

Katherine (Kay) Gillies Dixon Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Katherine (Kay) Gillies Dixon
Interviewer: Evelyn Ganzglass
Date of Interview: March 4, 2020
Location of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 27 pages

Biographical Note

Katherine (Kay) Gillies Dixon served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from 1962 to 1964 in an urban community action program (Colombia III).

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed December 21, 2022, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Technical Note

This transcript was created by Sonix software from the MP3 audio recording of the interview. The resulting text file was lightly edited and reformatted according to a standard template.

Suggested Citation

Katherine (Kay) Gillies Dixon, recorded interview by Evelyn Ganzglass, March 4, 2020, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

DISCLAIMER

This transcript was generated automatically by Sonix software from the audio recording. The accuracy of the transcript cannot be guaranteed. Only the original audio recording constitutes the official record of this interview and should be used along with the transcript. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy or would like to recommend corrections, they are encouraged to contact the library reference staff.

Oral History Interview

with

Katherine (Kay) Gillies Dixon

March 4, 2020
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:02] This is Evelyn Ganzglass, I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968. Today is March 4th, 2020, and I am interviewing Kathryn "Kay" Dixon, who is a Peace Corps volunteer in Columbia from 1962 to 1964. She was part of Columbia three, which was an urban community action program. OK, why did you join the Peace Corps?

DIXON: [00:00:35] Ok, the Peace Corps was enacted in March 1961. Kennedy had just been elected. I was a junior in college. I was really pretty much had not I was not going to be a school teacher. I was not going to be a nurse. I was very interested in journalism. Most everybody I knew discouraged that kind of a career. I had written a letter, so basically I wrote a letter to probably Kennedy or probably Peace Corps office in Washington, D.C., expressing interest in this program that I had heard about. I had a very good friend at that time who was

very much in favor of Kennedy being president. I had come from a very strong Republican background. So I was kind of, you know, I didn't tell people what I was interested in, do what was really so clandestine. I wrote the letter. I never heard anything that I recall. But I must I must have filled out more information somewhere along the way. You know, when you're a senior in college, you're filling out a lot of forms. You're going on job interviews. I don't you know, I got it. So then it was in April. I didn't have a job. I was graduating in June. I had an interview set up in Pittsburgh. My family was very excited for this job interview. And on my way to take the train from Huntington, Pennsylvania, to Pittsburgh, there was a big envelope in my mailbox and I opened it and I had been invited to training. Well, that was it. You know, I went to the interview and I told the woman who I said, I'm going to be very honest with you. I've just been invited to Peace Corps training and I'm not interested in this position. It's not a good way to kind of you know, and I and I basically said, you know, that's I'm not going to you know, I'm not I'm not going to do it. You know, I'm not your job. You know, I might be interested in this job in two years, but I'm certainly not interested in it now. I'm really excited about Peace Corps. And she thanked me and she probably had time.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:34] What had you majored in?

DIXON: [00:02:36] Jeannette college was a college. You required an oral comprehensive for graduation. And I had multiple majors throughout four years worrying about the oral comprehensive at the end of my senior year. And so I finally majored in, quote, sociology. But sociology at that time led only to jobs in prisons and social work. I also have been offered a fellowship to the University of Pittsburgh and graduate school, and I didn't see a career in social work either at that time. I just didn't see I had done service projects. You know, if you grew up in a church, you know, you're doing things that are right for church service. But I didn't see myself in that path. I was really at, you know, at all it's my roommates were either marrying, you know, they were all marrying. As a matter of fact, I didn't have a serious boyfriend. I mean, my, and my mother was really concerned about this. And if you think back to the 60s, she had real reason to be

because how was I going to support myself? You know, I couldn't do anything. So, you know, I just said, I'm going to join the Peace Corps. I don't know what it's all about. The idea of travel had always appealed to me and I and I. I really felt at odds through high school and through college that I didn't have a fit in the world. I just didn't belong. I mean, I just what.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:01] So what did your friends and your family say when you told them you were going in the Peace Corps? Give them the background.

DIXON: [00:04:08] My mother's first comment was, what will I tell my bridge group? My father said, well, Libby, I think we can work our way through this. I had one friend who was so happy she was just absolutely thrilled. She came from limited circumstances. She wasn't going to be able to go to college. She actually had a job as a nanny when she graduated. And she had been interviewed by, I think, the FBI. So she knew more about this than I did. And she was so excited when I when I found out.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:46] She was interviewed about you?

DIXON: [00:04:48] You, about me. And even though even though I had been away at college for four years and she was she was working she didn't work in Vandergrift or my hometown. She worked in another community. And she, she was so excited. I mean, when I got home, this was going home for the weekend that after this interview, I called her and she was just so excited because she knew about it and I didn't. And she kind of had put one over on me.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:12] It's kind of strange that they didn't communicate with you at all between the letter you sent in and.

DIXON: [00:05:18] Yeah, yeah. I mean, obviously, I made her early days. It was so early. I mean, they really and when I hear about forms and interviews in reference to I think I just wrote a letter and I probably sent my resume and I did have a strong resume for a college senior. I mean, I had been editor of my college newspaper. I've been involved

in some different community committees and service projects. So I wasn't.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:41] So you showed some leadership?

DIXON: [00:05:42] I showed some leadership, I guess, when the Face book was published. And that's what they used to call the book that went to the country with your picture. They said, I had a background in cooking and sewing and food preservation. I I spent summers on my grandmother's farm and I knew more about food preservation than most people know today. I still don't eat pickles, you know, and I had my mother every turn would say, please take something practical. So I take another sewing course. So I had domestic skills, if you will, and they must have shown up somewhere. I have no idea.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:19] Great story. Yeah. OK, so they sent you a letter and they said.

DIXON: [00:06:24] They said you've been invited for Peace Corps training and that's training. Yes, that's.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:28] And did they say Columbia?

DIXON: [00:06:30] Yes, they said Columbia. They said Urban Community Action. I mean the whole thing was laid out. Training would begin in July, graduation was in June. And I had like six weeks and I was going to New Mexico to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:43] That's where the training

DIXON: [00:06:44] That's where the training was.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:45] Was it at university?

DIXON: [00:06:47] It was one of the first groups that went through the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque with a man named Marshall. Mason was head of it. It was quite interesting. Nobody had been to

Columbia. That was just sort of you know, you had we had several Cuban people that had a Cuban background, bright people, but nobody knew anything about Columbia. You know, we have one professor that told us about real husband here who had been the ousted dictator and he had been educated in the states tri state college in Angola, Indiana. My brother was enrolled there. It's OK. My brother's going to be an engineer. So school, they

GANZGLASS: [00:07:28] Do have language training?

DIXON: [00:07:29] We had intensive language training by Cuban. By Cubans. Yeah. And we spent a lot of time in the labs and it was, was very intensive language training. There were probably there were probably local people because New Mexico in Albuquerque has a large Spanish population and all of the meals every you didn't you were absorbed in the language. You know, I had had two years of Spanish in school. I did very well in it. I had never been to the language lab because it interfered with publishing the school newspaper. The lab was set up at the same time. But, you know, so I was not in it looked like I had a real strong background in Spanish. Truth was I didn't at that time.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:10] And what else will you train did during training?

DIXON: [00:08:14] We had I think we had courses in like the social mores or the customs of what they thought would go on in Colombia, some, some exposure to what they thought Colombian people were like. I remember going out to an Indian reservation for like hands on work experiences, but I don't remember much about that, except I had never been on an Indian reservation and this just looked like a big desert to me. But again, I had never been out of Western, has never been to the western part of the country. We totally, you know, totally this was a foreign land to me. And I remember the flight because I'd never been on an airplane, you know, and you got all dressed up and you flew and it was out from Pittsburgh to Chicago to someplace, Kansas maybe. And then the last stop was Albuquerque and Chicago. Fewer people get one in Kansas.

DIXON: [00:09:08] There's very few people from Kansas going to Albuquerque. So I stood up. There was a girl down. She also was standing up, we were looking around to see who else was going to Albuquerque and what were the circumstances, and we both were going into Peace Corps training in the same group. In the same group, right. Yeah. And we, you know, imagine the audacity of standing up in an airplane looking to see who else is flying and connecting with another person.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:34] So how many people were in training with you?

DIXON: [00:09:36] There were more than a hundred people. It was a large group. It was two thirds women and one third men. The idea being that they didn't think they weren't sure that women could serve one in the Peace Corps. And if they could serve in Colombia,

GANZGLASS: [00:09:55] Why was that?

DIXON: [00:09:56] I'm not sure. I think it might have been the machismo of the culture, because I knew that at that time there were there were nurses, there were nursing groups that had been women. And I think there had been women teachers may be sent elsewhere, but they were,

GANZGLASS: [00:10:10] Like you said, two thirds were women.

DIXON: [00:10:11] Women. Yes. Because when they paired us up for teams in urban development, there were two women and a guy on each team. And if you were a married couple with the married couple were in the site, but it was they didn't let two women serve together in the sight.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:26] That was they had to have a man.

DIXON: [00:10:28] They had to have a man, which may be worked out because you needed the man to speak in community meetings. Women were second class.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:36] So let's just spend a little more time on training. So you all went to Albuquerque?

DIXON: Yes.

GANZGLASS: Did you all make it through training?

DIXON: [00:10:44] No. No.

GANZGLASS: What was this process like?

DIXON: [00:10:47] There was the, it's since been frowned on the horrible selection process. And that was that was really a miserable experience. I was going to ask I came home one night. I missed curfew, not by much, but I climbed through the window to get into my room on the first floor and my roommate was packing her bags. And I said, what's going on? She said, they tell me I can't be a Peace Corps volunteer. I can't be in this. And she was obviously crying. I was upset. I mean, she was a good language student. She was she was Jewish. She was from one of the New York City, Brooklyn in Brooklyn, New York, one of the one of the boroughs. Very intense, very I thought a lot of fun to be around. And she was in tears. They didn't give her a reason. She had to be out by morning. And there she was. And they did that video that went on and it was not pretty. I go and they held that over your heads. And they did. They had, we were tested unbelievably. There were all kinds of psychological testing. And there were like I think it's called a scatter gram test where you put down three people you want to serve with three people. You wouldn't be happy serving with her three or four. And they were using these, you know, to determine I mean, we were doing these and we felt they were using them to determine who was going to make it and who was. And they didn't ask you why you didn't want to why you wouldn't work with somebody or why you wouldn't. You just had to. And they forced you to answer these questions. I mean, you could not turn in the thing blank. You had to do it.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:30] And do you think they did use those, those evaluations?

DIXON: [00:12:34] Well, I think they might have. I, I remember getting one test from the psychiatrist and pretty was pretty well fed up with it. And so I was called in for private counseling and Miguel was also another one was called in and she came out of it and I said, what's going on in there? She said they wanted to know if I was suicidal. When I said, What do you mean Vescio? And she said, well, they asked me if I thought about suicide. And she said I answered yes as an everybody thought about suicide. I didn't say I was going to. I just said I thought about it, you know, that's one of you know, and she said, so she's crazy. And I was called in because I had given this smart aleck answer. I love my mother. I love my father. I love my mother. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I love my father Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:24] And they called you in

DIXON: [00:13:25] And they called me in about that to see if I had any deep-seated problems with my parents. I know, but I've had it with these tests.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:35] Ok, so you made it through training. Yes. Is there anything else memorable you'd like to talk about, about training?

DIXON: [00:13:41] Well, from there now, again, they not sure what we were going to do from there. We went to New York City for a month and we worked in the slums there because we were going to be an urban slum group. And we go there. We actually once you made it through the first eight weeks and in the University of Mexico, then after that, there was no more really deselection. I mean, there may have been people that didn't make it, but that was part. And we either went to New York first, we went to Puerto Rico and I can't remember which was I'm thinking we went to Puerto Rico first for our about. And we did a month of Outward Bound, which was really team building in many ways, my husband's story is that it really it tells you that you're only limited by your mind and not limited by your body. But that's where we

did the infamous drown proofing. We did, we did rock climbing. You had to repel off a dam. And it was, you know, up in the morning at six o'clock and, you know, a full

GANZGLASS: [00:14:39] Did it build team?

DIXON: [00:14:41] What I think, I think we did build team. I mean, you got to know a lot of other people and you did work together and you kind of I won't say you relax, but we there was still the option of being selected out. But people began to pull people, people off. People pulled together the whole time, you know, but, you know, and that was, you know, and you this was you had you were yourself there. You know, there's not much you can do when you're, you know, swimming or, you know, the physical activity. Remember, Kennedy was big on physical fitness. So even as a part of being in New Mexico, we had every day we had an hour of physical education. And I remember having to run like a mile in a certain amount of time, you know, and it was more it was more doing it, I think, than what your time was being able just being physically fit.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:29] So a month in Puerto Rico and then you went to New York City, and what was that like?

DIXON: [00:15:34] Life that was that was eye opening. That was where I saw poverty that I had never seen before. You know, my background in it didn't preclude poverty, but I had never experienced tenements, people living on, you know, people I don't think people were living on the streets, but there were multiple people in units. I saw apartments that were unbelievably bad. I met with miserable landlords. It was really that was really eye opening.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:04] What were you supposed to be doing in New York?

DIXON: [00:16:07] We were supposed to be getting experience in social work because they didn't know what we were going to do in Columbia, so they wanted to expose it. I was on my section. I was going, I was in West Eighty-seven Street where the movie West Side Story had been

filmed. I was right there again, language exposure. I think sometimes we were just an extra pair of hands or a body to check on landlords or whatever was going on, you know, just to observe conditions. The office I was in, I don't remember what it was, but the man who headed it was a graduate of Hampton Institute, was an all-Black school. I happened to be a graduate of Junior out of college. We were the first college that had welcomed Hampton Institute's football team to play football. And when he knew I was from Virginia, I mean, he and I bonded immediately, you know, over that. You know, how, how people how people meet and interact. And that was, was huge. And I said Junior at that time was a ranked football power. They had gone to they'd gone to the Tangerine Bowl. And Chuck Knox, who was later became a professional coach, player and coach. So they had they were a power in Division three football. How do I know all about athletics?

GANZGLASS: [00:17:26] So do you think the training prepared you for your experience in Columbia?

DIXON: [00:17:33] I don't know. It gave me some language skills. I own is that's. I don't know what kind of training would prepare you to be a Peace Corps volunteer. I mean, my children were volunteers and they had different experiences. Well, I don't know. I don't know whether.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:58] You were exposed to lots of different cultures.

DIXON: [00:18:00] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:00] That we maybe that was it.

DIXON: [00:18:02] That would probably be the best way. I mean, we were all young. We were all you know, I was not the most naive in the group, but I was certainly among those who.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:14] And how many of you actually went overseas?

DIXON: [00:18:16] I'm trying to remember, I think maybe 50 women and maybe, you know, maybe 20 or 30 of the men made it. It was you know, they definitely there was a definitely an attrition rate. There was even attrition. Once we arrived at our sites, there was a woman that was in an older woman that was in my group in the city of Medellin. And after and we were found in apartment, we were there and she said, I'm going home. I can't do this. You said you were a part of the Nuremberg trials and you can't do this, you know. No, I'm not. I'm out of here. No. So, I mean, that was.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:50] It happens. It happens. So. So you left New York and flew to Colombia?

DIXON: [00:18:55] We flew home. But we also I we in New York, we stayed at the International House and the Cuban Missile Crisis happened while we were there. And we were all surrounded by a television set waiting to see what happened. And that's why I think we went from New York to Colombia.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:12] Ok, so you got off the plane in and where? Bogota, Bogota and Bogota. And then what happened?

DIXON: [00:19:20] There were two groups of male volunteers that were ahead of us. They met the plane. They hadn't seen an American female in a year. So they I don't know whether they had a conference or they were all on medical leave in Bogota that week. But we flew in late at night. I mean, it was late, you know, and then for a week or so, we had some sort of orientation there. And then we were sent to our sites.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:46] And where were you?

DIXON: [00:19:47] So I was sent to Medellin, Colombia. And I think the reason I was sent to Medellin, Colombia, at this point, we know a little bit about the cities and where we want to go. And they asked why I wanted to go to Medellin and I put down and I think the my choice was the consulates in Medellin. His wife, her mother and my mother play

bridge together. And I think I was sent there based on that connection because the first two Peace Corps groups had been in Colombia. And, you know, there was this clash of personalities, if you will, if you think about who's in there, who is in the State Department in 1962, who was who were in the foreign communities, these were not people that were fond of Kennedy or fond of the social order that changed that was coming about and the volunteers that were there ahead of us. Some of them really didn't care what they said to these people. I mean, that they were invited to like the country club for events or things. These men would speak their mind, even though they were working out in the villages and being very successful. When they interacted with people who disagreed with them, they would express themselves so that the State Department. Yeah, they said there were some animosities there.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:09] How much interaction was there between State Department folks and Peace Corps?

DIXON: [00:21:14] More probably American than there might have been in other places. One, because I had the connection to Joanne. She was horrified. Where I was we were assigned to work, was helpful, provided some furniture for us, you know, occasionally invited us to events. The first thing was that we were invited to Thanksgiving at the country club with all of the Western, you know, with all the Western community, because Thanksgiving is a huge holiday for Americans overseas. And so we were invited to that event. And Joanne was always nice to me. And we did, you know, they gave us and we had a telephone, which was another. There's some other pieces of it. So she and I could talk by phone. We didn't I mean, you don't you don't talk by phone when you're busy doing your Peace Corps work. She just managed to maintain enough contact to. Yes, I could interact. The reason there was more contact was, and Kevin will tell you this is part of his story is he was recruited to play on a baseball team. We went to we were my site was really difficult. And this was, again, Peace Corps was very new in the mayor of Medellin said, yes, I would like volunteers, but you have to put volunteers in Barrio Antioquia. This is the red-light district of the city. Everybody thinks it's horrible. Well, I'm

going to clean up the vise in the city. And, and, you know, you have to live there.

DIXON: [00:22:42] You have. To work there, so I was put there with my teammate D, who was Colombian Mexican heritage, so she was tiny. She you know, she could fit in with the people, if you will. And she spoke the language much better than I did. And then our male counterpart, Lee Elum, was really a nice guy and a good guy. I mean, he was, he was tall. He was athletic. Well, and we were struggling to figure out how we were going to work in this neighborhood. And one of the things we thought we could teach English, so we went down to the University of Antioquia and met with the head of the English department who happened to be the manager of a baseball team in a local league in the city. And he was the manager. He was, his name was John Adams. And he recruited Lee to be on his baseball team. And he was a pretty fair athlete. He was more excited about getting his baseball team going than he was. We never did get anything to help us teach English, but he had in front of him the Facebook for the group, the next group coming in, which were physical education teachers coming to all over the country. And that was my husband. He had a picture of Kevin there and he was helping to get Kevin intermediated to play baseball. So we had that

GANZGLASS: [00:24:01] Diplomats were more interested in sports and social activities. Yeah, well, I totally agree. Yeah.

DIXON: [00:24:07] And there was a Colombian league and John Adams was going to get a team in there in the fact the Peace Corps was there. I mean, you're you've got you know, you've got middle aged bankers and diplomats and then you've got this young group of college guys coming in can staff your team. So we had more interaction with the Western community that I think in other areas because of things like the baseball team, because if you weren't busy on a Sunday morning, you could top the bus, you know, and an hour later you could be watching an American baseball game on a Sunday morning, which is not a bad thing to do when you've spent all week.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:44] So what did you end up doing in the barrio?

DIXON: [00:24:46] Ok, we were, was, was very difficult for us to do community development. This was also the, the Medellin office of Rojas Pena, the ousted dictator. So when he came to the city, this was where he came. All of the council members were, were members of the Communist Party, although they yeah, we were communist. They did they did everything to challenge anything in community development. We worked out of a health center. So we were able to we had to find volunteers, change sites for lots of reasons. And even then they changed. But we knew if we were afraid that if we left the city, if we left the site, the volunteers would be ousted. You know, that that was the kind of power. So we ended up working at the health club through the health center, gave classes in care, food use, hair care, was a co-sponsor of our project. So they gave our care. Food was given out to families through the health center. And so we taught people how to how to use how to make milk with the powdered food and did a lot of cooking with the care, food products and serving that we ended up. I've forgotten about it, but my partner was telling me, remember, we tried to start a daycare center or a childcare center before we left, but we didn't. We started it. But I don't know whether we got it off the ground or not. We had recommended that the site be closed when we were done because at that point, two years later, there were volunteers all over the city, all over Colombia, and it was obvious that they were not going to close. They were not going to chase the volunteers out if they didn't live and work in in Tokyo. They actually the way the resolution was, although it was very subtle, was many volunteers lived in the barrio. It was OK for men to live there, but they weren't doing community action. But they had engineers, they had architects and city planners. They were just, they were flooding the country with volunteers at that time. And meeting was a good city to put volunteers in.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:47] How big it was really?

DIXON: [00:26:49] At the time. It was the five hundred thousand. At the time it was like five hundred thousand. But it was that included. Medellin sits

in a valley and as you go up the mountains, all of the neighborhood of all the villages or the clusters, the people coming into the city for better jobs, they were they were forming little villages and little barrios on the mountaintops. And this was what was doing. So they became a part of that population. And that's where volunteers could be successful because they could work with these groups of people and get a school where they could get a road or they could get a soccer field in in a developed area where we were. They, they had a road. They had some schools. It was a different kind of urban community development. That was it was, would be useful. And it wasn't. I mean, it was. Really difficult, but if you're out working in some place where people are still just getting together, you can teach them a lot.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:50] So did you work with care for the whole two years of here?

DIXON: [00:27:54] We did and actually, we went to one of the things that the and I did or I did anyhow, is I would take buses out to where the rural volunteers were and I would do care milk demonstrations and classes with some of the rural volunteers. I mean, that way we know you're busy the whole time because you're living there, you know, you're a volunteer whether you're doing anything or not, but and you felt like in

GANZGLASS: [00:28:22] What way of your living situation?

DIXON: [00:28:24] Like we, we at that point did not live with families. And they originally said we would work in Paris and Tokyo. We would not we didn't have to live there. Well, the care guy came through at nine o'clock in the morning and said, you can live here. This isn't a problem. I said, would you come back at nine o'clock tonight when every corner is a canteen and there are men drunk in the seats? I mean, you've got the red light district. No, I have to get on a plane this afternoon. So, so, D and I did find an apartment. It was a nice apartment. There was a professional soccer player. I come from there his and he had bought his father had bought or built for his father a house that in the first floor the family lived and he was a shoemaker. He made soccer shoes for the team and we lived in the apartment on the second floor, which was nice. We had an indoor toilet. So we had

a we had a patio above us and we had our shower, was up on the on the outside was all the water. So we had a really fairly safe apartment in terms of security.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:30] Could you go out at night or not at all?

DIXON: [00:29:35] If we went out in the neighborhood, we were, always walked home. If we went out of this out of the neighborhood like a bus into the city, we had to call a taxi from our neighborhood to come in and bring us home at night. Other taxis would not go into the neighborhood at night at all, but the taxis from where we were, from where we were, they knew us and they would come and get us.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:57] How did people in the neighborhood deal with you?

DIXON: [00:30:01] They basically they we were we were entertainment. I mean, everything we did, they knew about I mean, they totally knew everything we did. They watched everything we did, you know, they knew what we ate because you'd have to go out in the morning to buy, you know, if you wanted eggs, you went down to see you had eggs or tomatoes or onions. You know, you went around to get your food. So they knew everything we did.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:24] So even though it was a red-light district, it is still a viable neighborhood.

DIXON: [00:30:29] It was still available. And what was interesting was this had been a middle class neighborhood. There were many families. There was sending their kids to the university. Still, they couldn't leave. This was their, their home. So we actually ended up working with these university students who were probably about the same age as we are. There were some that were younger and there were women, young girls that were in. So we formed like youth clubs and we worked with them in order to create recreation. And that's kind of how I met Kevin, was I had no background in education or physical education or teaching volleyball or any of those skills. And we ask for some help on that. And they sent Kevin out and he you know, so and that's where

we did that. The reason the university students were friendly is they wanted a ticket to the states. I don't mean physically, but this was an entree. And of course, we're among the first volunteers. Our goal is to educate people to be productive in their own country. And so we're kind of discouraging this migration that they're all looking to do. So you've got this conflict going in your mind, you know, work with people so they can take these skills and live there. And they're trying to figure out how to get to the states. And we know that when they get to the states, they're going to be working in the sweatshops in New York. But I had only learned that because I had been in New York for a month, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:54] So you saw that. Did you explain that to them?

DIXON: [00:31:57] Well, we tried to tell them to stay and finish their education. It didn't really work. I mean, I went to two or three weddings in the states where they had made it to the states and they were working and they felt that they had made, you know, that they had made it escape as they had escaped it.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:14] So did you have lots of Colombian friends or some Colombian friends?

DIXON: [00:32:20] We did have friends. I mean, this we did have friends in this neighborhood. Yes. And they were young people and they were friends. And we, we did maintain contact with them for a number of years. And we had one that we maintain contact with. What she had learned all of her English from songs was hysterical and, and she was beautiful and she was tall. And, you know, and she was looking for an American husband. She found God as a Peace Corps, the Peace Corps volunteer. She did. And, and they came to the states. And we you know, we exchange we communicated for years. We went to the wedding of one of her daughters and then we lost contact with her and I think had to do with the violence in the country. I think that was, you know, she just she just had to break off, contact me because I had sent her an email once and she said, don't do that any. She said they know where we are. They know her and her family was still in

Colombia. Her parents are well, probably their brothers and sisters were there and she was afraid that, you know, that they would be after her for money. She didn't have money. She had become a customer service rep at Sears and Penney's. And she was fabulous. I mean, I know she was. And the daughter's wedding was just so nice. It was you know, it was here in the States. In the States. Yes. I mean, this was we're not talking about 40000 or whatever those are. We're talking a wedding in a fire hall with friends and family. And just it was just awesome just, just to be there again. And it was great.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:48] So when you were there before the drug cartels took over, or was it were you aware of any of that at the time?

DIXON: [00:33:58] There was. There were there was a lot of drug. There was. Is it opium poppy drug? Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it wasn't uncommon to come home at night and have somebody asleep on our doorstep or stoned on our doorstep. The drug cartel was going on. And then I mean, drugs, if you're in Medellin, is the flower of the flower capitals of the world. It's a coffee growing region. It doesn't take much to the soil that will grow. Coffee and flowers is also the soil that will grow cocaine. And yeah, it was there. One of the saddest things that we had is we were in the states that we got a phone call from an attorney asking if we would be a character witness in a trial for somebody that we knew that had gotten mixed up in the cartel with the lieutenant. And we said, wait a minute. So we contacted our friend and said, you know, it's his right, you know, should we do it? And Maggie said, no. She said he went bad. She said he murdered his brother. We said, OK, that's it. You know, we can't be a character witness for this guy. So, you know, when you're poor and it's a means to an end, you know, all kinds of things, kinds of things happen, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:11] So you made several friends among Colombian folks. Did you make friends with Peace Corps volunteers that apparently. Well, you ended up marrying.

DIXON: [00:35:22] Yes, we did. We yeah. That was you know, I think one of your questions relates to impact.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:29] Again, what is going to get to that?

DIXON: [00:35:32] Know and I thought about that one because I thought where was the impact? I think for me, some of the impact truly was meeting people from all over my own country who had interesting outlooks on life. Some like mine, some not like mine. We just actually meeting and becoming friendly with people from a wide variety of spectrums. I mean, just so people I would not have met in western Pennsylvania under any circumstance.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:59] Sounds highly relevant at the moment.

DIXON: [00:36:01] Yes. Yes. It really

GANZGLASS: [00:36:05] Seriously.

DIXON: [00:36:05] Yeah, it's. Yeah. And you wouldn't meet these people otherwise. We all had a common mission, if you will. I mean, I think that was we all wanted to serve. I mean and I follow some of these like women in Peace Corps women, Peace Corps groups and things like thinking huh. It wasn't the Peace Corps that I was aware of. I mean, it just, it just seems like such a different world. I mean, the men were out in their villages. And I so admire these guys. I mean, they were working and they were doing things. And that's where they're that's where their focus was, was on making a difference where they were. And I was frustrated because we couldn't really make a difference where we were and we couldn't ask to be transferred out. So we just did we did the best we could

GANZGLASS: [00:36:53] Because you were a woman and therefore placed in this barrio. Or I guess it's I'm trying to sort out a placement is that the woman being a woman in Peace Corps is a I am treated in Colombia or what combination of all of that?

DIXON: [00:37:13] Part of it was we felt a strong commitment that we had to stay in that barrio because, you know, if the mayor says, I'm going to

pull out all the volunteers if you don't keep volunteers there. So we had that commitment and we had to find out something to make it work. And that was huge and it was so early. The other thing is we were so close to the airport. We were within walking distance of the airport. So you've got lots of people from Congress, you've got lots of people coming down and they're showcasing where you are. So lots of people pass through there. And that was interesting.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:55] Did you feel you were part of the American official presence there, as there's always this delicate balance between this Peace Corps, part of the State Department, you know, one of the senators now. Wants to put it under state. How did you feel about that? I mean, you had a friend, the wife

DIXON: [00:38:17] Of the consulate of the world. So, yeah, we can get a drink of water.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:26] Ok. Yeah, it's just it seems to be an ongoing tension between the role of peacekeepers and the connection the Peace Corps volunteers and the connection to the official American community. And you seem to have been very much caught in the middle of all of that.

DIXON: [00:38:45] Yeah, well, because we're right next to the airport. So if, and there were lots of diplomats and congressmen would arrive, we would be the first stop. They would say, OK, here's one Peace Corps site and here's Peace Corps volunteers. I can't tell you who all came through. I mean, you know, there were lots of them. You met them, you greeted them cordially. You explained what you were doing, you know, and tried to give a very positive outlook to it. And this was also the Alliance for Progress. And Kennedy was kind of a little bit of in Columbia where they were good friends. If you're nice to us in these countries, we can do this for you. So they really put a lot of volunteers in Columbia at that time and they just began to really ramp it up so well. And of course, we didn't want to discourage that. I mean, we you know, we were you know, we totally believed in the mission of the

Peace Corps. And, you know, one hand makes a difference or one person can make a difference.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:42] Did the Colombians have a positive view of Americans at that point?

DIXON: [00:39:47] I think so, yeah. I mean, our neighborhood, they didn't. But in general, the city did. We met a lot of city officials. Again, tall, blond. Lee was really good looking. Dee was we were we were not an unattractive team to put through the city, you know, to meet different people. Yeah. And, and having deals with her phenomenal language skills, I mean, ours were coming along. But, you know, she could keep when we when we when we when we would do meetings, we have to go to community meetings or community council meetings. Lee had to do the speaking. And this was always funny. He would speak and then he would say what he meant to say was. Because we kind of she really spoke well, she spoke well. Yes. And she was very sweet and able to you know, she was really a kind of a really cool diplomat when it came to keeping us out of hot water.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:34] So did, did you travel throughout the country or to other countries nearby while you were there?

DIXON: [00:40:41] I did. We went out on the weekends and on weekends we would go out if an urban volunteer was having a rural volunteer, was having a fiesta to raise money. The volunteers would go out. We take buses, we go that way. I traveled a little bit in country, carefully, saved my money and did flying go up the Amazon and in a banana boat and then went to then carefully plotted it out and went to Carnival in Rio the following year. Yeah, being very careful where we traveled, what this was, we had passports, which we didn't know until close to the end. We had diplomatic passports. They were red again so early. So when we left the country, well, we went to somewhere Linda and I traveled with another woman mostly. We were you know, we went right through customs. So we were treated as, as diplomats. We didn't know that. I mean, we didn't know, you know, that's what it was. But they did request those passports at the end of our service. And then.

Yeah, but that was again, it was so early. And so we had that. So we went a lot of places that we might not we might not have gone through customs so easily in different places as we did.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:01] But yeah. Well, you, you talked about impact on yourself having that. Yeah. People from all over. What do you think the impact, if any, was in the community where you served?

DIXON: [00:42:16] I think they I think that, you know, I'd like to think that they recognize that when we were people, just as they were people, that we were accepted. We didn't. And, you know, people cared in that community that it had been turned and then turned into a nasty neighborhood. So I know. But did we have a lasting impact? I don't know. I will say we went back in ten years and Kevin will tell you a story about that. We went back to the neighborhood, I think, and, and walked around. Our friend Magnolia was no longer there. She had gone to the states at that point that there was some of the women that we worked with. And we and they saw us on the street and we were invited into their homes. And Kevin remembers going into one home and see the woman had a floor and she didn't have a floor when we were there before. And she was so proud of the floor. And we had given them pictures when we left D and I had a picture of ourselves just a little, and we passed that out to our friends and she had a candle in front of it. Wow. Yeah. Right next to John F. Kennedy and God. Yeah. And we saw that in a couple of the homes, so. People did remember, as people did like us, you know, we were there when Kennedy was killed, too, so that was awful. It was awful. I mean, you just you just

GANZGLASS: [00:43:33] You know, you just how did people react to it or how did you react?

DIXON: [00:43:37] We were stunned. We had never we didn't know. I just we were just stunned. So people at that point love for if for no other reason, they all loved Kennedy. I mean, there's more Kennedy schools there. So the fact that we were there, did that heighten their

affection for us? It may have. We didn't leave. We were there. We all mourned together, if you will. So that was the.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:07] And my last question is impact kind of third goal, bringing the world back to the United States. Have you have you been involved in international activities? Have you been involved with National Peace Corps Association and other things like that?

DIXON: [00:44:25] We've been very involved. First of all, we were in Massachusetts and Governor Sargent, and that was with the Sister States program and the Sister States program. This was when we were back maybe 10 years. Jesse Sargent was the wife of the governor and she was really dynamic. Good, good, good governor's wife and Antiocho was the sister state. So there was a story about her in the paper that she was the sister state and this was it. And they were doing this. And so I was you know, I was 30 years old. I was around 30 and I was home with two children. And I know that I was feeling very. Meraux lost, thinking, this is my lot in life and here with these children, because, you know, I love my children, but the three year old and a two year old are not really intellectually stimulating. And I wasn't working. Kevin was working. Anyhow, there was a story in the newspaper about Jesse Sargent and the Antiocho. So I wrote a letter again. I wrote a letter to the son and said I had been with the Peace Corps volunteers in Medellin and Antioquia. How can we help? We'd like to be involved with his Partners of the Americas program, which is, I believe, run by the State Department. And, you know, one morning I was having coffee with a neighbor watching our three year old and two year old do whatever they do. I got a phone call from the governor's office.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:56] You're good at writing letters.

DIXON: [00:45:59] To what it does. So and she wanted to know we were invited to a meeting and I was speechless. I mean I mean, one of the things I learned in school is that all of these people that you meet, they're just people. But here I am getting a call from the governor's

wife and I'm speechless. So, so we became involved with the Partners of the Americas program while we were in Massachusetts.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:20] And what was the Partners in the Americas program?

DIXON: [00:46:23] It's a sister to sister program where you again interact to bring people closer together. And the State Department provides budgets for this for these partner states and the one. So we began to go to meetings and to work with them and we tried to work. One of the things that fascinated me was adoption. And that was because having worked in a red-light district, you see a lot of homeless, not totally homeless children, but children that if there was people were willing mothers were willing to give up their children for a better life. And so we began to do some work with that. We weren't successful. But in the other thing was that there was a program that they had to bring athletic trainers from the states down to all over the world, wherever these partners were. And they were looking at other, other areas. We're looking at name coaches. Well, these guys are going to be on a joyride to go down and hobnob around and do whatever they were. Kevin was contacted and I have a new coach that was really a quality coach. And so I invited him to accept this and go down and spend, I think it was six weeks there. So Johnny went down and then we went down. There was only money. They would only send one of us. That's what the budget. But having been Peace Corps volunteers, we weren't going to stay at the four-star hotels. So and Kevin's mother was so excited that she offered to keep the two kids for us. We had to go. So we went out on his stipend because we didn't have any other money and, you know, and saw what was said. That was ten years afterwards we saw what was going on in the country and tell the story. I can tell you I'm going to tell it because.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:11] You tell your version and he'll tell his version.

DIXON: [00:48:12] OK, Kevin was, you know, a Division I athlete. He was six seven at his peak, I believe all kinds of places where people would come up and recognize him. And, you know, they played ball with them. They knew him, whatever. You know, we congratulate him for

whatever. Well, and lots of times I knew the name. I was able to bail him out. He's you know, so anyhow, we're walking across the campus. He said we've got to go see the new university. He had taught at the University of Antioquia. And it was an urban campus. It was now they had a campus out in the suburbs. So it's beautiful. So we're walking across the campus and this guy comes yelling, Dickson St. George Dixon was in here. I mean, nobody knows I'm here. So, Kevin, I can't help you on this one because I could. Because you don't remember me says I'm sorry. I have not a clue who you are. You know, he said, you taught me to play basketball off the coast. I'm here on an athletic scholarship. And he said eyeball to eyeball. I mean, that's, that's guess that's. And I thought that we can measure that. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. And then he brought he brought his counterpart to the states too and he'll tell you that story. So you tells the drinking stories for. Oh wow. Because Kevin doesn't drink.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:31] So, so they were involved in in the Partners program. The Americas program. I know you're involved in in in the now and where you're living in Spokane as well.

DIXON: [00:49:45] Yeah. And we maintain the connection with the Massachusetts group. We were on the Cape, ultimately we ended up on Cape Cod. We also lived in Saudi Arabia for five years, which was another quite another experience with another returned Peace Corps volunteer. We've maintained the contact as part of the circle. And, um, two of our children had been volunteers, service and kind of the power of one and. Life has a purpose, kind of those themes are just part of who we are that you just you know, I'm not sure how it all fits together. Kevin took a job in Saudi Arabia because it was lucrative. And we had and it was a family contract and we had three kids and we'd like to travel. And nobody was somebody was going to let us travel every six months with a family. OK, we did that. We were in Yanbu. It was a city being built out of nothing right now. Right now, it's a huge industrial resort area, but it was nothing. We were one of the first families up there. Kevin works in the city. He works within the office. There's no Girl Scouts, Girl Scouts in Jeddah. And so the girls were in brownies. And, you know, we you jump through hoops to get them to all the

programs. We're moving to Yanbu. There's no Girl Scouts there. But somehow along the way, he had met a guy named Ray Bragg who was also worked for Parsons. And Ray had been a volunteer brain. His wife were volunteers in Turkey at the same time, about the same time we were volunteers in Columbia. And we got we got to know them only through letters being said, I would send a letter with Kevin to read to Carolyn back.

DIXON: [00:51:28] We agreed to start Girl Scouts in Yanbu because we had, there was nothing there, Carol. And I had never met. She was we never met personally. We were both due back in country in like September of whatever the year was and our flights got all screwed up. But I thought, well, Carolyn will get back in time. Will her flights got all screwed up. We had this all laid out. We had set up a meeting so the families would know that there's going to be a meeting for anybody interested in scouting. So we and I you know, I'm Kirsten because we're the next Carolyn, you know, and I've got to run this meeting by myself and just people coming in. So we get to the meeting hall and Kevin's job is community services. So we got the meeting all set up. We've got the loud speakers. We've got everything going in. The hall is filling with people. And I'm thinking, where is what? I'm going to run this meeting within five minutes. This plan comes through the door and she's a wreck. She says, let me go to the bathroom. You're Carolyn. You're OK. We were in a meeting as if we had been lifelong friends doing community organization together. It was unbelievable that we both connected from our Peace Corps training. Yeah. Just knew how to run a meeting and get everybody going and walked out of there with four Girl Scout troops, you know, brownies from middle school through cadets. I mean, the whole thing organized right there and kept it going for two years. Said our name is on a charter for scouting in Yambo. Yeah. Yeah. But yeah. And it was fun. I mean, we did that and I I'm kind of proud of that as sort of a late life accomplishment. But that the impact.

DIXON: [00:53:08] Yes, we've always because we moved out to Spokane, it was just difficult to believe that these people were so independent that they didn't, you know, and so we began to work. And there's, there's a

group there. There's a coalition going back. Yes. And we just went back through different ways. You know, we just it's just a part of who we are when, when two of your daughters sign in for Peace Corps, you know, and the other two.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:30] Why did they sign up? Because their parents had.

DIXON: [00:53:33] No, no, not my goal in life was to raise if I was going to raise children, if I was going to raise women and I happened to get women, is to be strong, independent women to do your follow your path, not to do you know what we want you to do, but to do what you want to do. And that was that's why two of them chose Peace Corps as part of their path. But yeah. And the other two are significant volunteers and contributors and all sorts of things.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:04] So you have four daughters.

DIXON: [00:54:05] We have four daughters. Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:07] That's good. Yeah. So is there anything is there a story you want to tell or is there something you want to talk about that I didn't ask you about?

DIXON: [00:54:18] Oh, no, it's fine.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:20] No, it's not. It's been a good interview. Thank you.

DIXON: [00:54:23] Oh thank you so much. Yeah. Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]