, going camping, how many sisters and brothers I had, you know, just stuff that seemed like absolutely nothing to me.

KLEIN: [00:23:58] Right.

PARSACA: [00:23:59] And it was very personable. And then when I saw the report he had written, he had written that I had, quote, an acute social awareness, unquote. And I remember cracking up, like.

KLEIN: [00:24:13] When did you get to see the report?

PARSACA: [00:24:15] This is crazy. Before we went.

KLEIN: [00:24:17] Oh, really?

PARSACA: [00:24:17] Yeah, I'm not, I don't remember the exact mechanism. But yeah, we actually saw it and I remember just cracking up. It's like, oh really? He knows that from this chat that we had? Okay, well, whatever. I'm glad he came to a good conclusion.

KLEIN: [00:24:31] What did, did you have to take psychological tests also, like the MMPI?

PARSACA: [00:24:37] Not that I remember. But, but the psych, one of the interesting things about couples is that the psychiatrist announced that he was going to be meeting, he wanted to have a group meeting with all of the married couples.

KLEIN: [00:24:47] Right.

PARSACA: [00:24:48] We thought, oh, what's he going to talk about, birth control or what? You know, we just. What he wanted to talk about was competition between couples and how we needed to be aware of that and how that had proven to be problems with Peace Corps couples because they had to work so closely together and they could be competitive. And, and he probably addressed desire to go too at that point. But so that was kind of.

KLEIN: [00:25:11] Was this all during that four weeks or?

PARSACA: [00:25:13] Oh no, this was throughout the three months. This was back in the city.

KLEIN: [00:25:18] At the end of the four weeks, were you tested on your language ability.

PARSACA: [00:25:22] Yeah, we were. It was a, um, a verbal test and then they ranked us according to the.

KLEIN: [00:25:29] The Foreign Service. FS one, two, three, four.

PARSACA: [00:25:32] Yes, exactly.

KLEIN: [00:25:34] Was there any indication that you really should be at least two or?

PARSACA: [00:25:39] Um, I remember getting a one plus and being very happy with that. So they must have, you know, maybe the cutoff was one.

KLEIN: [00:25:46] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:25:46] You know, whatever it was, you know, I mean, that seems pretty paltry now but.

KLEIN: [00:25:52] During the four weeks, had anyone dropped out of the program, that you were aware?

PARSACA: [00:25:57] Yeah, I don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:25:58] Okay. Uh, so what happens after Monroe?

PARSACA: [00:26:03] Okay, so we go back to the Hotel Paris, and we continue with education classes at Columbia Teachers College. And, and then after a week or two, we were placed in the Catholic schools in New York City because of the public school strike.

KLEIN: [00:26:21] Let's stay with.

PARSACA: [00:26:21] Oh, yes.

KLEIN: [00:26:22] Go ahead.

PARSACA: [00:26:22] I'm sorry. We stayed at the Hotel Paris for about a week, and then we went to our home stays with families in the city.

KLEIN: [00:26:29] Do you recall who was running the program at Teachers College or who was head of the training?

PARSACA: [00:26:36] The one person I remember was a Nigerian named Kojo.

KLEIN: [00:26:41] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:26:41] And that's the only person I remember.

KLEIN: [00:26:44] And within the, so now were the nurses were going to split off at this point?

PARSACA: [00:26:51] Yeah, they must have split off and done different educational training.

KLEIN: [00:26:54] Of the group then, I don't know, it may have been 120, 130 at that point. Were there any, any in the group who had previously taught?

PARSACA: [00:27:04] Oh yeah, there were. There were a few teachers.

KLEIN: [00:27:07] But the majority had not?

PARSACA: [00:27:10] The majority had not. The oldest person in our group was 26, and he had a, maybe it was 25 because he still needed to avoid the draft. He had a PhD in biochemistry and he had taught at the college level.

KLEIN: [00:27:25] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:27:27] But there were some who had taught in secondary and junior high.

KLEIN: [00:27:31] So the, the, uh, the basis of training, the assumption of training, was that you were starting from square one?

PARSACA: [00:27:39] That's right. And Kenya had required that all of the teachers have bachelor's degree, but they did not require that they'd be certified teachers.

KLEIN: [00:27:49] Yes, that's common to the British style system.

PARSACA: [00:27:51] Right.

KLEIN: [00:27:53] So you did an intensive education?

PARSACA: [00:27:56] Right.

KLEIN: [00:27:56] For about a week.

PARSACA: [00:27:58] Uh huh.

KLEIN: [00:27:59] Were there also cultural and historical studies at that point?

PARSACA: [00:28:01] Right. That went on throughout, even when we, um, even when we were staying with families, there were certain days where we had to go back to Teachers College for various sessions, cross cultural and that sort of thing.

KLEIN: [00:28:13] Do you remember doing, also doing American studies, world communism?

PARSACA: [00:28:17] No. No, I, I think I would remember that.

KLEIN: [00:28:21] Yeah, it may have been dropped by then.

PARSACA: [00:28:22] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:28:24] Okay. So tell me about how the home stay went.

PARSACA: [00:28:28] Our home stay was very interesting. It was a, um, these people owned a brownstone in Brooklyn and it was in a neighborhood

that had undergone significant revitalization through this neighborhood project. And so it was really a very nice neighborhood, surrounded by much less nice areas, near Prospect Park.

KLEIN: [00:28:51] Was the, the home stay was arranged for you?

PARSACA: [00:28:55] Yes, it was. And the family, they had one child who was a teenage boy, maybe 14, and the father worked for the Transit Authority. And the mother, I don't remember. She was out of the home, but she was from Barbados.

KLEIN: [00:29:11] And it was a Black family?

PARSACA: [00:29:12] Yeah. And they were just really great. We actually had our own little apartment at the top of the brownstone, so we had a very, really cushy, cushy home stay. Other people had much less luxurious and more, and frightening experiences in some of the places.

KLEIN: [00:29:34] How long was the home stay?

PARSACA: [00:29:35] Three weeks, I think.

KLEIN: [00:29:37] And what was the expectation of how you would spend your time during the three weeks?

PARSACA: [00:29:41] If I remember correctly, they gave us very little direction. I mean, during that time we were student teaching, so we were out of the home all day in the school. And we were at Bishop Ford High School in Brooklyn.

KLEIN: [00:29:52] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:29:53] And, you know, we went through all the adventures on the subway, taking the wrong train and all that stuff. But as far as a home stay, it was just kind of like interacting with them in the evenings. And, and we were there over Thanksgiving, so they had the whole family and that was really wonderful.

KLEIN: [00:30:11] Tell me about the your experience walking into a classroom. You had only had a week of educational training.

PARSACA: [00:30:20] Yeah, we may have had a little. Yeah, maybe it was about, yeah, only about a week. I was terrified, basically. But we each had a mentor, and mine was this very kind young Italian from Brooklyn. And so we kind of related on the Italian thing and he liked that. And, and, uh, I taught biology, which I was pretty comfortable with, although I had not really studied straight biology. It had all been medically oriented, human oriented. Um, but I felt pretty good about that. And being in the Catholic schools, that was very disciplined.

KLEIN: [00:31:01] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:31:01] And so we didn't have to deal with a lot of class manage, classroom management basically.

KLEIN: [00:31:06] What level was it?

PARSACA: [00:31:06] High school.

KLEIN: [00:31:07] But what grade?

PARSACA: [00:31:09] Oh.

KLEIN: [00:31:10] You don't remember?

PARSACA: [00:31:10] I don't remember, probably ninth or ten.

KLEIN: [00:31:12] So from the first day you were teaching or did you have a chance to observe for a week and then?

PARSACA: [00:31:19] Oh no. Talked to him about lesson plans or something. But I know that we, it was such a short period that we kind of jumped right into it, but I don't remember the actual timing.

KLEIN: [00:31:29] At any point did you feel that there was no way in the world you would ever become a teacher?

PARSACA: [00:31:34] No. Uh uh. I mean, it really wasn't what I wanted to do.

KLEIN: [00:31:38] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:31:39] But I felt like I could do it. And looking back on that experience, I'm so grateful for having had that experience. It taught me.

KLEIN: [00:31:45] Why?

PARSACA: [00:31:45] Well, it taught me how to present to people, how to get an idea across, how to organize material for that, for presentations.

KLEIN: [00:31:54] Did you sort of come to that just because you were doing it or did someone guide you through? I mean, were you applying a theory or just sort of figuring it out as you went along?

PARSACA: [00:32:03] I knew nothing about educational theory.

KLEIN: [00:32:05] Even though you'd been exposed to some, I guess?

PARSACA: [00:32:08] I suppose. I mean, honestly, it must have been pretty, it must have. I must not have taken much of it in because I don't remember it at all. And there's so many other things I remember very vividly.

KLEIN: [00:32:16] That's true of many education courses.

PARSACA: [00:32:18] Yes, I'm sure. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:32:21] So it was three weeks of teaching and Jim was teaching at the same school?

PARSACA: [00:32:25] Right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:32:26] And you had no other agenda other than occasionally going back to Columbia?

PARSACA: [00:32:31] Right. And, and living in this neighborhood, you know, kind of living in a cross-cultural experience and seeing how we felt about that.

KLEIN: [00:32:38] Did anyone evaluate your teaching?

PARSACA: [00:32:41] They must have. And I think it was this mentor to whom each of us was assigned. It must have been because that would have been the only one.

KLEIN: [00:32:49] No one from the training program?

PARSACA: [00:32:50] I don't remember that they did.

KLEIN: [00:32:51] Okay. Yeah. After the three week home stay and practice teaching, you're still in training?

PARSACA: [00:33:00] Right.

KLEIN: [00:33:00] Was there a midpoint in the training when there was a selection board and you were told, you know, everything was okay or people disappeared?

PARSACA: [00:33:10] I don't remember. I only remember people getting deselected at the end. I do remember that some people left.

KLEIN: [00:33:18] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:33:19] But I think up to the end it was voluntary. But there may have been.

KLEIN: [00:33:23] Yeah. I assume during the four weeks at Monroe you had sort of begun to develop friendships with couples.

PARSACA: [00:33:31] Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:33:31] And then that was dispersed when you went to the home stay.

PARSACA: [00:33:36] Right.

KLEIN: [00:33:36] And now you're back together again.

PARSACA: [00:33:37] Oh, yes. And then, of course, we all had our stories to tell from the home stays.

KLEIN: [00:33:41] Yeah. And back at the Hotel Paris?

PARSACA: [00:33:43] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:33:44] And for how long was that?

PARSACA: [00:33:46] Well, that must have been about another month, because we started training on October 7th, and then we ended like around the 20th of December or something like that, because I know, like I said, we went home for the holidays.

KLEIN: [00:33:58] And you had the chance to go back.

PARSACA: [00:33:59] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:34:00] What was the last phase then of training?

PARSACA: [00:34:04] The last phase was to come back together. I would guess they did the deselection. Well, that whole last time after training, we did a lot of the cross-cultural and more education. Those are the things I really remember, and more of those obnoxious T groups.

KLEIN: [00:34:25] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:34:26] That kind of thing. And then when we all came back from our Christmas break, we had just a couple of days.

KLEIN: [00:34:33] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:34:34] I mean, maybe we came back on the 30th because I remember we had, or the 31st perhaps even, because we had a big New Year's Eve party in the hotel.

KLEIN: [00:34:41] Were, um, were there any volunteers who had served in Kenya who were part of the training program?

PARSACA: [00:34:49] There was, no, not that I. You mean who were doing it a second time?

KLEIN: [00:34:53] No, no, who were now trainee trainers? Returned volunteers.

PARSACA: [00:34:56] Oh, yes, there were. Yes, there were. And I've always been mad at them because they gave me one piece of very bum advice.

KLEIN: [00:35:03] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:35:05] They had all been in government schools. They were there before the Harambee schools. So they were in well-established schools, most if not all of which had electricity.

KLEIN: [00:35:16] Yes.

PARSACA: [00:35:16] They were in the cities. And I was having this huge stress about whether or not to take my sewing machine because it weighed 40 pounds, or weighed 30 pounds or whatever. It was heavy. And I thought, gosh, we're not going to have electricity. Why take it? But I'd love to be able to do stuff with girls and sewing. And they said, oh no, you'll have electricity. So my dad, who worked in a factory warehouse crating big things most of his life, crated it up beautifully for me. And I shipped it to Kenya, and it became a stand for our Peace Corps book locker for two years, because there was no electricity within 70 miles of where we were.

KLEIN: [00:36:00] Do you recall if any of the returned volunteers were married couples?

PARSACA: [00:36:05] I don't remember that any were.

KLEIN: [00:36:07] Okay. I mean, was there any part of the training where they took the married couples aside just to?

PARSACA: [00:36:13] The only thing I remember was with the psychiatrist.

KLEIN: [00:36:15] Okay. So there was no physical fitness training that you did.

PARSACA: [00:36:20] No.

KLEIN: [00:36:23] And when you went home for Christmas, did the families try to say, well, why don't you stay? I mean.

PARSACA: [00:36:33] No, no, they knew us well enough. I mean, my parents knew I always did what I wanted to do.

KLEIN: [00:36:38] I assume you were both very enthusiastic at that point.

PARSACA: [00:36:40] Oh, we were. We were very excited. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:36:42] Yeah. So back to New York?

PARSACA: [00:36:45] Right. Back to New York. But in Detroit, we had to evacuate our plane because the engine caught on fire. It was a little scary.

KLEIN: [00:36:53] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:36:53] We got back to New York, spent one or two days, and then.

KLEIN: [00:36:58] We'll talk a little bit about the selection, the final selection. Do you recall much about it?

PARSACA: [00:37:04] You know, I don't remember people. I don't really remember being told we were selected. What I remember was the trauma of the people who were deselected, because two of them were good friends of ours.

KLEIN: [00:37:16] And how, how were they informed that they were?

PARSACA: [00:37:21] Um, I don't know. I think, I mean, they just told us.

KLEIN: [00:37:26] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:37:26] And so I, I don't, they must have been called into a meeting or something. I don't know.

KLEIN: [00:37:31] Yeah. But that aside now you're ready to go?

PARSACA: [00:37:36] Right. Yeah. And one of these friends actually appealed because it was based on false information and I can't remember what that was, something in an FBI check or something. And he did end up coming to Kenya about a week after the rest.

KLEIN: [00:37:49] Oh, great.

PARSACA: [00:37:50] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:37:51] So they were still doing background checks?

PARSACA: [00:37:53] Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was something my family talked about, how the FBI had come around the neighborhood and all the neighbors said, oh, Mary's the nicest girl. We used to always buy donuts from her when she was selling them for her girls club. And that was all they could tell them about me.

KLEIN: [00:38:09] Your record was pretty clean.

PARSACA: [00:38:11] Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:38:13] Okay. So you're ready to go now.

PARSACA: [00:38:18] Right.

KLEIN: [00:38:18] Did you, had you then had packed up everything for two years?

PARSACA: [00:38:24] Yes. And we made all the mistakes you could make.

KLEIN: [00:38:27] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:38:28] You know, and then we had this New Year's Eve party and, um, everybody got pretty loaded. And I remember we were on the 17th floor of the hotel, and I was, the window, for some reason our window was open and I was trying to close it and I got really nervous about the window. Anyway, ended up going to Kenya with a horrendous cold. But we went to the airport on New Year's Day, where we all were watching the Rose Bowl, and left at half time. So it was only three months later that we knew, we found out that Ohio State had beat USC.

KLEIN: [00:39:05] Was it a charter flight?

PARSACA: [00:39:06] Yes, it was a charter flight. It was 150 of us. And then a small group going to Uganda.

KLEIN: [00:39:12] Okay. Yeah. Yeah, that would, that would be, uh. And that was your first overseas flight?

PARSACA: [00:39:18] Oh, yes. And it was glorious. It was KLM and they just wined and dined us all the way to Amsterdam.

KLEIN: [00:39:24] Yeah. So it was Amsterdam and then?

PARSACA: [00:39:27] Amsterdam and then we landed in Beirut and we were the first plane to land in Beirut after the Christmas bombing of the airport.

KLEIN: [00:39:36] Oh, yeah.

PARSACA: [00:39:36] And so there were bombed out planes on the airport and soldiers. And we were escorted from the plane into the terminal where we had to stay. We could use the restrooms. We had to stay there and escorted back.

KLEIN: [00:39:48] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:39:50] No pictures. So that was pretty interesting.

KLEIN: [00:39:53] At any point, did up to this point, had your specific assignment been discussed?

PARSACA: [00:40:00] No, just that we would be in a secondary school. Oh, well, that's not true. Let me back up. About three weeks before we were to go, one of the Peace Corps doctors found out that myself and one other woman in the program were medical technologists.

KLEIN: [00:40:18] Right.

PARSACA: [00:40:19] He came to New York to meet with us because they wanted to open a medical technology school at the medical school, and he wanted to recruit us to do that. Well, at this point, Jim and I had already decided we wanted to be in a rural school. We were really excited about working together. We definitely want to be in the bush, but here's the job I wanted.

KLEIN: [00:40:41] Yeah, yeah.

PARSACA: [00:40:43] So. So anyway, he, you know, he went through the whole sales pitch and tried to convince us. And, um, and I just said, you know, really, I can't make this decision until I see it. So and this other woman said the same thing. So he met our plane, which arrived at 4:00 in the morning. And, um, when can I, when can I take you to medical school? Oh my God.

KLEIN: [00:41:08] Do you remember his name?

PARSACA: [00:41:09] Yeah, Bob Amman. And he picked us up like 9:30 the next morning. And we went there and it was just, it was an incredible job. It would have been so cool.

KLEIN: [00:41:21] Was it in Nairobi?

PARSACA: [00:41:22] It was in Nairobi. And so we would have lived in an apartment. Jim would have gone to his school. I would have gone to the medical school. And it was like, well, God, we could stay home and do that. You know, that's not why we came here. But it was a very hard decision for me because I really wanted to do this. There was really a need. But the other woman did stay and do it, so that made it easier for me. But then we said, put us as far away from Nairobi as you can, and they did.

KLEIN: [00:41:50] Yeah. So. So when you were going to look at the med tech school, you still didn't know what your alternative was?

PARSACA: [00:41:59] No, we did not at this point. And so we stayed, we stayed in Nairobi a long time, like I'd say at least ten days.

KLEIN: [00:42:09] Were Kenya schools are on a January beginning?

PARSACA: [00:42:13] Correct. Three months of school, one month vacation, which was so, so lovely.

KLEIN: [00:42:18] Where did you stay when you?

PARSACA: [00:42:20] We stayed at the Brenner Hotel. And it was interesting because for some reason, and I don't really know why, Jim and I and a few other couples were kind of overflow. So we got to stay in this much nicer hotel.

KLEIN: [00:42:36] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:42:37] And it was, it was mosquito nets and breakfast, tea brought at 7:00.

KLEIN: [00:42:44] Yeah. Was the group still together as a group and were you doing some in-country?

PARSACA: [00:42:52] You know, we must have been. But to tell you the truth, I don't remember it.

KLEIN: [00:42:56] And you don't remember the group?

PARSACA: [00:42:57] I remember being at the office. And I remember people getting their assignments. And there was a delay on our assignment because of this med tech school possibility.

KLEIN: [00:43:05] Right.

PARSACA: [00:43:05] And so maybe we just stayed longer than some because of that.

KLEIN: [00:43:11] But people were gradually going out?

PARSACA: [00:43:13] Gradually dispersing, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:43:14] And what was your impression of that as it was happening?

PARSACA: [00:43:20] Wow. You know, I don't really remember. I just remember being so thrilled with everything. I was so excited.

KLEIN: [00:43:29] And I mean, but there must have been people getting totally urban assignments and some getting bush assignments?

PARSACA: [00:43:35] Right. One couple, one couple we were close to were put at Starehe School in Nairobi, one of the finest schools in the city. And they lived in an apartment. And later when we saw them, I remember her being shocked that women came to our door with cabbages on their heads. She just couldn't believe it.

KLEIN: [00:43:52] Were people protesting? You know, I don't, I don't want to be in Nairobi and get me out of here?

PARSACA: [00:43:56] I don't remember. You know, the most dramatic thing I remember were the couple of people who freaked out and wanted to just get the hell out of the country.

KLEIN: [00:44:03] Really?

PARSACA: [00:44:04] Yeah. I mean, they were very dramatic. One guy had been dramatic all through training, but it had been gung-ho dramatic. Now it was like, get me out of here.

KLEIN: [00:44:12] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:44:13] And so they seemed to take up an awful lot of the space and energy.

KLEIN: [00:44:17] Who, who was director then?

PARSACA: [00:44:20] Bob Poole.

KLEIN: [00:44:20] And when did you first meet with him?

PARSACA: [00:44:23] Well, I guess pretty, pretty quickly. I remember he had a tea or picnic or something for us at his home, which was very nice.

KLEIN: [00:44:31] Do you recall in the few days while you were in Nairobi before going out any kind of, the Peace Corps Kenya trying to imprint what they were all about and what their expectation of you was?

PARSACA: [00:44:45] I'm sure because I'm sure they did.

KLEIN: [00:44:49] Rules and regs.

PARSACA: [00:44:49] Right. Oh, yes. You know, I remember that that happened, but the details totally escape me.

KLEIN: [00:44:56] Okay. If, uh, I mean, it's kind of a personal question. Had you been advised that it would be best not to become pregnant?

PARSACA: [00:45:04] Well, what they had said throughout, and I don't remember if the question was raised by someone or if it was just part of the drill. What they said is, it's no problem having a child while you're here as long as you can continue to do your job. But if you cannot continue your assignment as a Peace Corps volunteer, then we will send you home.

KLEIN: [00:45:24] So that was your understanding of the policy?

PARSACA: [00:45:25] That was clearly our understanding, and it was the policy at the time. I think there were five babies born in our group.

KLEIN: [00:45:30] Oh, okay. So you finally got your assignment.

PARSACA: [00:45:37] Right.

KLEIN: [00:45:39] You had, did you have any idea of where and what it was all about?

PARSACA: [00:45:43] Only on the map. And, um, and the way, this is pretty amazing, the way teachers were assigned to Taranganya Secondary School was because.

KLEIN: [00:45:52] Say it again?

PARSACA: [00:45:53] Taranganya. T-A-R-A-N-apostrophe-G-A-N-Y-A.

KLEIN: [00:45:59] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:46:00] Um, was because the head of the mission there, a man named Roy Cooper, had gone to Peace Corps and requested teachers. I mean, had he known what they were getting, he might not have done that. But so when teachers were assigned to Taranganya, Roy was in Nairobi and he was going to be our transport upcountry. And so he met

us and he was a little nervous guy, but he was going to tell us everything we needed and he really was very helpful. You know, we bought the, the Chinese version of the Petra Max lantern because it cost 1/10 as much and the kinds of pots and things like that. So we went shopping with him. We bought a water filter, which was something we wouldn't have thought of, and then we would have been 350 miles from a water filter. I don't remember a lot of health training, which our daughter got.

KLEIN: [00:46:50] Oh, I was, yeah.

PARSACA: [00:46:51] Yeah, I don't remember that. And I know I would have, I would remember that. So I think they pretty much. We did meet with Peace Corps docs and they probably did say, don't drink the water, and that sort of thing.

KLEIN: [00:47:03] Do you recall being issued a Peace Corps medical kit?

PARSACA: [00:47:05] Yes, we were issued a medical kit and we got our gamma globulin shots.

KLEIN: [00:47:10] Yeah. Okay.

PARSACA: [00:47:11] Every six months.

KLEIN: [00:47:12] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:47:13] Yeah, the medical kit was. And, and we were issued a Peace Corps book locker.

KLEIN: [00:47:16] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:47:17] It was so glorious. And they were really considerate in that they put, they had four different versions and they put different versions with people in the same region so we could switch them around. So we had our own little lending library.

KLEIN: [00:47:30] Now, uh, the, the headmaster of the school was an American?

PARSACA: [00:47:36] No, no, the headmaster of the school was a Luo, a Kenyan who was of the Luo tribe.

KLEIN: [00:47:42] Now, Cooper, who was he?

PARSACA: [00:47:43] He was the head of the mission. The school was not on the mission. The school was a private.

KLEIN: [00:47:48] What kind of mission was it?

PARSACA: [00:47:50] Elim Pentecostal from upstate New York.

KLEIN: [00:47:53] Okay. And Cooper was an American?

PARSACA: [00:47:55] Yes. From Detroit.

KLEIN: [00:47:58] Had been in Kenya how long?

PARSACA: [00:48:00] They had been there about two years, I think.

KLEIN: [00:48:04] It was he and his wife?

PARSACA: [00:48:05] He and his wife and three, three or four children, three children who went off to boarding school.

KLEIN: [00:48:11] So the mission then started the school?

PARSACA: [00:48:14] Well, the way I understand it is that the mission, yeah, they must have, I mean, they supplied the only teachers at the beginning and I don't, I don't know exactly. Yeah, they did pretty much start the school.

KLEIN: [00:48:26] Now, the Harambee school was sort of private schools being started throughout the country because there weren't enough public schools.

PARSACA: [00:48:35] Exactly. There weren't enough positions in government schools for all the students. And so the Harambee concept was self help, that communities through whatever means, perhaps with the help of a mission, or they had a member of Parliament or whatever, would start their own school.

KLEIN: [00:48:51] And then the government had decided to begin to support them.

PARSACA: [00:48:54] That's right.

KLEIN: [00:48:55] And did that coincide with your going?

PARSACA: [00:48:57] Yes. The first year we were there, Taranganya had one, form one was government students and forms two, three, and four were Harambee.

KLEIN: [00:49:06] And the difference being?

PARSACA: [00:49:07] The difference being that the Harambee students were usually kids who could not, who didn't have enough qualifications, enough knowledge, to get accepted to a government school.

KLEIN: [00:49:18] Right.

PARSACA: [00:49:19] And they paid about three times as much in school fees because there was no government subsidy.

KLEIN: [00:49:24] Was that, was that a source of tension between form one and the others?

PARSACA: [00:49:28] I don't remember that it was.

KLEIN: [00:49:34] Okay. Now, Mr. Cooper picks you up in Nairobi and helps you with buying of the stuff.

PARSACA: [00:49:40] Right.

KLEIN: [00:49:41] Can you describe the journey, your first journey out of Nairobi?

PARSACA: [00:49:44] Yes. Well, it was 350 miles.

KLEIN: [00:49:47] Did he have a Land Rover?

PARSACA: [00:49:48] No, he had a Peugeot station wagon, a Peuchie, as our students called it. Um. And we started out rather late because I guess we did some shopping that morning or something, but I don't think we started out before 10:00 or 11:00, and then we drove maybe 40 kilometers out and down the escarpment to a place called Kijabe, where the Rift Valley Academy was located, where his daughter was a student. So we stopped there probably for an hour and then we started up again all the way across the Rift Valley, up the other escarpment into the Highlands. And we were just in awe. I mean, oh! Well, one of the things during that stay in Nairobi, they did set up a trip for us to the Nairobi game parks.

KLEIN: [00:50:33] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:50:33] Which was great. So we had already seen some game, but there was game around in the Rift Valley, and then up into the Highlands where the tea plantations were.

KLEIN: [00:50:42] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:50:42] It was so glorious. And, um, then it got dark and we'd be driving, driving, driving for hours. I mean, we felt like we were going to the absolute end of the earth. And the reality was we were pretty damn close. So we arrived at Taranganya around midnight, and the last 26 miles was on something that was barely more than a one lane road. It really was not dissimilar to our road right out here.

KLEIN: [00:51:14] Rutted dirt.

PARSACA: [00:51:14] Rutted and dirt and some places it actually had grass down the middle with one track. Yeah. And but on that drive down that road, there were a lot of, um, sisal plants, which you probably know look like gigantic yucca.

KLEIN: [00:51:30] Spiky.

PARSACA: [00:51:30] And then they have that asparagus stock up the middle. And on these were civet cats who had climbed up. So the whole thing was, you know, their eyes would glow. So we were just exhausted. And, you know, we were never scared. It was just like, whoa, where are we going?

KLEIN: [00:51:48] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:51:48] So we get to the mission house at about midnight, and we spent the night there. But, um, I think it was good that we had each other. But we're also very common sensical Midwestern people. And I think that served us well, because one of the first things the wife told us, this Mrs. Cooper, was that we had to watch out because just that day she'd taken a dish towel out of the drawer and there was a spitting cobra under it. And then she also told us we had to sleep with the shutters closed because leopards would leap through our windows. And we all took this, we took this with definitely a grain of salt. It's like, you know, I haven't heard of any Peace Corps volunteers being killed by leaping leopards, so I will take my chances.

PARSACA: [00:52:33] So we spent one night there and then moved into a house on the mission that was vacant because our little bungalow at the school that the government was now building wasn't quite completed. They had completed one and the headmaster had moved into that. And then we were going to get the next one.

KLEIN: [00:52:54] Okay. Can you describe the school compound?

PARSACA: [00:52:56] Yeah, across the road from the mission. And it was, gosh, probably 50 acres, it would be about my guess. Oblong or rectangular

shape. And the houses were at the west end and there was a road that went all the way around the compound past our houses, across past the soccer field, round by the dormitories and on the other side out to the road. And between our house and the soccer field was about a 30 yard long, 10 foot high hedge of lantana. So gorgeous and smelled so wonderful.

KLEIN: [00:53:44] Were most of the buildings concrete block?

PARSACA: [00:53:46] Yeah. They were concrete block.

KLEIN: [00:53:48] Tin roof or?

PARSACA: [00:53:49] Right.

KLEIN: [00:53:49] Asbestos compositions?

PARSACA: [00:53:51] Tin roof. We had the Mabati, the corrugated tin, just like we have in this house. Anyway, our little house that we moved into was a kitchen that was six by eight, and then three small rooms, which we used as an office, and the living room and our bedroom.

KLEIN: [00:54:09] Right. And it was a boarding school?

PARSACA: [00:54:13] It was a boarding school. The kids had very, very, very poor accommodations. The school building itself was one strip of four classrooms with a small section in the middle where the office was. And we had a Gestetner copy machine in the office, which was indispensable.

KLEIN: [00:54:32] So it was, there was one class for each form.

PARSACA: [00:54:36] One class for each form.

KLEIN: [00:54:37] And they stayed and the teachers came to them.

PARSACA: [00:54:40] That's right. That's right. Yeah. The forms did not move from their room. And the, the dormitory was very, very inadequate. The students slept two to each level of a bunk bed.

KLEIN: [00:54:53] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:54:53] So it was, you know, an outhouse that was overflowing and really, really poor food.

KLEIN: [00:55:00] So for the first couple of weeks, you were living at the mission?

PARSACA: [00:55:03] For the first six months.

KLEIN: [00:55:04] Six months.

PARSACA: [00:55:06] Which was difficult.

KLEIN: [00:55:07] Did, now were you able to set up housekeeping or were you?

PARSACA: [00:55:11] Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:55:12] So it was, it was your own house.

PARSACA: [00:55:13] It was our own house, yeah. It was a house that was vacant on the mission. And Peace Corps rented it from them until our house was done. And, and there were definitely tensions between us and the missionaries.

KLEIN: [00:55:25] Mm hmm.

PARSACA: [00:55:26] And, uh, you know, they wanted us to go to the Pentecostal church and we said thank you, but no.

KLEIN: [00:55:34] What about the adjustment to, you know, buying food, cooking meals?

PARSACA: [00:55:40] You know, it was so easy for us. I love to cook. I didn't know at that time just how much I love to cook. But I'm very grateful for having learned to cook in Kenya because I can make anything from scratch. And I can make anything from anything.

KLEIN: [00:55:53] Yeah. Now, where did you get the food?

PARSACA: [00:55:56] We had a lot of people who came to our door with pineapples, cabbage, tomatoes, onions. Four miles from us was a little town of Kehancha where we got our mail and there was a market once a week so we could go there and we could buy meat. But the meat there was really pretty gross. And remember, I had just graduated from laboratory science school, so my last course had been parasitology. So every time I walked into the meat market, it was like tapeworms, you know?

KLEIN: [00:56:28] Did you get eggs and chicken?

PARSACA: [00:56:29] We got eggs locally. Jim alluded last night to the little girl who would steal our eggs. She would walk into this, our little store room and come out with two eggs that she would then offer to sell to us. I'm sure she's done just fine.

KLEIN: [00:56:42] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:56:43] And then once a month, we would, well, about every couple, I'd say from once a week to every two weeks, we'd go into Migori, which was 26 miles away. And that was a proper town.

KLEIN: [00:56:56] How would you, how would you get there?

PARSACA: [00:56:57] Country bus. There was a bus that went on our road and continued for 11 miles to a place called Nyamtiro, where it would turn around, it would spend the night, and turn around and come back.

KLEIN: [00:57:07] And that was virtually the Tanzanian border, wasn't it?

PARSACA: [00:57:10] Oh, yeah. Really close. We were, we were probably crow's flight five miles from the border, but up at Nyamtiro, it was right on the border.

KLEIN: [00:57:18] Okay.

PARSACA: [00:57:18] And we had two busses. One was, uh, one was named Jamluo and the other was named Love in Tokyo. And they were supposed to come a half an hour, an hour apart. But they raced.

KLEIN: [00:57:33] Yeah.

PARSACA: [00:57:34] And so you just had to jump on whichever one stopped and.

KLEIN: [00:57:38] Yeah. Cooper didn't offer to take you into market, or into Migori?

PARSACA: [00:57:43] Cooper was a, he was a very kind person. He was very inept and really turned a blind eye to a lot of really bad stuff that was going on because he didn't want to deal with it, but he was basically a good person. And so he would do things like drive sick people to the dispensary and occasionally we would catch a ride with him up to Kisii, which was 70 miles away. But we really tried to distance ourselves from the mission because for one thing, when we got there and we lived on the mission, everybody assumed we were missionaries.

KLEIN: [00:58:18] Ah, yeah.

PARSACA: [00:58:18] And so this was something we wanted to just definitely counter.

KLEIN: [00:58:22] Right.

PARSACA: [00:58:23] At that time, you know, we, we had been cautioned about mini skirts and all of this, of course, but, but long shorts were fine. And, and so that separated us from the mission. And then we would sit on our front porch and drink beer, and that separated us from the missionaries.

KLEIN: [00:58:42] What was the mission's relation to the school?

PARSACA: [00:58:45] Well, they supplied teachers at this point. At this point, they were completely out of power as far as the administration of the school, particularly with the government students. But they did have teachers. And tell you the truth, I can't remember if Roy, he must, he must have taught Bible. Bible was a subject that all students do, and I'm sure he taught Bible. I don't remember him teaching anything else. We had the headmaster. We had a wonderful, wonderful Kenyan named Jerry Magovey, who was a science teacher. And he and I set up the science lab.

KLEIN: [00:59:18] Was Jerry a university graduate?

PARSACA: [00:59:20] Yeah, a teachers college at least, I don't remember. But the other thing at our school compound were two brand new buildings built by, um, Crossroads Africa.

KLEIN: [00:59:33] Oh!

PARSACA: [00:59:33] With the symbol of the Black and the white hand shaking and [sneezes]. Excuse me. And one was to be a library and one a science laboratory. And the science laboratory had the benches in and the faucets and things. Of course, there was no running water, but they had the, uh, the fixtures. And there was a storeroom that was just packed with books that had been sent. So our two big projects were to do the library, Jim and I did the library, and then Jerry and I did the science lab, to get that set up, which was just wonderful fun.

KLEIN: [01:00:12] How many, how many other staff members were there?

PARSACA: [01:00:17] Usually it was just the four of us, and intermittently we would have other staff members. Now, after six months, we moved to the school compound, which was glorious, and then a new couple came to the mission. They were exactly our age. They arrived, their names were Bill and Juanita Foy. They arrived during Richard Nixon's inaugural

address. Well, no, that's right. They came January 20th. So we overlapped living on the mission. They must have been in a different house. Yeah, there were three houses there.

KLEIN: [01:00:48] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:00:49] And they arrived during the speech, which was certainly fortuitous, as they got all excited about it. We were completely depressed. Anyway, and they were awful. They were just awful.

KLEIN: [01:01:06] Where were they from?

PARSACA: [01:01:07] They were from, they had gone, he had gone to Oral Roberts University.

KLEIN: [01:01:13] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:01:14] I don't, honestly don't remember where they were from. I mean, we never even called them by their first names. We just wanted to keep as much distance.

KLEIN: [01:01:20] So they were missionaries.

PARSACA: [01:01:21] They were missionaries who had been called to Taranganya. But then when they found out that they had outdoor plumbing and a rain tank for water, they discovered that really they were called to teach at the Bible school in Nairobi. And thank God, after about six months they left.

KLEIN: [01:01:37] But for the six months they were teachers?

PARSACA: [01:01:41] He was a teacher and she was forced into it, shamed into it, I should say, by the headmaster. She said, I came here to be a wife, not a teacher. And he said, but you speak English. And so she did teach English. And then when they left, I took over her English classes. And I had a very funny experience where one student wrote in an essay that

they could tell I was not a missionary because I did not wear my glasses perched upon my nose or my skirts about my ankles.

KLEIN: [01:02:13] Great description. Let's talk a little bit about your adjustment of walking into this classroom.

PARSACA: [01:02:25] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:02:27] So were you at all familiar with the Kenya education system?

PARSACA: [01:02:30] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:02:31] And the expectations built into it?

PARSACA: [01:02:33] Yes. We had gotten a fairly good orientation to that. And I don't remember if that was in Kenya or in New York because. [tape break] Let's see, I was saying that we had been prepared that for things like that the students would not be a discipline problem, that we would be expected to teach to the syllabus.

KLEIN: [01:02:53] Right.

PARSACA: [01:02:53] And that we couldn't get too freewheeling because they had to take the, the Kenyan version of the Cambridge exam to get their high school diploma.

KLEIN: [01:03:02] Did you have copies of the syllabus?

PARSACA: [01:03:04] Yes, we did.

KLEIN: [01:03:06] And but the students you were beginning to teach, you would not see through the exam because they would go through four years.

PARSACA: [01:03:14] Right. Only some of our, the fourth and third formers when we started. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:03:20] Yeah. Okay. And your initial teaching was? What was your assignment?

PARSACA: [01:03:27] I taught biology, chemistry to kids who had never seen ice. It was a challenge.

KLEIN: [01:03:34] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:03:34] Um, geography. Math.

KLEIN: [01:03:37] Wow.

PARSACA: [01:03:37] Um, and one other thing. Oh, health science or health.

KLEIN: [01:03:43] And you were only teaching form one?

PARSACA: [01:03:45] Oh, no. We were teaching all the forms.

KLEIN: [01:03:47] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:03:48] We just, we sat down. We had a staff meeting. It was just Jerry Magovey, Mr. Obiero, the headmaster, Jim and myself and Roy. And divvied up the courses. And I'm almost sure he only taught Bible. But then when other missionaries came, they did teach some English or some physics or whatever.

KLEIN: [01:04:09] And so how many periods a day were you teaching?

PARSACA: [01:04:15] It was a lot.

KLEIN: [01:04:16] Yeah, that sounds like it.

PARSACA: [01:04:17] Yeah, it must have been, I wouldn't be surprised if it was eight periods a day.

KLEIN: [01:04:22] Wow.

PARSACA: [01:04:23] Like four in the morning, four in the afternoon. That may, it may not have been eight. It may have been six.

KLEIN: [01:04:27] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:04:27] But it was all day. All day, every day, kind of.

KLEIN: [01:04:30] When did, when did school start?

PARSACA: [01:04:33] It started about the first week of January. I think we were there about a week before it started. But of course, it was supposed to start then but many students didn't show up, which was something we didn't understand, and learned that what was happening is they were out begging for school fees. And they would come with enough money to pay for two weeks and then they would disappear again. It was so painful, so hard, and it seemed to always be the best students.

KLEIN: [01:04:59] Do you recall your initial introduction to the classroom and the students?

PARSACA: [01:05:05] Um, not as a specific incident, but just as an overall impression. I can remember just being totally blown away when the whole classroom stood up. I mean, I didn't grow up in circumstances where anybody stood up for everybody, right?

KLEIN: [01:05:21] Right.

PARSACA: [01:05:22] And I also really, oh, I know. I think they couldn't say Beverwyck. And at that time, I had taken Jim's name. I just took my own name back later. And so they couldn't say Beverwyck. And so they called us Mr. Jim and Mrs. Jim. And it just made me crazy. So I finally got them to call me Mrs. Mary. That was fine. I just did not want to be called Mrs. Jim. And the other thing that I remember it being very hard to adjust to, but that was, was fine, was madam. The madam.

KLEIN: [01:06:01] Yes. Yes.

PARSACA: [01:06:03] So just some of those cultural things were just kind of, um,, not really. Well, they were just, they were strange to us, you know.

KLEIN: [01:06:12] Up to the point you started teaching, you'd been in country for?

PARSACA: [01:06:17] Three weeks.

KLEIN: [01:06:18] Three weeks. Did you get any chance or did you begin to use your Swahili?

PARSACA: [01:06:23] Yeah, we did, actually. Yeah. We tried it out different times. And once we got up to Taranganya, we had to use it.

KLEIN: [01:06:30] Yeah. But only off the school compound?

PARSACA: [01:06:34] Well, yeah, we didn't, we didn't very often speak Swahili with the students because they were learning English.

KLEIN: [01:06:41] Was that a school rule?

PARSACA: [01:06:44] Um, no, I don't remember it being a school rule.

KLEIN: [01:06:47] But back to your initial teaching, were there, did they understand your spoken English?

PARSACA: [01:06:55] Yeah. Yeah, they did, pretty well. I mean, there were certain words, wish I could remember what some of them were now, but we didn't have much trouble communicating. We, actually, um, I don't remember that we were told this term of special English, but I think we both slipped pretty easily into that, of speaking clearly and articulating.

KLEIN: [01:07:18] And dropping slang.

PARSACA: [01:07:21] Right. Exactly. Exactly.

KLEIN: [01:07:24] And you were, you were able to understand the students?

PARSACA: [01:07:27] Most of them. There were some who really didn't belong in the school.

KLEIN: [01:07:30] Yeah. How quickly did you learn school, names and begin to distinguish?

PARSACA: [01:07:39] Oh, gosh, I think really quickly. I don't remember that being a problem at all.

KLEIN: [01:07:42] Was it was it a coed school?

PARSACA: [01:07:44] No, it was all boys.

KLEIN: [01:07:45] Okay. Okay. How, how did the initial teaching go?

PARSACA: [01:07:50] Well, I think it went all right. Um. You know, again, back to my hang ups about writing. I just, I just felt like I really was not equipped to correct essays, that I didn't know enough about writing myself. But then when I realized what it meant in Kenya, I was okay with it because it was so basic. It was so basic.

KLEIN: [01:08:12] Did you have any form four classes?

PARSACA: [01:08:14] I had form four probably for geography or biology or something, but not English.

KLEIN: [01:08:20] And do you recall the students being concerned because they were about to face the exam?

PARSACA: [01:08:26] Tremendously. I can remember one time we were doing something in biology that had to do with botany, and so I wanted to take them out, or I did take them out on a little field trip around the compound looking at different specimens, and they were really pissed. It's like, Madame, is this on the syllabus?

KLEIN: [01:08:44] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:08:45] You know, very challenging because they were so, so concerned about knowing what they needed to know for that exam.

KLEIN: [01:08:53] They couldn't take the exams that required a lab component?

PARSACA: [01:08:58] No.

KLEIN: [01:08:58] Right.

PARSACA: [01:08:58] No.

KLEIN: [01:08:58] So it was all whatever they took was going to be a, they could be examined with paper and pencil.

PARSACA: [01:09:04] That's right.

KLEIN: [01:09:05] Yeah. And I think biology falls into that category.

PARSACA: [01:09:09] Oh, I'm sure.

KLEIN: [01:09:09] Whereas chemistry doesn't. Okay. So there was pressure there. Make you uncomfortable or?

PARSACA: [01:09:20] Yeah, it did, because it seemed really restrictive. And neither Jim nor I wanted to just do what the students wanted us to do, which was to just copy from a book onto the board for them to copy into their exercise books.

KLEIN: [01:09:34] Right.

PARSACA: [01:09:34] And so it was an adjustment for them to get used to our teaching style and there were some kids who challenged it. But as I was telling you last night, when we met these people 26 years later, they said things to us like, you taught us how to think. We can't ask for more than that.

KLEIN: [01:09:52] It must have been easy with the lower forms to sort of open up the teaching.

PARSACA: [01:09:56] It was easier for a couple of reasons. One, because they were not already so much into that system, but also they were the government students, and they really were much sharper.

KLEIN: [01:10:07] They tended to be better.

PARSACA: [01:10:08] Yeah, definitely.

KLEIN: [01:10:10] Did you have any professional contact with the principal, in other words, with the headmaster?

PARSACA: [01:10:18] Oh, yeah. Daily.

KLEIN: [01:10:19] Did he, did he come in and observe you?

PARSACA: [01:10:22] No, I don't remember him doing that. He was very nervous, very threatened by Jim. He was sure that Jim wanted his job.

KLEIN: [01:10:32] Huh.

PARSACA: [01:10:33] And, you know, we, we tried to just maintain a friendly relationship with him, but it did get difficult. And actually, I'll let Jim tell you about this whole thing where we actually asked Peace Corps to come out and mediate a disagreement with him.

KLEIN: [01:10:52] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:10:53] But it really involved Jim mostly. I mean, he wasn't threatened by me. I was just a dumb woman, right?

KLEIN: [01:11:00] So the first six months you're living on the mission, you're teaching full time. Did it fall into place fairly quickly?

PARSACA: [01:11:10] Yeah, it did. You know, one of the things that you have as a Peace Corps volunteer that you don't have here is a lack of distraction.

KLEIN: [01:11:17] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:11:18] I mean, you're there and it's your life.

KLEIN: [01:11:21] Yes.

PARSACA: [01:11:22] And, and to be working in the same job as your partner really was so wonderful. We were able to do that very well. And we had brought a, Jim had brought his typewriter. So we had our manual typewriter.

KLEIN: [01:11:35] And you had a duplicating machine.

PARSACA: [01:11:37] We had a duplicating machine. So we did a lot of that.

KLEIN: [01:11:42] Did you have extracurricular responsibilities?

PARSACA: [01:11:45] Yeah, we did. And I can't remember if we were told we had to or it was just so exciting to do the library and the lab. Those were long term projects.

KLEIN: [01:11:56] It's kind of an expectation at boarding schools.

PARSACA: [01:11:57] Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I'm sure it was. And Jim coached, uh, track.

KLEIN: [01:12:05] What did he coach?

PARSACA: [01:12:05] Track. And I think Jerry coached the soccer. And then I had a wonderful extracurricular thing, but it wasn't with the school. I met, we had friends at a school right on the Tanzanian border, Peace Corps friends, and we went down to meet them. And it was a school that was run by Maryknolls. And there were two American priests, one American nun, and then several Kenyan nuns, Kenyan or Tanzanian. And, um,

they, the, the American nun was a nurse or maybe even a nurse midwife. And she had started, and some of the Kenyans were nurses. And so they had started doing a prenatal and well baby clinic where they would go around once a month to four different sites and hold clinics way out in the bush, like 20 miles into the bush from where we lived.

PARSACA: [01:12:58] And when they found out I was a med tech, they got very excited and wanted me to participate in this. So went back to the school, talked to the headmaster, and asked him if I could be free on Fridays if I taught all of my classes Monday through Thursday. And he agreed. And so every Friday they would come from Isibania, this town on the border, and pick me up in Father Dave's white Toyota pickup. And with usually the American and one or two Kenyan nuns and myself, we'd pile on the back of the pickup and pick up all these mamas and go off on these tracks and set up this clinic under like just a thatched roof, like maybe a primary school. And I had a microscope that was, that used the sun, of course, as its light source and a hand-cranked urine centrifuge.

KLEIN: [01:13:51] Now, that was the Maryknolls, they had all the equipment?

PARSACA: [01:13:55] Well, they had, yeah. Yes, that's right. That was their stuff.

KLEIN: [01:13:59] And was that a situation where you had the chance to use more Swahili?

PARSACA: [01:14:04] Oh, yeah, I used more Swahili. I had a young Kenyan who they knew and had chosen to train in how to do parasitology and urinalysis. So it was really, really fun.

KLEIN: [01:14:18] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:14:19] And we'd be out there most of the day, start back around 3:00 in the afternoon. So that was fun.

KLEIN: [01:14:28] During the first six months, what kind of contact did you have with Peace Corps?

PARSACA: [01:14:32] Very little. You know, we were, being way up country we were kind of the poor relations, which was fine with us. The only time it wasn't fine with us was when we would hear about shipments of books and they'd say. We'd get a letter, come into the office and pick up all the books you need. And by the time we'd get there two months later, of course, the Central Province people would have scarfed them all up.

KLEIN: [01:14:55] Yeah, yeah. Did you, did you have any regular communication with the Peace Corps?

PARSACA: [01:15:01] Um, not that I remember. They might have sent out regular newsletter or something, but I don't remember it.

KLEIN: [01:15:06] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:15:08] We had.

KLEIN: [01:15:08] There was a town six miles away where you got your mail.

PARSACA: [01:15:11] Yeah, four miles.

KLEIN: [01:15:12] Four miles. And was there a telephone at the school?

PARSACA: [01:15:17] No.

KLEIN: [01:15:18] Okay, so the only.

PARSACA: [01:15:19] I don't even think there was a telephone in, in Kehancha. I think the closest one would have been Migori.

KLEIN: [01:15:25] And things were relatively, politically, were relatively quiet?

PARSACA: [01:15:29] They were, it was five years following independence. They were quiet until Tom Mboya was assassinated. Vice president.

KLEIN: [01:15:37] And that was in the second year?

PARSACA: [01:15:40] I don't remember.

KLEIN: [01:15:41] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:15:41] Yeah. It was quite a while before we left.

KLEIN: [01:15:44] Was Peace Corps at all concerned with your being so close to the Tanzania border?

PARSACA: [01:15:49] I don't remember any communication from Peace Corps during that whole episode. And, you know, even if there had been, unless they had gotten in a Land Rover and driven out to check on us, it would have been two weeks before we got a letter anyway.

KLEIN: [01:16:04] Did anyone visit from?

PARSACA: [01:16:07] Yeah. This Bob Siegel, who was, um, I don't remember if he was deputy director at the time. I think he might have been. He's the one who came out to mediate this dispute. And I think, I think he visited us one other time too, just kind of on rounds. And then for a short while, excuse me, our second year, they put a staff member in Kisumu, which was about 140 miles from us. And, um, I don't think that idea lasted too long, but it seemed like a good idea to have staff up country some ways.

KLEIN: [01:16:44] A little closer.

PARSACA: [01:16:44] Yeah. And he visited us, I think.

KLEIN: [01:16:47] You know who that was?

PARSACA: [01:16:48] Yeah, that was Chuck Coskran.

KLEIN: [01:16:49] Chuck?

PARSACA: [01:16:50] Chuck Coskran and Kathy.

KLEIN: [01:16:56] During the first six months, did you take any vacation, any time off?

PARSACA: [01:17:01] Um.

KLEIN: [01:17:02] Did you go into Nairobi?

PARSACA: [01:17:03] Yeah, we did go into Nairobi because we taught for three months. And you know, thinking about the timing. We probably didn't spend that much time, it was, probably was less than a week in Nairobi. It had to be, because I know we started teaching in January, it just seemed like forever. But anyway, when we. It was January, February, March, so we had the month of April off.

KLEIN: [01:17:23] Oh, okay.

PARSACA: [01:17:24] And we did a safari. One couple that were good friends of ours asked us to safari with them, which was a wonderful thing because he was a man who came back and got a PhD in ornithology, and so he knew I wasn't a birder at the time. We didn't even own binoculars, but he knew a lot about the animals. And so we really, we had a great time and learned a lot about the animals.

KLEIN: [01:17:50] You didn't have a vehicle?

PARSACA: [01:17:52] No, we rented a car, rented a tiny Land Rover.

KLEIN: [01:17:55] Where, in Nairobi?

PARSACA: [01:17:56] In Nairobi, yeah. So we hitched into Nairobi.

KLEIN: [01:17:59] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:18:01] I'd like to show you this dent in my wedding ring. See this dent right here?

KLEIN: [01:18:06] Yes.

PARSACA: [01:18:07] Well, that comes from where a rock hit me when Jim was getting bored when we were hitchhiking. We'd been sitting there for 3 hours, and he started throwing these little rocks at me. And one hit my ring. I still have the evidence. But, you know.

KLEIN: [01:18:24] So it was possible to hitch, I mean, maybe it took a long time.

PARSACA: [01:18:27] We would take the bus to Kisii.

KLEIN: [01:18:29] Oh, okay.

PARSACA: [01:18:30] Yeah, usually to Kisii, and then we'd start to hitch.

KLEIN: [01:18:33] No public transport from Kisii in?

PARSACA: [01:18:35] I'm sure there was, but it must have been, like waiting until night or, yeah, I don't remember why it was. But if you got picked up by an Indian in a Mercedes, it was really fast.

KLEIN: [01:18:46] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:18:47] Really scary. But you'd get there faster.

KLEIN: [01:18:49] Yeah. So then you rented a vehicle?

PARSACA: [01:18:53] Yes. And then went off and did the safari loop.

KLEIN: [01:18:57] Do you remember where you went first?

PARSACA: [01:18:58] Yeah, we went to the Mara Masai and Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater and Olduvai Gorge.

KLEIN: [01:19:04] Were you trying to camp your way around?

PARSACA: [01:19:06] Oh, we were, yeah, we camped all the time.

KLEIN: [01:19:08] Oh, okay.

PARSACA: [01:19:09] Yeah, we camped everywhere. And then we.

KLEIN: [01:19:11] I had forgotten whether that was possible.

PARSACA: [01:19:12] Yeah, we'd use the lodges for showers and drinks.

KLEIN: [01:19:20] Then back to school?

PARSACA: [01:19:21] Then back to school. And in the meantime, we had acquired a couple of dogs and a cat, and we had our little family back there at school. So we always had a student housesit for us to take care of the animals.

KLEIN: [01:19:35] And the big change was then you moved into your own house on the compound.

PARSACA: [01:19:39] Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:19:42] How did that change your relation to the school?

PARSACA: [01:19:45] Oh God, it was like a breath of fresh air.

KLEIN: [01:19:49] Because?

PARSACA: [01:19:49] Because we were away from the mission.

KLEIN: [01:19:51] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:19:51] It definitely made that, made our, our difference from being missionaries more clear to everybody else. And we didn't have to go there. We would only walk over there if Roy had picked up the mail or something.

KLEIN: [01:20:05] Yeah. What was the headmaster's relation with the mission?

PARSACA: [01:20:12] Uh, tolerant, but usually very annoyed. He didn't, he didn't subscribe to their brand of religion and if I remember correctly, he didn't practice any Christian religion that I remember. But he couldn't.

KLEIN: [01:20:27] Was there any resentment?

PARSACA: [01:20:29] There was resentment. He didn't like them in some of their heavy handed things when the Foys came. Well, actually, that's not true. The Foys stayed such a short time. It was, I don't know, four months, six months. But then another couple came, a family, Harold and Ernestine Malone. And we went from nice guy Roy to pain in the neck Foys to unbelievable Malones. They were horrible. We by this time had gotten a grant and we were buying books. We got two grants, one to buy books and one to buy lab equipment.

KLEIN: [01:21:09] Who were the grants from?

PARSACA: [01:21:10] You know, I don't remember. And we didn't have anything to do with getting them. So I think it's something, I don't.

KLEIN: [01:21:15] [inaudible]

PARSACA: [01:21:16] It probably was, it wasn't something we had to write for or anything.

KLEIN: [01:21:21] So you simply got to notice that you got X amount of money?

PARSACA: [01:21:23] Yeah, we had this money. And so Jim and I, particularly Jim, did a lot of research on books that would be appropriate. We bought the African Writers Series and, and all kinds of things. Well, including some natural history books. And this became a huge battle with the missionaries that they were not going to allow any books that talked about evolution in the library. This isn't your library. This is a government school.

KLEIN: [01:21:52] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:21:52] And it just became this. And the headmaster was totally on our side and we did indeed keep these books in the library. But there were just all kinds of bizarre episodes like that.

KLEIN: [01:22:05] In relation to the library, did you train librarians?

PARSACA: [01:22:08] Yeah, we had a student.

KLEIN: [01:22:11] Set up a stamp and due date and card system?

PARSACA: [01:22:13] Right, we did, although it was not fail safe. And we realized one day that the entire African Writer Series was being pilfered and it became this big. Oh gosh, Jim should tell you about it. But anyway, it became this huge thing at the school and the headmaster went on a rampage and wanted to expel these kids that had stolen books. It's like, you know, if they'd stolen something else, but they're stealing books, I mean.

KLEIN: [01:22:38] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:22:38] You want them to read, right?

KLEIN: [01:22:40] Did you decorate the library? You had a building for the library?

PARSACA: [01:22:43] Yes, it was a wonderful library. And with this grant, we were able to actually buy furniture. So we had, they were probably locally made, but nice tables and chairs.

KLEIN: [01:22:52] Did you have [inaudible]?

PARSACA: [01:22:52] And it was very professional and, I think so. You'll have to ask Jim about that. Yeah, he spent most of his time.

KLEIN: [01:22:58] The other part of the grant was?

PARSACA: [01:23:01] For lab equipment.

KLEIN: [01:23:02] And did you share the grant with? There was another science teacher.

PARSACA: [01:23:07] Oh, yeah. I mean, he, you know, that was definitely his thing. And I worked with him on that, but it was for the school and it was, you know, and we bought beakers and pipettes and all these kinds of fun things.

KLEIN: [01:23:19] Yeah. So you were able to start lab work by the second year?

PARSACA: [01:23:23] Yes. And but it was mostly just demonstration because there was not enough for kids to do things. And sometimes we would let them do things but. And we had a little four cubic foot kerosene refrigerator that made four ice cubes. So I rushed over to the lab with these four ice cubes to demonstrate the states of matter for the kids.

KLEIN: [01:23:45] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:23:47] It was great.

KLEIN: [01:23:51] During the, well, you're still in the first year. You've taken the vacation. You're back. You're now moved into the house.

PARSACA: [01:23:58] Right.

KLEIN: [01:23:59] Did you, were you able to hire anyone to be a steward or help out?

PARSACA: [01:24:04] Yeah. Well, you know, that was the ongoing Peace Corps dilemma. Should you hire help? Well, if you hire help, it supplies a job. But then it can be perceived as being privileged. And, you know, we went around and around. Well, finally, we, there was a young girl. She was about 15, who had worked at the mission, and she got pregnant and they fired her and expelled her from the mission. So we hired her and she, she did ironing for us and wash, and with the charcoal iron.

PARSACA: [01:24:37] And then we hired her brother to sweep the house and just pick up. And, and he was very funny. His name was Peter, she was Hannah. And we would come back from school and Peter would be sleeping in our, in our spare room with our battery powered radio blasting away with a broom in his hand. And then, but then we kept Hannah, but until she married and moved away. And then we hired students. There were some students who were just so wonderful and had such a difficult time with school fees.

KLEIN: [01:25:14] So it would help with their fees.

PARSACA: [01:25:15] Oh yeah, we just paid their school fees.

KLEIN: [01:25:17] And during all this time you were doing all the cooking and?

PARSACA: [01:25:22] Oh, yeah, I did, I always did the cooking.

KLEIN: [01:25:23] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:25:24] And John Ochieng, this one student who we really loved, he, he washed the dishes every day after school and swept the house. And then Efraim Jimbowie, who was another wonderful kid, he, he did our laundry and then he would housesit for us.

KLEIN: [01:25:43] Did the, did you clear it with the headmaster before you hired students?

PARSACA: [01:25:48] I don't remember. I don't, if we, if it was in any way going to be an issue, we would have but it was never an issue.

KLEIN: [01:25:54] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:25:54] Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:25:57] So, uh, coming toward the end of the second semester, which would be the end, sort of the end of the first year.

PARSACA: [01:26:04] Right.

KLEIN: [01:26:06] How did that?

PARSACA: [01:26:07] Okay. Then we had another month off and we'd gotten a letter from Peace Corps that there was going to be a medical safari to the Northern Frontier District of Turkana. And are you interested? Like, yes! So we applied and we were accepted for that and.

KLEIN: [01:26:23] Were you busily training Jim to be a med tech?

PARSACA: [01:26:25] Well, it was great because what we did is give smallpox and tuberculosis vaccines.

KLEIN: [01:26:31] And who was the agency organizing it?

PARSACA: [01:26:33] It was all Peace Corps, but I don't know if there was.

KLEIN: [01:26:36] Was it a program?

PARSACA: [01:26:37] It must been the Ministry of Health because we had Ministry of Health Land Rovers.

KLEIN: [01:26:43] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:26:43] And but you know who probably was part of it? I don't remember that. But, um, and Ministry of Health people, Kenyans, who were up there too. And so there were 16 of us, I believe. It was four, four or five groups of four, so 16 or 20. And we were, we were paired up in these groups of four and given locations that we traveled around to for a month. And it was fabulous. And we just had, we must have good karma or something because we drew all these sites on the lake. And traveled with this couple camping and the driver.

KLEIN: [01:27:24] But they were Kenyans who were part of your team?

PARSACA: [01:27:27] There was a Kenyan driver who went along.

KLEIN: [01:27:30] But no Kenyan Ministry of Health official?

PARSACA: [01:27:32] But no. No. We were the only ones giving the vaccine. You know.

KLEIN: [01:27:37] Who, when you got to a village?

PARSACA: [01:27:38] I was just going to say, now that I think about it, I think what happened is that the Ministry of Health people were in. They would meet us at the villages I think, you know, because they did not travel with us. And I think they probably went out from Lodwar to the different sites intermittently rather than just, because we left Lodwar and then we didn't come back to Lodwar for a month. We went from, like we'd stay at a site for four days or three days or whatever.

KLEIN: [01:28:06] Was it all camping out?

PARSACA: [01:28:07] Yeah, we camped the whole time. We gave 5,000 inoculations of each one.

KLEIN: [01:28:12] And were you able to function in Swahili up there?

PARSACA: [01:28:18] Um, there was, you know, somewhat, but it was mostly Turkana.

KLEIN: [01:28:23] So you depended on the Ministry of Health officials.

PARSACA: [01:28:26] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:28:28] For a lot of the communication.

PARSACA: [01:28:28] Exactly. Exactly.

KLEIN: [01:28:30] And Jim was part of the team?

PARSACA: [01:28:32] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:28:33] Was he giving shots?

PARSACA: [01:28:34] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We are all were. It requires very little training.

KLEIN: [01:28:38] So you did that for a month?

PARSACA: [01:28:41] Yeah. And then back to school.

KLEIN: [01:28:42] Well, at any point, up to that, up to this, was there any gathering of the group? I mean, did Peace Corps call you in for a conference of any sort?

PARSACA: [01:28:52] No, we had our close, we had our termination conference. That's only conference I remember.

KLEIN: [01:28:57] At the end.

PARSACA: [01:28:58] But of course, we were into Nairobi, I mean, we probably. I don't think we went to Nairobi except when I got pregnant other than on a school break. It was just too far. I mean, it would take a whole week to go to Nairobi and come back.

KLEIN: [01:29:15] But in some places, Peace Corps would call everyone and have a mid, mid-service conference.

PARSACA: [01:29:20] I do not remember that.

KLEIN: [01:29:21] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:29:22] I think I would.

KLEIN: [01:29:23] So you didn't, uh, we'll get to the pregnancy in a moment, but you didn't really spend much time in Peace Corps office or?

PARSACA: [01:29:33] Oh, no. Not much at all. Because we were so far away. But we had our cluster of Peace Corps friends up country, of course. And we did what all volunteers do where you stay up all night talking because it was so nice to know you weren't going to make a faux pas.

KLEIN: [01:29:47] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:29:48] Playing Scrabble.

KLEIN: [01:29:48] Yeah. Do you have any sense of what, how Peace Corps, the director and others were viewing you?

PARSACA: [01:29:57] Well, you know, I honestly can't tell you much of what. Well, I can't really tell you much of what this was based on, other than some harassment. But we always felt like they thought the upcountry volunteers were kind of a pain in the ass. Because they would send out, you know, it's time for your gamma globulin shot, come into the office. Well, you know, we'd have to wait a month because we weren't, we couldn't just travel to Nairobi. They said, you're late, you know, you need to get here. Well, hello. Are we here to teach or to run around the country?

KLEIN: [01:30:27] Because there were places where the doctor would go out or a nurse would go out and give the shots.

PARSACA: [01:30:31] Oh no, they never did that for us.

KLEIN: [01:30:33] It wasn't so hard to arrange.

PARSACA: [01:30:34] No. And I would think, I would think they would have enjoyed that.

KLEIN: [01:30:36] Well, it must have been the Kenya Peace Corps style.

PARSACA: [01:30:40] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:30:44] Let's talk a little bit about the pregnancy, which is, at what point in the two year cycle did you?

PARSACA: [01:30:52] I got pregnant in February of the second year.

KLEIN: [01:30:56] Okay. So that was early on?

PARSACA: [01:30:58] Right.

KLEIN: [01:30:58] You still had, uh?

PARSACA: [01:30:59] Almost a full year.

KLEIN: [01:31:02] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:31:02] Yeah. Which we carefully timed because we, we knew we had to have that baby before we went home or we'd end up paying for the care ourselves and we knew we didn't have any money so. I mean, my readjustment allowance had been going to pay off my student loans.

KLEIN: [01:31:19] Oh, okay.

PARSACA: [01:31:20] So, so we were not going to have any money when we got back.

KLEIN: [01:31:22] So when you knew you were pregnant, did you simply write a letter to Peace Corps?

PARSACA: [01:31:28] No, we went in. We did, that's the one time that I remember going to Nairobi as a special trip, because I wanted to have a pregnancy test before I told them.

KLEIN: [01:31:36] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:31:36] And, um, but interestingly, before I went in for that pregnancy test, an old Kenyan woman who we knew, you know, she was one of the market mamas, she stopped me and she said in Swahili, when your

baby comes, I'll send my daughter to take care of it. I say, oh my God. Honestly, you know, it was pretty amazing.

KLEIN: [01:32:00] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:32:01] So we went to Nairobi, had the preg-, went to the Peace Corps office and had the pregnancy test. And then was, it was suggested to us by the Peace Corps doctor that now we would want to go home.

KLEIN: [01:32:12] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:32:14] He said, you know, well, now I suppose you want to go home. No.

KLEIN: [01:32:17] It doesn't sound like he was terribly supportive.

PARSACA: [01:32:19] No, they weren't supportive at all. They were really annoyed.

KLEIN: [01:32:22] Just at that point, had any of the other couples become pregnant?

PARSACA: [01:32:26] Yeah. One in Nairobi.

KLEIN: [01:32:29] Oh, in Nairobi.

PARSACA: [01:32:29] Right.

KLEIN: [01:32:30] And what, what did they choose to do?

PARSACA: [01:32:33] They stayed.

KLEIN: [01:32:34] Okay. All right.

PARSACA: [01:32:35] I think their baby was born about six months before they left.

KLEIN: [01:32:38] So you were the second of that?

PARSACA: [01:32:40] I think so.

KLEIN: [01:32:41] Had, had any previous volunteers, couples had children?

PARSACA: [01:32:48] Um, not that we were aware of. I mean, we might have been aware of them. Not that I remember. We didn't know any.

KLEIN: [01:32:53] There may have been a change in the policy.

PARSACA: [01:32:55] Yeah, maybe so.

KLEIN: [01:32:56] Just about the time you were you were becoming volunteers. So the doctor was not terribly encouraging?

PARSACA: [01:33:02] No.

KLEIN: [01:33:03] Hmm. Did he explain why he felt you should be going home?

PARSACA: [01:33:08] Well, no, I. I actually, I don't think it was so much that he thought we should be going home as, well, he was concerned about our site being so remote.

KLEIN: [01:33:19] Which he had never seen.

PARSACA: [01:33:20] Which he had never seen, no. This was a different doctor too. But, um, I think he assumed that we wouldn't want to stay up there. And so we said, no, you know, we've been telling you guys that this was in our plan and asking for clear directions. So, um, no, we want to stay. I feel great. I know I'm going to continue to feel great and don't anticipate any problems. Then they said, okay, if you can find a hospital. They said, well, you'll have to come to Nairobi for the birth. And I actually, I'm not even sure this all took place in the same discussion. There may have been some letter writing.

KLEIN: [01:33:57] Was there any suggestion that you transfer to another school?

PARSACA: [01:34:01] No. [tape break]

PARSACA: [01:34:03] Teachers. And they said finally, if you can find a hospital with a blood bank and an incubator, you can stay in the country. We did. It was 100 miles from our home, which was tricky.

KLEIN: [01:34:18] The Maryknoll clinic didn't have any anything like that?

PARSACA: [01:34:22] No. This was a Seventh Day Adventist hospital right on Lake Victoria, at Kendu Bay.

KLEIN: [01:34:28] Okay, but it's 100 miles away?

PARSACA: [01:34:31] Yeah, it was 100 miles away.

KLEIN: [01:34:33] And so then the plan was when the baby was due to arrive, you would go there?

PARSACA: [01:34:40] No.

KLEIN: [01:34:42] Oh, okay.

PARSACA: [01:34:42] I went for, um, in our search for the place, we had heard about Kendu Bay, so we went there and checked it out. It was wonderful.

KLEIN: [01:34:50] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:34:51] And I had a, met the doctor, had a checkup. And then I went back. We went back together one more time for a checkup. And then at about. No, actually, I had this early checkup. And then being an American, I felt I should probably go back. I'd gotten prenatal vitamins from Peace Corps, and of course, they were going to support this financially.

KLEIN: [01:35:18] Mm hmm.

PARSACA: [01:35:18] And then I had an appointment, and for some reason, Jim couldn't go and I couldn't get a ride. So I hitchhiked by myself. I figured a pregnant woman was pretty safe and I was. And got a ride back with the missionary who was going to go there the next, Adam.

KLEIN: [01:35:36] To the hospital?

PARSACA: [01:35:36] To Kendu Bay. And then the third checkup I had was two weeks before the due date, and, um, we went, Jim and I went up together. We went in a mini Moke. Do you remember the mini Mokes? They were like a little, they were like a little four wheel drive chassis with barely any kind of body. They were open. And our friend, the ag volunteer, had one and he loaned it to us and we took it as far as Kisii, where he needed it. And then we took the bus the extra 30, or a Peugeot taxi, the extra 30 miles. And she said, no, the baby will be two weeks. It hasn't dropped yet. Well, then we took the bus all the way home, 100 miles. I was totally exhausted, went to bed, and went into labor that night.

KLEIN: [01:36:23] At the school, you were at the school?

PARSACA: [01:36:25] Yeah, at Taranganya. We had just been at Kendu Bay that day. And so our plan. At the beginning of our second year, um, a couple came to a school, Naroha, which was about seven miles further up the road from us, and they became very dear friends. And it was the most amazing coincidence. He had graduated from the med tech program at Michigan State and recognized me on the streets of Nairobi. And then they got assigned at the school.

KLEIN: [01:36:58] So they were both teachers?

PARSACA: [01:36:59] Both teachers. Yeah. But he, number one, he had this medical background. And number two, he was an A positive, which was my blood type. And I was not about to be given malaria infested blood if I needed a transfusion.

KLEIN: [01:37:14] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:37:14] So when I went into labor, you know, it took a while to figure it out because we had just been told would be two weeks. Anyway, finally we decided it was the real thing. So Jim walked over to the mission to ask the missionary to drive up to get our friends Rick and Maggie. And the missionaries, the woman, Ernestine, had done nothing for the entire time they were there and I was pregnant but harangue me about how stupid I was, that she would get on a first plane back to New York. And how can I think of having a baby here? I said, you know, people do it every day.

KLEIN: [01:37:52] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:37:52] Anyway. So we really avoided them and didn't want them to have anything to do with this. But Harold insisted, no, no, there's no time. I'll drive Mary. And poor Jim. He comes back and he says, Harold's really being insistent. I said, well, you need to go back and tell Harold that if he's going, I'm not going. He needs to get Rick. What can I tell him? I said, tell him Rick has medical training and I want him there for that purpose.

KLEIN: [01:38:17] Right.

PARSACA: [01:38:17] So the guy bought that and he went up and got Rick. Rick and Maggie came down and then we drove the 100 miles to Kendu Bay. Got there, got there with two and a half hours to spare.

KLEIN: [01:38:30] So you finally got the missionaries' car and?

PARSACA: [01:38:33] Well, no, Rick and Maggie were, were naughty. They had, they had a van. They had bought a van that they sort of kept hidden.

KLEIN: [01:38:40] Against, totally against Peace Corps regulations.

PARSACA: [01:38:42] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:38:42] Oh, okay. I got it. So you went in their van.

PARSACA: [01:38:47] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [01:38:47] And so had the baby?

PARSACA: [01:38:51] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:38:51] And the baby was a girl?

PARSACA: [01:38:53] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:38:54] Named?

PARSACA: [01:38:54] Mara.

KLEIN: [01:38:55] Mara.

PARSACA: [01:38:56] Christine.

KLEIN: [01:38:58] Mara Christine. How long were you at Kendu Bay?

PARSACA: [01:39:01] Five days. It was very luxurious. They wanted me to stay, make sure nursing was going okay. And since the whole thing cost \$85, I didn't think it was excessive.

KLEIN: [01:39:11] Yeah. What month was this?

PARSACA: [01:39:14] October.

KLEIN: [01:39:15] October. All right. So it's getting close to the end of your service?

PARSACA: [01:39:18] Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:39:19] Had you, through the pregnancy, had you missed much time teaching?

PARSACA: [01:39:24] Not at all. I felt great and actually went on a long safari. It was our only flying safari because it was, let's see. It would have been August. That would have been the school break. And Peace Corps had our termination conference at Mombasa. And so we drove to Nairobi. But then we flew to Mombasa and then flew to Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. It was kind of luxurious. And that's our last fling, because we really didn't think the roads would be such a great idea at that point.

KLEIN: [01:39:57] Yeah. So you actually, you had the determination conference when you still had two or three months left?

PARSACA: [01:40:02] Yeah, we still had one more term of school, and I think they did it because of the school break.

KLEIN: [01:40:09] Was the, well, let's jump to the, well, let's go back to Kendu Bay. Five days and you were ready to go back to school?

PARSACA: [01:40:18] Yeah, I didn't go right back to teaching. I think I took about two weeks, stayed home, and then, of course, it was right on the compound.

KLEIN: [01:40:25] How did the school community take to you as a new mother?

PARSACA: [01:40:29] They were wonderful.

KLEIN: [01:40:29] Yeah. Okay.

PARSACA: [01:40:38] All right. Well, when we return to the school with our baby after five days, we had a constant stream of students, many of whom would say things like, this is the first white baby I've held. And they reminded us of that when we met some of them 26 years later, which was pretty neat. And she would just go. She was a very quiet baby. And so I'd just take her in her basket to the classroom and she would most of the time sleep. And if she didn't, I'd pick her up. And it really didn't present a problem at all. And the other thing that was incredibly wonderful about that was that the women in the community just developed a whole new connection to me, which we didn't have before.

KLEIN: [01:41:23] Mm hmm.

PARSACA: [01:41:24] They would, one day, four or five mothers with, with small babies under a year all came together to the house. These were all women who I knew from the area. It wasn't really a village. It was a school compound. And then family, family shambas, the farms around. And so it really wasn't a focal point. Anyway, they all came all dressed up with their babies, and they brought me bananas, milk, and eggs as baby gifts so I could make good milk for my baby. It was so dear. And we all sat there nursing our babies. But, um, that's just kind of a little aside to that, this connection with women.

PARSACA: [01:42:06] When I look back on my Peace Corps experience, I realized how incredibly young I was. And Jim too. I mean, we were, we were 23 when we left and newly married, and we were all about being a couple. But he had a lot of experiences with men. And I would often be treated kind of as an honorary man, where I would be allowed into situations where women weren't normally allowed because I was American, or different anyway.

KLEIN: [01:42:39] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:42:39] But I really never had experiences alone with women. And now that's something, if we went today, we'd still be married, but I would seek that out. I just, I was just too young to know how much I was missing by not having that. But having the baby was a touch of that, which was really wonderful.

KLEIN: [01:42:57] How did the missionaries take to your being a nursing mother?

PARSACA: [01:43:00] They pretty much ignored us and they were really quite hateful. The, the woman was just basically pissed that I'd had this baby without any trouble.

KLEIN: [01:43:10] Right.

PARSACA: [01:43:11] That we'd all survived. And we had a really awful incident with them when our baby was about a month old because we ran out of water. We were having a drought and our tank was empty and we could use the river water, which was pretty gross. But I really didn't want to use, bathe our baby in it. She wasn't drinking any, but I didn't. So anyway, Jim went and asked them for a bucket of water and they wouldn't give it to us. So anyway, it just, we had very little to do with them after she was born.

KLEIN: [01:43:41] Do you recall did, right after the birth, did you telegram Peace Corps to let them know?

PARSACA: [01:43:48] Yeah. We, we, um. There was a phone in Kendu Bay and maybe, maybe Jim called them. Somehow we let them know right away.

KLEIN: [01:43:56] I'm curious about.

PARSACA: [01:43:56] Oh, wait a minute. No, we didn't. He, he sent telegrams to our families.

KLEIN: [01:44:01] I was going to ask that.

PARSACA: [01:44:02] Yeah, and but we didn't. He didn't contact Peace Corps because we got a telegram from them that said, please advise of your medical status.

KLEIN: [01:44:14] Well, they were being diplomatic.

PARSACA: [01:44:15] Yeah, exactly. So we wrote back and said we were all fine.

KLEIN: [01:44:18] When you reported to the families that you were pregnant, you did? You did tell them?

PARSACA: [01:44:24] Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

KLEIN: [01:44:26] Did they try to convince you that maybe be good not to work?

PARSACA: [01:44:29] You know, they didn't. But I have all of the letters that I wrote home. And since my daughter, my other daughter, just had a baby, I've been wanting to go back and read about that, because my mom and dad were very, very dear. They sent us, they sent us cloth diapers, they sent us Pampers, diaper pins. Pampers were just out and so they sent us enough for the trip home.

KLEIN: [01:44:54] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:44:55] They were very, very supportive. Um. I honestly don't remember anyone trying to get us to come home. I just think they knew it was hopeless.

KLEIN: [01:45:08] How did Peace Corps deal with you once you had the baby? I mean, did you, did they come out to check on you?

PARSACA: [01:45:15] Oh, no. No, that was October. And then about the second week of December, our school term ended and we went very, very sadly into Nairobi.

KLEIN: [01:45:28] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:45:30] We had a, we wanted to take the long route so we could take our daughter to the river she was named for and take pictures and all that. So it took us forever to get into Nairobi. And we arrived around 9:00 at night and had all of our stuff in a Peace Corps Land Rover. Jim had gone to Nairobi, borrowed the Land Rover, which they loaned to us because we had the baby.

KLEIN: [01:45:53] Okay.

PARSACA: [01:45:53] So they were supportive in that way. And took her and rushed into a restaurant and came back out and our Land Rover had been broken into and our passports, all our money, and our cameras were all gone.

KLEIN: [01:46:07] Oh no.

PARSACA: [01:46:08] So instead of spending our last two weeks in Kenya having fun and going to Amboseli as we'd planned, we spent it dealing with the embassy. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:46:19] Were you going to be replaced at the school by other volunteers?

PARSACA: [01:46:23] No, we were not. And, you know, it's funny, I've thought about that because I don't know why we didn't lobby for that. I think we were just so caught up in having this baby. And it was just, yeah, we felt very distant from Peace Corps staff. And although we had some nice contact with people, like when we had all our money stolen, we stayed with the deputy director, this Chuck Coskran, he put us up because we couldn't even afford a hotel at that point.

KLEIN: [01:46:53] So as you came to the end of the two year tour, what was your feeling, that you'd kind of accomplished something that, you know?

PARSACA: [01:47:02] No. I mean, we, we loved being there.

KLEIN: [01:47:06] Right.

PARSACA: [01:47:07] But and, and we did. I mean, I felt like I had accomplished something. I mean, our kids were learning, you know, the students were learning. And, and we couldn't see how they would do on the Cambridge exam, of course, because they had two more years, most of them. But we were just heartbroken to leave.

KLEIN: [01:47:26] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:47:27] I mean, we, if ,if I, if I did not, I would not have stayed in town another year. I really did not want to teach another year. I didn't particularly like it. I considered it kind of a necessary evil for living there and being there and having that experience. But, you know, I was committed to doing it and doing it as best I could. But anyway, we were

just heartbroken. I mean, we had these dogs we loved dearly and this cat and we had dispense with them. And I'm going to have to turn that off because it'll keep beeping.

PARSACA: [01:48:02] So we started writing letters and we really didn't feel we could leave our dogs locally because they would not have been treated like they were used to being treated. Although we did leave our cat with our teacher friend Jerry. And one dog we gave to Ephraim, the student who was now out of school and had taken such good care of our dogs. But anyway, um, just everything. We were just heartbroken. We cried all the way to Migori.

KLEIN: [01:48:30] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:48:31] And then kind of got over it and got into this trip to the Mara River and.

KLEIN: [01:48:36] Yeah. And, um, let's, let's jump back in time, going to the termination conference. You were still pregnant at that point?

PARSACA: [01:48:47] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:48:48] And this was really the first time in almost the year and a half that that original group was back together?

PARSACA: [01:48:57] Right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:48:58] And how did?

PARSACA: [01:49:00] Boy, you know what I remember about that termination conference? I was seven months pregnant, and I had made myself, we have, we had a friend in Migori who had a travel sewing machine. I had made myself a swimsuit because I knew there was going to be a pool and we were going to go to Zanzibar. And, uh, what I remember so clearly is laying in that pool and just loving it. I don't remember any of the sessions.

KLEIN: [01:49:29] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:49:30] It was just so nice to be with friends and just kind of hang out.

KLEIN: [01:49:33] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:49:34] Jim may remember more about it, but I don't.

KLEIN: [01:49:36] Yeah, but really, your service had been virtually autonomous, I mean it?

PARSACA: [01:49:42] It had been.

KLEIN: [01:49:43] Yeah. You weren't functioning as part of the bigger group.

PARSACA: [01:49:47] No.

KLEIN: [01:49:47] And within that group you had a couple of close friends.

PARSACA: [01:49:51] Right.

KLEIN: [01:49:51] Yeah. Yeah. And at any point there was at least one other couple who had a child?

PARSACA: [01:49:59] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:50:00] And at any point did, was there a session in which they asked you to feedback the experience of being a volunteer and a mother?

PARSACA: [01:50:10] Uh uh. Oh, actually she wasn't, she hadn't been born yet at the termination conference.

KLEIN: [01:50:14] Well, even.

PARSACA: [01:50:17] Uh uh, no. And actually I think there were two babies. No. Well, anyway, it doesn't matter. But no. I think one of them came to the conference, is what I'm thinking. I'm sure we talked.

KLEIN: [01:50:32] And that conference was great because you then went on to Zanzibar?

PARSACA: [01:50:35] Right, and Dar es Salaam.

KLEIN: [01:50:36] Yeah. As you were finishing up and not planning on being robbed, but leaving the country, what were your plans?

PARSACA: [01:50:49] Boy, our plans were, we thought we would go back to Washington, D.C. because we had loved it so much.

KLEIN: [01:50:55] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:50:56] But we got back to Grand Rapids, Michigan, on December 23rd, and everybody was so happy to see us. But one of the funniest things, of course, we had this little baby that would just took everybody's attention and somebody else was holding the baby. And my mother sidled up to me and said in my ear, you're not wearing a girdle. And I said, you're right. And I haven't worn one for two years, and I don't intend to ever wear one again. But our plan was to go back to D.C. We were going to go to Grand Rapids, of course, and spend time with our families and then find, Jim was going to find a job because I didn't want to go to work at this point.

PARSACA: [01:51:41] So what had happened is the green sheet, this Peace Corps employment bulletin, had been about 30 pages thick when we left. And after the Nixon administration came in, social service jobs just dried up and it was like five or six pages and there were very few jobs. And Jim, he'll tell you this himself, but he really got depressed. I was, I was a little better because I was focused on the baby and we bought a stroller and we would, it was a terrible winter in Michigan. And we would go on these long walks plowing that stroller through the snow.

KLEIN: [01:52:16] Were you living with your family?

PARSACA: [01:52:17] We stayed with my mom and dad, who were really great. They were very non-interfering and just, we were welcome there as long as we needed to be. And then in the Peace Corps employment bulletin was an announcement for a job in Los Alamos. And that was after we'd been home about two months. So we came out here for the interview and then he got that job and we moved after three months. But what happened to us there was we couldn't stand being in the city. We really couldn't stand it. And we were like.

KLEIN: [01:52:45] Which city are you referring to?

PARSACA: [01:52:46] Grand Rapids. And we realized that there was no way we wanted to go back to the East Coast.

KLEIN: [01:52:52] Oh, I see. Okay.

PARSACA: [01:52:53] And so we, we didn't know where we wanted to be. We wanted to be in Africa. This is all we wanted, all we could tell. And when this thing in New Mexico came up, you know, we knew the bomb had been built there and we knew. We looked on the map and saw it was 7,300 feet elevation so there had to be mountains. So, well, this can't, you know, this has to be pretty rural. Anyway, when we drove out here and saw how much New Mexico resembled Africa, we were content.

KLEIN: [01:53:22] And it was Jim who got the job?

PARSACA: [01:53:24] Yes, but, but of course, when we came for the interview, he didn't know if he would get the job and we had to drive all the way back. And so as we went through this area, we wrote down every town with a hospital because we decided. Well, actually I had just started to work in Grand Rapids in a hospital, and we decided we're moving out here and I'll get a job if I have to. We'll work this out. We were just.

KLEIN: [01:53:47] The trip out sold you on New Mexico?

PARSACA: [01:53:49] Yeah. Yeah. And we visited some Peace Corps friends in Kansas on the way back, and that was kind of uplifting.

KLEIN: [01:53:58] During this time, did you? You mentioned you really wanted to be back in Africa. Do you recall, did you explore working for AID or anything?

PARSACA: [01:54:06] You know, we didn't. I think it had mostly to do with having the baby.

KLEIN: [01:54:11] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:54:11] I think also both of us from our family backgrounds, Jim was the first person in his family to ever go to college too. And, you know, we, we were so underexposed to a lot of things. I think we did believe we could do a lot of things that now we know we could have done or we could do now.

KLEIN: [01:54:28] Yeah, yeah.

PARSACA: [01:54:30] I think it was just a matter of confidence and trust. It's like, well, if you don't, if you weren't trained for this, then how can you do it?

KLEIN: [01:54:37] Yeah. Yeah. Um. Anything else you want, I mean, it's kind of sort of the end of the sequence. You did get to go back. Well, let's take, uh. Overall, what was, what do you think the effect on your life was having been? I think it's been implied a lot in your story already.

PARSACA: [01:54:59] Yeah. Yeah. Well, certainly, you know, I think what every Peace Corps volunteer learns is that there are a whole lot of people out there with a whole lot less than we ever imagined we could do without. And so, I mean, it's, I mean, when we left Michigan State, it's like, well, the thing to do was live in a Detroit suburb and, you know, get a job. And it's like, we never would have. I don't, I don't know, we might have found some other experience, but I think without that Peace Corps experience, we never would have recognized just how much is out there in the world and what will really make you happy.

KLEIN: [01:55:38] You both brought a lot to it, obviously, I mean.

PARSACA: [01:55:42] Well, yeah, I think so.

KLEIN: [01:55:43] Whatever your person was.

PARSACA: [01:55:45] Sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:55:48] And at any point over the next 25 years were, as your life changed and family changed, were you ever tempted to again become volunteers?

PARSACA: [01:56:01] We talk about it now. I mean, we never were when, of course, when we had children and we were very focused for 20 years on their thing, that kid thing, which is rather all consuming.

KLEIN: [01:56:11] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:56:12] But, you know, we wouldn't live here if we hadn't done Peace Corps. I mean, there's no way. And, you know, I think we've sacrificed a lot in career opportunities to live here. But this has been where we've wanted to be and we've loved it. And it's, it's because of Peace Corps. I mean, we wouldn't have done this.

KLEIN: [01:56:27] But it's interesting. You make genuine life choices and career choices.

PARSACA: [01:56:33] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:56:34] I think many people don't. They sort of.

PARSACA: [01:56:37] Yeah, I think that's true. And Peace Corps was, well, for me, the first choice was to go to Washington. I mean, this was really a break. And once I did that, it was like, you know what? I'm going to keep going.

KLEIN: [01:56:51] Talk briefly about your daughter's joining the Peace Corps and the role you might have played.

PARSACA: [01:56:56] Okay. Well, of course, she grew up with Peace Corps stories and Peace Corps friends. I mean, you know, we have lots of people who visit us. And actually for eight years, when from the time Tana was about six months old until she was almost nine, Jim was the director of a group home for children, and he advertised in the Peace Corps employment bulletin. So he hired in a lot of returned volunteers. And so she was constantly surrounded by returned volunteers. And then when she was 15, we had a reunion of our group, to which 104 people came.

KLEIN: [01:57:31] Wow.

PARSACA: [01:57:31] And not all volunteers. It was probably, I don't know, maybe 40 who were actually from the program. And it was just a blast, three days at a cabin in the mountains. And that convinced her. She said, these are the coolest people I've ever met. I've got to be a Peace Corps volunteer. It's like, well.

KLEIN: [01:57:47] How old was she?

PARSACA: [01:57:47] Fifteen. Okay. We'll see. And she really stuck with that and then worked for one year in California after graduating from college and decided that's what she wanted to do. And she called at 6:00 one morning from California. She said, Mom, they just called from Washington. They want me to go to Malawi.

KLEIN: [01:58:10] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:58:11] Whoa.

KLEIN: [01:58:12] And then once she got there as a volunteer, you and Jim had a chance, an opportunity to go and visit?

PARSACA: [01:58:18] Yeah, a year later we went to visit her and, um.

KLEIN: [01:58:21] And you included a trip to Kenya then?

PARSACA: [01:58:24] Right. Trip back to Kenya. We, um, all four of us went to, or the three of us went to Malawi to visit Tana, where we spent a month in her village and then a week backpacking in the highlands. And then all flew up to Kenya.

KLEIN: [01:58:39] Yeah.

PARSACA: [01:58:39] And so we were reunited with these students because of one student who we remained close to. We had actually lost touch with him. And he, he was very, very smart. We knew he'd do well, but he went on to the university in Nairobi. He got a master's in Nairobi and was working in the university teaching, and a guest professor from the University of Indiana came to Nairobi and encouraged him to go on for his PhD. And so when he wrote to this man and said.

KLEIN: [01:59:15] What's his name?

PARSACA: [01:59:16] Chacha Negotichacha. And when Chacha wrote to this man in Indiana, he said, well, wait, because I think I'm getting a job at Yale. And so this man got the job at Yale, and Chacha applied there and was accepted. So he was in, he spent four years at Yale, but he went home to Kenya every summer. He had four kids by this time. And he, uh, he was there when Peace Corps celebrated its 25th anniversary in Washington. And he had a friend he knew who was going to that. So he said, go to the Kenya, go to a Kenya, find a Kenya booth and ask if anybody knows these people?

KLEIN: [01:59:53] Uh huh.

PARSACA: [01:59:53] It happened to be literally a couple of weeks after we had sent out the first inquiry to our group, saying, hey, how about a reunion in a year and a half? And one of the men from our group who'd received that was sitting there and he said, well, as a matter of fact. So we got a letter from him, which I couldn't possibly quote without crying.

KLEIN: [02:00:14] Yeah.

PARSACA: [02:00:16] But, um, anyway. He met us in Nairobi. And we stayed at his home. He had, he had retired from the university. And, um, no, when he went back after he got his PhD, he became president or principal or whatever was called of one of the colleges up country.

KLEIN: [02:00:36] Mm hmm.

PARSACA: [02:00:36] Did that at a couple of different ones and then retired to write. And built a beautiful home up near our school.

KLEIN: [02:00:43] Oh.

PARSACA: [02:00:43] And his wife was there, but he had been asked by the government to start this Higher Education Student Loan Board in Nairobi. And so he came back and so he was living there in a government supplied house where we stayed with him. And living with him were many young men from the Kuria tribe who he was mentoring. It was so great. It was just so much fun.

KLEIN: [02:01:09] So he, he, he was then your guide or escort back?

PARSACA: [02:01:12] Yes. Oh, yes. And he took us to, we took his driver and car and went back to the school. And actually it was on my 51st birthday. It was so wonderful. And a big rainbow. There was a huge rainstorm and the rainbow. But I mean, it was like Hollywood, couldn't have been orchestrated better.

KLEIN: [02:01:29] But through the years you haven't had much, you haven't maintained much contact with Kenya?

PARSACA: [02:01:34] No, we haven't. What happened and what I think what happened primarily was that when we first got back, we were writing to certain students and then the pleas for money started coming in. And for 25 years we lived from paycheck to paycheck. And I mean, and there's no way you can explain that to somebody who has so little, how much it costs to live as Americans. And, um, and it just, we just kind of tapered off keeping that up because it was unrelenting.

KLEIN: [02:02:03] Yeah.

PARSACA: [02:02:03] And but Chacha was one of the people who never did that. That's interesting. He's very self-motivated. Well, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]