

Candice Diehl Wiggum Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Candice Diehl Wiggum

Interviewer: Patricia A. Wand

Date of Interview: November 5 and 30, 2018

Location of Interview: Blue Bell, Pennsylvania; Ringoes, New Jersey

Length: 39 pages

Biographical Note

Candice "Candy" Diehl Wiggum served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Macedonia (now the Republic of North Macedonia) from September 2009 to December 2012 in a business development program.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed March 4, 2019, 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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

Candice Diehl Wiggum, recorded interview by Patricia A. Wand, November 5 and 30, 2018, 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

Candice Diehl Wiggum

November 5, 2018
Blue Bell, Pennsylvania

November 30, 2018
Ringoës, New Jersey

By Patricia A. Wand

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

WAND: [00:00:06] Today is Monday, November 5th, 2018. This is Patricia Ann Wand. I am interviewing Candice Diehl Wiggum, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Macedonia from 2009 to 2012. She served in a business development project. So first, Candy, let me tell you how pleased we are that you have agreed to be interviewed. I'm looking forward to hearing your stories.

WIGGUM: [00:00:44] Me, too.

WAND: [00:00:45] And let's start by the, you know, the opening question. Why? Why did you join Peace Corps?

WIGGUM: [00:00:54] Well, I was in high school, ninth grader, I believe, in 1960, and was always inspired by Kennedy's speech and the start of Peace Corps. I thought that was very exciting. My cousin actually served in the Peace Corps in the late '60s, early '70s, I believe. And then I followed Miss

Lillian when she was in India. And it was always a long term goal of mine to someday join the Peace Corps. In fact, a friend of mine told me after I had that I had told her 20 years ago that I was going to join the Peace Corps. So it really had been a long term goal.

WIGGUM: [00:01:37] So when I reached the time when I was ready to retire, um, that, that was always my plan. And I retired when I was just short of 63. So I went in, in fact had my 63rd birthday when we moved into our training village, and came out when I was 66. So it also worked as a nice segue from working into retirement because by the time I got back, I was in, could get Social Security, I had Medicare. So it was kind of a way to, to take an adventure right at the end of my career and, you know, still be covered with health and living and all those kinds of things.

WAND: [00:02:28] So you mentioned the friend who remembered your talking about Peace Corps a long time before you actually went in. So I'm assuming that friend was supportive. What, what did the rest of your friends and your family think about your joining the Peace Corps?

WIGGUM: [00:02:48] Well, I grew up in the military. My parents were still alive, but in increasingly poor health when I joined. But they were very supportive. Travel has always been extremely important to them, and they were delighted for me to go and to experience another culture and to once again be out in the world beyond where I had raised my kids. Um, my kids. I have two children. And they were somewhat amazed. My daughter was not particularly happy. She likes me close by. And she says, I know if you go, you'll never come back. And then when I extended, she said, see, I told you you're never going to come back! So it was more difficult, I think, for her than it was for my son, who actually did come over and visit me and loved, loved the experience of being over with me when I was in Macedonia. So. So it was kind of, it was kind of mixed.

WAND: [00:03:49] Mixed feelings, it sounds like.

WIGGUM: [00:03:51] Mixed feelings.

WAND: [00:03:52] Right, right. Well, so tell us, what did you choose to do for your career in your, in the life before you retired and opened up the opportunity to become a Peace Corps volunteer?

WIGGUM: [00:04:05] Yeah, I'd been a mental health counselor for years and years and years, since my 20s, at colleges and universities. And when I retired I was actually the interim dean of students at the college I worked with. So I'd worked with young people my whole career, was very comfortable being around college students, and so was very comfortable being around the younger Peace Corps volunteers as well.

WAND: [00:04:32] And where were you working when you, during, during the major part of those, what? What, 30 or more years?

WIGGUM: [00:04:39] Oh, yes. More than 30 years. For the first 30 years, let's see. I started, I think in '69 and retired in 2002. I worked at Western Washington University up in Bellingham, Washington. And then I retired from that job and moved across the country and finished my career the last seven years at Keene State College in Keene, New Hampshire.

WAND: [00:05:05] Okay, very interesting. And then, um, so you're, you're getting. How long before you retired and joined the Peace Corps? Did you plan to do that? When did you, when did the idea solidify? Ah, this is what I can do and this is the timing for it.

WIGGUM: [00:05:30] Well, I'd read that it took about 18 months, I think at the time, between first application to going into the Peace Corps. So I started about a year and a half before I actually went in. Finding out information, filling out the forms, doing the endless medical things that are required, especially at my age, as I have a longer medical history than younger people. So it was really part of planning for, for quite some time. So I retired in June and I left in September.

WAND: [00:06:09] So you started your application process. Did you talk with other people about it while you were doing that, or did you do it kind of quietly?

WIGGUM: [00:06:16] I did it pretty quietly, I think. Um. I don't think I did it secretly. I just.

WAND: [00:06:25] Didn't make a big fuss about it.

WIGGUM: [00:06:26] I just didn't make a big fuss about it. You know, like I said, it had been a long-term goal. And so to me, it wasn't like, well, I'm going to go do this. You know? It's like, well, of course I'm going to go do this.

WAND: [00:06:36] Yeah.

WIGGUM: [00:06:37] And then I was terrified that I couldn't because I have sleep apnea. And at the top of the medical form, it says you probably won't get placed if you have sleep apnea. And I went, no! But it said you probably or, you know, it used some conditional language. So I thought, well, I'll see. The worst they can do is say no. If I don't apply, then I'm not going to do it for sure. So I think it helps, I think it helps to have a PhD.

WAND: [00:07:07] Mm hmm.

WIGGUM: [00:07:08] I think they're willing to be a little bit more flexible, because a woman the year before had applied with her husband and she had sleep apnea and they didn't take her. So, yeah.

WAND: [00:07:18] Well, you passed that hurdle.

WIGGUM: [00:07:20] I did.

WAND: [00:07:21] So when did you get the invitation? And, and how, had, did you, did you go in saying you'd go anywhere or did you?

WIGGUM: [00:07:32] I went in pretty much saying I'd go anywhere. I didn't want to be in any country. Strangely enough. I'm laughing because I said I didn't want to be in any country that was Arabic because I really didn't want to deal with that discrimination against women that I feel is oftentimes there. And then I ended up in eastern Macedonia, which working with Albanians and they're predominantly Muslim and got to love Albanians

and really chose that because I wanted to experience living and working in a Muslim community so I could get to know that culture better. So I kind of laugh at that now. But, um, but that was the original thing.

WIGGUM: [00:08:15] And the acceptance process was a little strange because I got a letter that said I would be going somewhere in the Caucasus, and I figured that was probably Georgia, but I didn't know for sure. And then the Russians invaded Georgia. And so the class ahead of me was pulled out of Georgia. And then the next letter I got said, oh, you're going to the Balkans. You're going to Macedonia. So, so there was some shifting around. And then in June, I got a call saying, do you want to go in two weeks? We have a place for you. And I thought, no, my life's a little too complicated to be able to wrap it up in two weeks and go. So, so there was a lot of different sort of hopping around with my placement.

WAND: [00:09:06] But they, when you were offered a two week, an entry within two weeks and you said, no, I'm not, I can't be ready, then what did they say? What did, what did, how did they?

WIGGUM: [00:09:17] Well, that was fine because I was already slated to go to Macedonia at that point.

WAND: [00:09:21] So you just waited for another project to start?

WIGGUM: [00:09:24] Well, the two weeks wasn't to Macedonia.

WAND: [00:09:28] Oh.

WIGGUM: [00:09:28] I have no idea where that would have been to.

WAND: [00:09:30] Oh, I see.

WIGGUM: [00:09:30] But they evidently had a place where they saw I could be used.

WAND: [00:09:34] Yeah.

WIGGUM: [00:09:35] So. So I said, no, you know, I'm set to go to Macedonia in a couple of months. I'll just keep with that.

WAND: [00:09:42] Yeah. All right. So you retired in June, got your life in order so that you could be gone for, at that point, you expected to be gone for two years. And anything particular about that summer of transition that you want to recount?

WIGGUM: [00:10:01] There was just a lot to do. It was 2009, so the housing market had crashed, so I couldn't sell my house. So I found someone to be kind of caretakers, renters of it. I rented it out for quite cheap so people could, so they wouldn't depend on me to be the landlord that fixed everything. They wanted to move in right away. They needed to move in right away. They'd lost the lease on the house that they were in. It was a family. And so we actually lived together for a while. And then I traveled a little bit and saw my kids and my parents and did that. So it was, you know, and in the meantime, I'm packing things away and trying to figure out what to take and how to fit in one suitcase and all the things that you do as a Peace Corps volunteer.

WAND: [00:10:58] So then you finally got it in order. And September came. And away you went.

WIGGUM: [00:11:05] And away I went, down to D.C. for a couple of days and then off to Macedonia.

WAND: [00:11:12] And tell us about training and those. Well, you could even start by those first few days in Macedonia, where you were and all that, and then elaborate about your training experience.

WIGGUM: [00:11:24] Well, one of, one of the, there's so many things that that I kind of look back and chuckle about. And one of them was, there were some people in our group that said, oh, I really want to do the dual language program. I can't wait to get there and see if I can get into it. And I thought, are you nuts? I think it's going to be horrible learning one language, much less two. How can you even think that? And then I go into training and I hear a presentation and I think, I want to do that,

because I want to get the fullest experience I can get. And to do that, that means learning Albanian as much as I can, as well as Macedonian. And so I volunteered for the program.

WIGGUM: [00:12:14] There is only one non-teaching position, and I really didn't think I was going to get it because it was for business development. And that's not the, the project I was supposed to be in, which is why I sort of hesitated when you asked. But it turned out to be a farm related one. And I'd raised my kids on a ten acre farm, so I had farm background, so they were so excited to have me in that I fit into that slot and I was accepted. Then it was my birthday when we moved into the village. We had learned the Albanian alphabet, and the family I lived with didn't speak Macedonian, didn't speak any English. The dad spoke some French. And I spoke a few words of French. Probably knew as much Macedonian at that point as I knew French, but that was all right.

WIGGUM: [00:13:08] So, and they had a, they had a big party for me with champagne. And I'm thinking, wait a minute, these guys are Muslim. What are we doing with alcohol? But, but they did. I think Peace Corps had probably given them some money because they knew it was my birthday to have a celebration. And all the relatives came and the other people who were in the village came. So.

WAND: [00:13:27] This was, this was your 63rd you said?

WIGGUM: [00:13:30] This is my 63rd. Yeah. Yeah, this was my 63rd. So. So it was a little overwhelming, but quite nice. The family I moved in was very traditionally Albanian. The mom had gotten married at 13 or 14 and they kept having kids even though it almost killed her until they had their son, who was the youngest of five. The dad was several years older. Um, in Albanian culture, women over 60 are retired. They're not supposed to do anything. So one of the first weekends I was there, we had to go up to the head of the clan that he was part of, and he had to get permission from his uncle to let me live in the house.

WIGGUM: [00:14:20] And at that point, I knew enough Albanian that I could tell that the head of the clan was saying, why do you have to take care of her?

Where's her family? Why is she here? Kind of thing. It was, it was very difficult. But my host father was very nervous about this meeting, and he told me I had to be on my best behavior and to stop drinking coffee and to. But then in the end, he did get permission to have me. He would get very angry at me because it was against his, against his honor for me to do anything because I was over 60. So as much as picking up a plate and carrying it to the sink, which was about four steps away. He would yell at me, don't you do that! I have four daughters. They're supposed to do that.

WIGGUM: [00:15:14] Some other things that were difficult for me, and it was a lovely family. I mean, it was, there were five kids and two parents. I got the parents' bedroom and the seven of them slept in the other room. We shared one bathroom. It was a little apartment. One of the reasons they took a Peace Corps volunteer was because he hadn't been paid in months, and they were hoping that the subsidy would help them live. And I think I ended up costing them more than, than they ended up getting. But it was, you know, it was, it was an interesting introduction to a lot of different things. You know, the tension in the country between the two major ethnic groups that live in the Republic of now North Macedonia. There were, there were a lot of very interesting things.

WIGGUM: [00:16:08] So I was going to say, the other thing that was difficult for me is I'd been a single parent. I'd lived on my own for a long time. For them, it's horrible to be alone. And so I could never be alone, that, that would again insult them. They hadn't taken good enough care of me if I was alone.

WAND: [00:16:29] Even for a few hours or even?

WIGGUM: [00:16:31] Oh, even for a few minutes. At one time, they had to leave me for five minutes before their daughter could get there, and they apologized to me profusely that I had to be alone for five minutes. It meant at night that we were always going out. You know, I would try to plead, I have to do my homework. And no, no, no, you have to come. And we'd go. The women, like, like my host mother, who was 34 at the time, worked like crazy and never, rarely left the compound where the

house was. But at night they'd go and visit relatives, usually the women of her husband's family. And I had to go on all these visits because I couldn't be left at the house. And I couldn't ever be left alone with the, with the dad, because that was, again, quite unseemly for, you know. So there were just a lot of cultural things to get used to right away.

WAND: [00:17:29] So. And this was part of your training framework or time span, which was, what, about three months?

WIGGUM: [00:17:37] It was. Yes, it was. We went to site early December, so it was about two and a half months, three months.

WAND: [00:17:46] Where you were in this village, this rural village, and you went to the village knowing only the alphabet, the Albanian alphabet?

WIGGUM: [00:17:55] That's all we had learned, because they had had to make the decision of who was going to be in the dual language program, kind of at the end of that first week that we're in country. And so by the time they chose us and by the time it was time to go to the village, that's what we had learned.

WAND: [00:18:12] So you went to the village then with this rudimentary introduction to Albanian alphabet, and then you had to speak Albanian with your host family?

WIGGUM: [00:18:24] Yes. If my, like we went. My family took me one time in an area that had been, you know, there was still a lot of border tensions at that time. And he took me in an area that Peace Corps volunteers weren't supposed to go. And so he told me in French not to tell Peace Corps. But you can, you know, I think back at that time and I don't know how we did it, but my host mom and I had great, meaningful conversations. And I think you just learn to communicate in a number of different ways.

WIGGUM: [00:19:03] Um. You know, she, she was so worried about me moving out in an apartment by myself. It's like, come back any time, you're part of our family. I mean, it's just, there's such a, partly it's the Albanian culture,

partly it's just the wonderful people. Partly it's she's at home all day. It was wonderful for her to have some other woman that was there to talk to. There were a lot of different factors, I think, that entered into that. But it was, it was a very moving experience. Yeah. I mean, I could talk forever. I'll tell you a story. And this is the story of my last day there.

WAND: [00:19:42] The last day in the village where you were training?

WIGGUM: [00:19:46] Right, before I, before I went to Gostivar, which was my placement site. Oh, I couldn't sleep very well. And I woke up really early in the morning, like at 5:00, and I went into the bathroom and I locked the door to go to the bathroom. And I went to go out and I couldn't get the door open. The lock had broken. So I'm standing there thinking, what should I do? Well, I could take a shower, but then I'd be naked and wet. And that's not good either. So I called out and eventually the eldest daughter heard me and the family all got up and came out and they couldn't get the door open. And they put their little ten year old girl through the, this little window that was outside the bathroom on the balcony. And she came in. She couldn't get the door open either.

WIGGUM: [00:20:33] So finally the father climbed through the window and he realized that the lock was really broken. He couldn't get through it either. So he was telling his wife, kick the door in. And I was feeling like the biggest schmuck in the world. And she couldn't kick it in. So the last, one of the last views I have of my host dad was him climbing back out of this teeny, teeny window, you know, his butt flying through as he tried to get through. And he came and he kicked in the door and the frame all split and broke and, oh, I just, I feel terrible. And my host mother looked at me and said, see, even the house doesn't want you to leave.

WAND: [00:21:14] Oh.

WIGGUM: [00:21:15] It was, you know, it's just like, that was, that was the experience. It was just this lovely, most of the time, and loving experience.

WAND: [00:21:27] And she said that to you in Albanian?

WIGGUM: [00:21:29] Oh, yes, absolutely.

WAND: [00:21:30] And you understood it?

WIGGUM: [00:21:31] Oh, yeah.

WAND: [00:21:31] Two months after you arrived.

WIGGUM: [00:21:33] Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So it was very sweet. And it was very sweet. Isn't that a great story?

WAND: [00:21:41] That is a great story. So let's, a little bit more about that training time frame. What, so you were in the village living and, of course, it's this living with this family was a tremendous part of that training on all levels. But what other things, were you learning Macedonian at the same time that you were trying to learn Albanian?

WIGGUM: [00:22:07] Yeah, we had three days of Macedonian and two days of Albanian. Or the other way around, maybe three of Albanian and two of Macedonian. So we were trying to learn at least enough to navigate with, because it was an Albanian. You know, we went to some of the other training sites and they had coffee bars, but this was a little village and there was nothing there. So on our breaks, I, I asked. Oh, there's so many different things. The stove was broken at one time and they had one of those little hot pots that you heat up water in. And I thought, that'll be great for our training because we have no place to get a cup of coffee or a cup of tea where we are. So I can take that, we can get little packets and we can mix it. So I asked them where they got it and the little place in the in the village where they got it didn't have any.

WIGGUM: [00:22:58] So my host father, who I think really at that point was making money smuggling, took me down to the *treg*, to the market that happened once a week, and kind of negotiated and got me for very inexpensively, one of those to use. So that's what we used on our breaks and things like that.

WIGGUM: [00:23:20] It was a stressful time for me. My parents' health really deteriorated during those three months. The people I'd rented the house to had, had split up and I didn't know what was going to happen with that, but it turned out to be okay. My daughter was supposed to start a job in September, but they furloughed her to January. My son was applying for a new job. So stateside there was a lot of stuff that was happening. So there was one day I had a complete meltdown in training, just that. But the women that I trained with, it was all women because Albanian villages wouldn't take men. But the women I trained with, who were all in their mid to close to upper 20s, not quite upper 20s, were all very supportive and we were all very close during training.

WAND: [00:24:15] How many other Peace Corps volunteers were training in that village?

WIGGUM: [00:24:20] There were six of us all together. Yeah.

WAND: [00:24:24] And you were all learning, taking the same coursework, and also all studying both languages?

WIGGUM: [00:24:30] Yes.

WAND: [00:24:31] Right.

WIGGUM: [00:24:31] Yeah, this was a crazy group that wanted to do dual language. There are a lot of linguists in there. They were nuts.

WAND: [00:24:39] So just very briefly, how would you describe to someone like me who knows nothing about either language, how would you describe the difference between Albanian language and Macedonian? What are the roots? What are the differences?

WIGGUM: [00:24:52] Very, very different roots. Albanian is, has a lot of similarities to Latin. You know, it's, it's more of a romance language, but it's also a very old language. And so, but the Romans were there and so they had a big influence on that. Macedonian's Slavic. And so it had a Cyrillic alphabet. It, you know, two totally different roots, two totally different

alphabets, two totally different ways of writing words, writing letters. So. So they were, they were quite different.

WAND: [00:25:27] Yes.

WIGGUM: [00:25:29] They were quite different.

WAND: [00:25:29] Very different. Very different. So did you, at the same time as you were learning the languages in your coursework and training, were you also exposed to some of the cultural differences, some of the business development issues, any of that? Or was it mostly about language?

WIGGUM: [00:25:45] Um, well, I was the only one in that group who wasn't a teacher, going to be a teacher, wasn't going to be teaching English. And, and I think I was the only one really in Macedonia that was business development there. So I would take a, when we had the classes on NGO and non English, I would take a Kombi into town and then another Kombi out to another town to have those lessons.

WAND: [00:26:19] Kombi being?

WIGGUM: [00:26:20] Being like a van, you know, it's a small. They have big busses, but for the villages they have little vans that they travel in. So it would be, you know, it would be finish language in the morning. And then we, then I'd take off and do this sort of dual Kombi ride, which was. You know, I would try to catch lunch in between to get there on time, kind of stuff. The non English as a second language program is much less targeted, I would say, because people go into so many different kinds of jobs out of that. English as a second language, it's pretty clear. And the curriculum was pretty clear. It was, it was a lot more amorphous on the, on the other side because people were going in lots of different directions.

WIGGUM: [00:27:15] But you learned a little bit about the history and some of the issues with NGOs and Macedonian words that were used and things like that. We also got cross cultural training. You know, there's a lot of

different parts to the training that we got. You know, it was just this specialty training that I had to go to another village for.

WAND: [00:27:42] Um, speaking of cross cultural, what did you wear? Were you expected to cover your hair?

WIGGUM: [00:27:48] No. No. Um, a lot of women, especially older women did, but a lot of. Well, you know, the Middle East, by the time I left the Middle East was doing a lot of recruiting in the area. So you saw more younger women with hair covering. But when I first got there, it was mostly just older women that, that had a hijab or a niqab. On the younger women. You know, Albania itself, Macedonian Albanians, the Albanians that live in Macedonia, are a lot more traditional because they've had to protect their way of life.

WIGGUM: [00:28:32] In Albania, they're Muslim, but they're also very secular. Hodja was there. It was a communist country for 40 years. He really was horrible. He was absolutely horrible. But he did promote equality, equality among women. He turned the country into something much more secular than it might have been otherwise. And they say the real religion of Albania is Albanianism. I mean, and they have an old culture that Muslim, Islam came into, but was pretty much translated into Albanian. So it's, it wasn't like a Middle Eastern country.

WAND: [00:29:16] Right. So the, the Albanian, shall we say, tenants of religion. Would you, how would you define those? What, I mean, for example, in some parts of the world, those traditional religions are like animism or, you know?

WIGGUM: [00:29:32] Oh no, this, I mean, we would celebrate Muslim holidays. They had what they called Bayram. I think in other parts of the world it's called Eid. But, but we would have that. They had Ramadan. Um.

WAND: [00:29:48] So ostensibly it was Muslim.

WIGGUM: [00:29:50] Yeah, and they had, you know, there were mosques. One of the delightful things is the muezzin and the call to prayer several times a

day. It's a lovely, you'd hear it from different mosques all over town. And that lovely rhythm, you got used to that rhythm of the day.

WIGGUM: [00:30:07] Um, alcohol was always very interesting to me. I told you I was very surprised because many of them did drink alcohol, but they hid it. You know, the Albanians from Albania would come over and drink alcohol and like my counterpart would drink alcohol with them. But they oftentimes had a bottle of wine hidden that they would drink at home. When they drank, they didn't drink with company oftentimes. Especially my family in the village who I know did drink wine, but certainly not so anybody could see them drink wine. So that, you know, there is, there is different ways they handle things.

WIGGUM: [00:30:48] But they, you know, they had things like, like the circumcision ceremony, which they would, which they would do with boys between the age of six and ten.

WAND: [00:31:00] Oh.

WIGGUM: [00:31:01] So boys were not circumcised at birth. It was a way of bringing them into the tribe and having them experience some, you know, it was a transition ceremony that they would do this. When I moved into, with my host family, their son had just been circumcised a month before I moved in. And we endlessly watched tapes of, of his party. They have a big party where they haul the kids in all dressed in white on trays and it's big. I even got to see a film of the circumcision itself. Over and over. So. So things like that. Um, you know, there were a lot of corollaries with what you would find in other Muslim countries, but translated, like I say, through, through Albanian.

WAND: [00:31:57] Right. A few minutes ago, you mentioned that while you were there you saw Middle East recruitment, if you will.

WIGGUM: [00:32:09] Yeah.

WAND: [00:32:09] And what, describe what was happening there.

WIGGUM: [00:32:12] Well, there was different things that were happening. Um. First of all, in many of the bigger towns in Macedonia, there was the Yahya Kemal School, and that was the school that was started by Yan, who lives in Pennsylvania, who's now very much an enemy of Erdogan. And Erdogan actually had relatives very close to where I lived. So he would come to western Macedonia more than the president of Macedonia did. But so there is still a big Turkish influence there. And there was some pressure, like one of the young men that that I am still good friends with who went to this high school. One of his professors would say, you know, stay away from the Americans. They're all missionaries. They're all trying to convert you.

WIGGUM: [00:33:07] And then they, the, I think some of the Saudis started coming up. There'd be big bulletin boards that would have, come in and hear about the new Islam. And they were doing some training. And I heard, and I don't know if this is true or not, that they were paying families to, to have the woman wear a burka. You started seeing burkas all of a sudden come out. And there are some people who were sort of getting, um, recruited into a more Middle Eastern, more, more fundamentalist. Not tons, but, but it was there. And I have read since that that they, they, ISIS got quite a few recruits from Kosovo, which was very close to where I lived as well, because I think the same thing was happening there.

WIGGUM: [00:34:06] You know, the unemployment for young people was about 75%. Agriculture was starting to be so you couldn't make a living. There was tremendous numbers of young people that saw no future. So it was a fertile ground, I think, for recruitment.

WAND: [00:34:30] Let's go to your assignment. We've, we've been learning a lot about Macedonia and the Albanians in Macedonia, but we haven't heard. Now let's go to your assignment.

WIGGUM: [00:34:41] All right.

WAND: [00:34:41] Where did you go and what did you do?

WIGGUM: [00:34:43] Well, I was assigned to the Regional Association of Sheep Breeders of Western Macedonia, and this was an organization that.

WAND: [00:34:56] Regional Association?

WIGGUM: [00:34:57] Of Sheep Breeders of Western Macedonia.

WAND: [00:35:00] Sheep Breeders.

WIGGUM: [00:35:01] Try learning that in Macedonian and Albanian. Um. This was an organization, you know, the EU was trying to bring Macedonia, even though the Greeks were blocking them at the time, up to European standards. And they really had no idea how far behind Macedonia was. But they had created this Eastern and a Western association, and the Swedes had funded it for ten years. And then the funding stopped and it was supposed to then be turned over to locals to run and to do, but the locals had no interest in funding it. So by the time I got there, it really didn't exist anymore. But the counterpart didn't tell Peace Corps that, for one thing, um, who was delightful. I love, I loved my counterpart and I got very close to his family and I went back a couple of years ago and went to a family wedding. And, you know, we're still very close.

WIGGUM: [00:36:05] But, you know, he was a survivor and he did what he could to, to survive. He hadn't been paid in a couple of years I think. There was no real association. Peace Corps had said you have to have an office. And so he went to the municipality and we got an office that was unused because it was unusable. And we never used it, but we had an office. And so the hardest time for me was the first six months because I was trying to figure out what was going on. You know, I would say to Luli, well, on your application, it says, this guy is the head of the board of directors. When will I meet him? And he, oh, well, he's not doing that anymore. He's doing something else. And the farmers would say, well, what Luli really needs to do is get a job. We tried to have some meetings, but nobody would come. He still had very good connections with all the farmers and we did a lot of rural development work.

WIGGUM: [00:37:11] One of the great fun things. You know, the other thing that complicated it a little bit was my age, because he was Albanian. A woman over 60, he's not supposed to ask to do anything. And here he's got this volunteer who's over 60. So the first thing he actually asked me to do was to ask another volunteer to help organize a 5K race. And so I said, Luli, I can do that. And we developed a very good working relationship and wrote grants together, did all kinds of things together.

WAND: [00:37:42] But he let you then organize that race?

WIGGUM: [00:37:45] Yes.

WAND: [00:37:46] Even though, so you had to convince him that just because you were 63, you could still do this?

WIGGUM: [00:37:51] Yes.

WAND: [00:37:52] And he could trust you.

WIGGUM: [00:37:53] Yes. Yeah, and he did. And it was very successful. We did it for three years and it got a lot of attention. And it, you know, it was, ended up being good for him because it brought his visibility back up in the, in the, in the city and all kinds of things happened. Anyway. So that was, that, that I always kind of laugh at, but it worked out alright.

WAND: [00:38:14] So this race was a, what did you say?

WIGGUM: [00:38:18] It was a, it was a 5K.

WAND: [00:38:19] 5K of runners, run?

WIGGUM: [00:38:21] Yeah. And we worked with a high school and the sports directors and we got high school teams and then we got people from all over that, that also ran, little kids the first year. But we kind of changed that. It, it got very professional by the last year that we had done it, but we wrote a SPA grant and got money to buy some of the good, uh, watch that also let us see how long the times were that people ran the

race. We could track that and do all sorts of things. So we had a website and a Facebook page and it got to be a big event.

WIGGUM: [00:39:00] And it was supposed to be combined with a, uh, one of the things that Luli did and that I worked with him was organized different festivals. So it was supposed to be combined with a sort of a farm festival, but that part never really happened very much. The farmers weren't much interested in that. But we got dancing groups, dancing group, a local dancing group that came in and did traditional Albanian dances. And it was, it was great fun. It was great fun. So we also organized things like there was an annual sheep festival that was up in the mountains every year. And we, Luli helped organize that. And I helped monitor the cheese judging and all kinds of things.

WAND: [00:39:51] So, now, so this is sheep now and this was the national or this effort to, uh, to organize the sheep breeders. But so did you do this under the supposed auspices of this organization, or did you just do it because Luli understood that this would appropriate?

WIGGUM: [00:40:10] We did it under the auspices of the Regional Association of Sheep Breeders. Up until the last year, and the last year that I was there, Macedonia passed the law requiring more stringent requirements for NGOs. And he couldn't meet that. So really that last year the Sheep Breeders died. And he by that time had opened up a little cafe, which I had helped with because I'd made some connections and introduced him to a man I knew that worked for the UNDP and got him a grant that, to help them open this place.

WIGGUM: [00:41:00] And one of the reasons I'd stayed the third year is I thought he was going to get a job. He told me he was getting a job in the economic development office of the *opstina*, and I thought, well, at least we'll have money to try to get things done. We'd written grants. We'd worked with other NGOs. [coughs] Excuse me.

WAND: [00:41:23] To get a job with the what now?

WIGGUM: [00:41:25] The municipality, with the economic development office.

WAND: [00:41:29] Of the municipality.

WIGGUM: [00:41:30] Yeah. And we were working, we were trying to develop a lot of like regional tourism, nature tourism, that kind of stuff.

WAND: [00:41:43] So I'm going to pause just and ask you, what was the name of the municipality that you worked in?

WIGGUM: [00:41:49] Gostivar.

WAND: [00:41:51] And how is it spelled?

WIGGUM: [00:41:52] G-O-S-T-I-V-A-R.

WAND: [00:41:57] Thank you.

WIGGUM: [00:42:02] So, you know, and there was. During those first six months when I was sort of trying to figure out what we were doing, because sometimes Luli would say, tomorrow we're going to go here, be ready by 10:00, and then he wouldn't come. There was no real office to go to at that point. Part of the time during those first six months, we cleaned out this unusable space. But the first day after we were done cleaning it out, I went there and sat there for a couple of hours. And then I thought, why am I sitting here? There's nothing happening here. And that was pretty much the end of that. But I did go, there was a Peace Corps volunteer who was in the economic development office. So for a while I went and sat there with her and kind of learned about what was going on with Gostivar and met some of those folks and created relationships with those folks.

WIGGUM: [00:42:57] One of my skills I think is networking, so that's what I did a lot of and that's what Luli did a lot of. I mean, because we didn't really exist, we networked with other organizations actions and worked a lot with other folks to develop different programs. And in fact, he ended up loaning me out to a group without telling me. He told them I would write a grant and he just told me to go to this meeting. So I did. And then they

turned to me and said, okay, when you write this up. It's like, what?
Excuse me.

WAND: [00:43:33] Now, and once again, this was all in Albanian? This was still in Albanian?

WIGGUM: [00:43:39] Not necessarily.

WAND: [00:43:40] Or were you also speaking Macedonian?

WIGGUM: [00:43:43] Well, some of the meetings we would go in would be in Macedonian. Some would be in Albanian and Macedonian. A lot, there was English translation because by, you know, um, up to about 1989, what kids learned in school was Russian. After 1989, they learned English. So there was a fair amount of English speakers that were there. My understanding of written Macedonian and Albanian got to be decent. My hearing of it, I think when you get older you don't hear as acutely. I think I've always had a little trouble with that anyway. So when it was spoken to me, it was a little bit more difficult to understand. But there would be slides and I could read them and I could follow, follow along with what was happening. And, you know, there were just.

WIGGUM: [00:44:37] I loved my job because if you teach English, you go to school every day and you teach English. But I could never know what was going to happen the next day. I have another favorite story. You know, I tend to talk a lot.

WAND: [00:44:52] That's okay.

WIGGUM: [00:44:52] Which makes interviews hard. One day Luli said, well, we're going to go down to Ohrid and we're going to see these people about this cross Albanian Macedonian grant. I said okay. He says, be ready by such and such a time. And I said okay. So I thought, well, as long as we're going down there, there's this guy who works at the university that has something to do with something we might be interested in. And there's this other woman who does some tours, so I'll make

arrangements that we meet with them too, so we can talk a little bit about some common interest areas. So I did. So that was fine.

WIGGUM: [00:45:29] So I went out and met Luli that morning and there was another car and 2 or 3 other people in it. And, oh, these are from, the from the central government, from the tourism department. They want to see what's happening in Mavrovo. So we're going to go that way first. We'll stop them off in Mavrovo. But first we had to stop at a friend of his because he needed something. I can't remember what it was now. Anyway, it's the, it's a culture that you can't just say, I need this, I'll take it and go. You don't do that. You have to go in and you have to have a cup of coffee with them. So we went in to his friend's office and we all sat around and had our coffee and chatted about who knows who and what's happening and all that.

WIGGUM: [00:46:15] And we get in the cars and we go to Mavrovo, which is on this lake. It's a tourist area. And we stop and we have to have coffee there. And then we go out and look at this thing. Yes, yes, yes. And then we go back. I think we might have had lunch after that. I'd learned by this time that I had orange juice every other time, or else I would have been coffee saturated. And then, oh yeah, there was this farmer that lived in Debar. So we were, oh, first we, we had to stop at the, uh, at the monastery and see the monastery, because the monastery had burned down. Part of it had burned down and they had redone it and the people wanted to see the monastery. So we stopped at the monastery and I think probably had coffee there.

WIGGUM: [00:47:04] Then there was a hotel that was just down the road from that that was owned by a friend of Luli's that I became very close to too. So we stopped there and we had to have something there. And then we finally get to Debar. And by this time it's 4:00 or 4:30 and we're no closer to the place we're going than we were when we started. But we had to stop and meet this farmer, have a cup of coffee there with him. So in the meantime, I'm trying to call these people that I'd arranged to meet. And the one guy, he just went home. We never did meet with him, but we finally got down to Ohrid probably at about 6:00 at night. The guy that Luli wanted to see about this grant came out and met us in the parking

lot because he wasn't supposed to talk to anybody. They were evaluating grants.

WIGGUM: [00:47:54] So he gave us about two minutes of general information and he went back in. And then, and then we went and met, met the person that I had arranged us to meet, one of the people, the woman. And of course, had to have coffee again and talked about tourism. She was a tour guide and ran a tourism business. And then we got home about 10:00 at night. But we, you know? The original, and that, that was what oftentimes happened. It's like, Luli and I always had this joke. He would say, oh, you plan so much. And I said, I have to plan. I'm an American woman. And he'd say, but I have to not plan. I'm an Albanian man.

WAND: [00:48:39] Oh, yeah.

WIGGUM: [00:48:40] And that was. And then we'd laugh about how we did this, but that was oftentimes how it was. Um. Planning. Planning didn't work there because you had to be open, like I. Towards the end, I offended someone because I was looking for their daughter and I just went down and asked where his daughter was. And Luli said, you have to go back. So I went back and sat down with this man and had a cup of coffee before he then looked for his daughter, and there was some real issues he wanted to talk to me about. Um, but. But you couldn't plan because you had, there was the social part of it was more important than the actual getting whatever the task was.

WIGGUM: [00:49:29] And it's, it's a clan culture. It's a, like people in Albania trace their families six generations back. We'd pass people on the street and Luli would say, oh, there's my cousin. And I'd say, okay, Luli, how is he related to you? And he'd sit there and he'd think for a minute and he'd say, I don't know, but he's my cousin. So there's these very intricate social connections that always have to be observed. You know, when we were organizing the race, we'd go to the police chief to get permission to block off these streets. And we had to sit and have coffee with him and find out how his family was doing, how everybody was related, how our families were doing. And then he'd say yes and we'd go. The business

piece would take two seconds. The social piece would take probably an hour. You know, and it's, it's just so interesting to see that cultural piece.

WIGGUM: [00:50:42] Another story that I love that shows just how bound we are to our own culture is the October after I'd been there a year, I went home to see my parents because, as I said, they were not doing well. And I think Luli was afraid I wasn't going to come back. So I went to buy a *ciftelia*, which is a little string instrument, to take home to give to a friend. And he said, I want to get you something, I want to. So he looked around the shop and he found this wood plaque that had hands on it like this. And I thought. And he said, oh, I want to get that for you. That's perfect. And I thought, why would praying hands be perfect? He's Muslim. And he bought it and he gave it to me and he says, this is perfect. Hands clapping. And that's what he saw when he saw that.

WIGGUM: [00:51:41] So it's just another reminder that, you know, we have so many presumptions about culture and you just have to give all that up and be aware of your own presumptions so you don't get caught in them. It was part of the fun.

WAND: [00:51:58] Hands clapping.

WIGGUM: [00:51:59] Hands clapping. Perfect.

WAND: [00:52:02] Perfect. Perfect. Right. Yeah. Um, so you. You said the first six months, you were just really wondering, you know, where all this about the, the Western Region Sheep Breeders Association and whether, how it worked and all that. And then you finally figured out that it really didn't work.

WIGGUM: [00:52:27] Didn't exist.

WAND: [00:52:27] Because it didn't really exist, in name only. In somebody, European's vision only, but not in reality apparently.

WIGGUM: [00:52:35] Well, no longer in reality. It had existed as long as it was being funded outside.

WAND: [00:52:41] But, but the Albanians themselves really didn't embrace it.

WIGGUM: [00:52:45] No, no.

WAND: [00:52:47] As something valuable.

WIGGUM: [00:52:47] I mean, for a couple of reasons. One, these guys would take their sheep herds up in the mountains and spend all summer up in government pastures, up in the mountains by themselves. Sheep breeders by nature are solitary and independent. Second of all, this was a country where socialism, where communism had just fallen apart. And in Albania, communism, you know, Hodja was. People hated Hodja, and especially the farmers. He took away their land. He commanded what they would plant, all those things. So anything that smacked of a collective was not looked upon with great love in that area.

WIGGUM: [00:53:38] So it was something that I think was bound to fail. As long as the farmers could get some benefit of it at no cost. Some meals, some training, you know, whatever they could get, that was fine. But the minute the money stopped, they weren't going to put money into that. And they were poor, you know, they were all poor. Where was the, the Eastern Association tried to sell feed, but they couldn't. They couldn't do it at a price that would give them money to exist. So they fell apart as well.

WAND: [00:54:13] So you were assigned to work in a framework that didn't really exist?

WIGGUM: [00:54:18] Yes.

WAND: [00:54:18] So you had to create your own framework?

WIGGUM: [00:54:21] Yeah. And I went back to. When I realized that it, when it finally dawned on me the totality of its nonexistence, I went back to Peace Corps and I said, look, what am I supposed to be doing? This thing does not exist. It's not here. And they said, well, by that time we'd

started planning the race. They said, basically, oh, just stick with it, you know, do a secondary project. What am I supposed to do for a secondary project? Um, see how the race goes in the fall and talk to us again. So. So I stuck with it. And, you know, we found things to do.

WAND: [00:54:59] What other things did you find to do besides organize the race? And it sounds like you organized, helped Luli to organize some festivals.

WIGGUM: [00:55:07] Yeah.

WAND: [00:55:08] So what?

WIGGUM: [00:55:09] We did, we did a lot of meetings with other NGOs. We did a lot of kind of looking at, like I said, a lot of it was around rural tourism and how we could increase that. You know, we ended up working basically through and with other NGOs. And we, we examined, because Luli really wanted to get the sheep breeders started again, we went to a lot of grant funders and went to meetings by grant funders trying to figure out cross border projects or something that would allow money to start coming into the sheep breeders again.

WAND: [00:55:47] So the grant project. You mentioned grants several times and in fact and you were detailed to write some.

WIGGUM: [00:55:54] Yeah.

WAND: [00:55:55] What, is the grant concept, a new concept in that area?

WIGGUM: [00:56:00] No. In fact.

WAND: [00:56:02] How deeply rooted is it?

WIGGUM: [00:56:03] It's pretty deeply rooted because, like I said, Macedonia was a country that was on track to become part of the EU. So the EU had lots of NGOs that were there, government sponsored NGOs, to try to bring Macedonia up to a level where it could be an EU country. Now Greece

blocked that and blocked their, their accession into NATO as well, because of the name Macedonia, which is why it's the Republic of North Macedonia now. And hopefully some of that's breaking down, although they're still in process. Um. But yeah, so there was, there was a lot of money from Europe and they would, they would oftentimes do.

WIGGUM: [00:56:52] Like we, one of the first things that I did in the spring, my first year there was go to a series of classes that were for teachers of agriculture or other people who were heavily involved in agriculture. And they would bring in experts from Europe that would teach about modern swine farming or, um, making sewage lagoons or animal rights and what they had to do to meet the animal rights. That's one I always laugh about because halfway through I looked at Luli and said, does any of this make sense to you? He said, no, no. And in fact, the people who taught it then went out and realized what the situation was in the country. And they came back sort of going, I would have done this totally different had I understood.

WIGGUM: [00:57:48] We had a guy who was wonderful, who came in about fishing and farm fishing and really worked with some of the Albanians that were there. We had people from Kosovo and Albania there, as well as Macedonia. Um, most of the time the professors played on their computers because they knew it wasn't really relevant to, to their lives and didn't pay much attention to it. Well, you know, the first one I went to was about swine farming. And they, they talked about what a modern swine operation would be. And at the end of it, I said, you know, how much would it cost to just set up a moderate one of these? And they said, oh, about 600,000 Euros. You know, it wasn't relative. It wasn't relative to our life. There was one about meat grading. You know, there was a bunch of different stuff. But it was nice because it sort of, you know, I'd taken some animal science courses when I was in college and sort of brought me up to the.

WAND: [00:58:47] Up to date.

WIGGUM: [00:58:47] Up to date for some of the farming things. Yeah, but, but was totally. [tape break]

WAND: [00:58:53] Okay now. This is Patricia Ann Wand and I am interviewing Candice Diehl Wiggum for the second time because of a technical difficulty at the end of the first interview. We are following up with some things that didn't get recorded. So it is now Friday, November 30th, 2018, and we are in Ringoes, New Jersey.

WAND: [00:59:28] So Candace, thank you again for agreeing to meet with me to finish up our interview for the Oral History Project. When we left off with the first half, 50 minutes or so of this tape, we were just starting to talk about your third year of service in Macedonia, where you served from September 2009 to December 2012. So we were finishing up your second year and you were considering serving for another year in Macedonia. So why don't we start there? What, what prompted you to want to serve a third year and what kind of work did you pursue in that regard?

WIGGUM: [01:00:18] Okay. Um. During my three, during my first two years there, I worked with the Sheep Breeders Association and we did a lot of work with other NGOs looking at rural development. But we had no money. We really didn't have an NGO that was functional to be able to carry out anything. The third year, my counterpart thought he was going to start working for the local municipality in, in the economic development sector, and I thought that that would be great because then we could put some of the ideas that we had generated and some of the work that we had done with the other NGOs to practice because we would have some funding behind it and a way to get grants and a way to do some of the things that we couldn't as a really non-functional NGO.

WIGGUM: [01:01:17] At the same time, the country director of Peace Corps came to me and asked if I wanted to be the lead volunteer for the third year, extend for a third year and be a lead volunteer as part of the Peace Corps organization and work with volunteers in a number of different ways to help facilitate, for example, the SPA grants, the money that went for small projects from USAID. To help if people were having trouble, to go to their village and meet with them and see if I could help them with some difficulties they were having. To help plan Peace Corps events,

like when our new volunteers came in. To help with trainings, to help with recruitment of people. There was a, there was a number of different jobs that that was going to entail.

WIGGUM: [01:02:15] And I thought that sounded very interesting, too. So I did make the decision to stay for a third year, and split my time between Skopje at the Peace Corps headquarters and Gostivar, where I worked still with my counterpart and the Sheep Breeders Association. It turned out that he did not end up getting the job or deciding not to take the job at the economic development center at the municipality. So we continued doing some of the same things we'd done, planning the 5K race and celebrations.

WIGGUM: [01:02:52] And I also had been working each year with others to plan a national English spelling bee and to get that organized at the village level and then have the finals in the capital. So the students who pass the, the local levels could come. And that was always both great fun and hugely challenging to do. So. And then, and I worked at the Peace Corps office and did the things I was supposed to do there.

WAND: [01:03:27] Right. Right. And so for the spelling bee, a little more detail about that. Did it, uh, what age groups did it cover, and did it attract students from all over the country or just from the capital or how did that go?

WIGGUM: [01:03:42] Oh, no. It was all over the country. It was, it was at the local level. And it was from pretty much, what were the youngest kids that came? I think maybe even third and fourth graders. We had some young kids come. I know at least fifth and sixth graders came. I can't remember now exactly what the youngest age was. But they did preliminary spelling bees in all the village schools and those that passed the preliminaries, the teachers arranged for transportation and brought them to the capital. And we had a number of different preliminaries to, to get the students down to, to a manageable number so we could do the finals. And we had at each grade level up to high school, that was the final one.

WIGGUM: [01:04:32] And we had the ambassador come our last year and, and observe the finals with, with the older kids and make the awards for the winners of the spelling bee. We worked with a local college, and that was part of the challenge because at the last minute the number of rooms we had suddenly changed and the rooms we could use became much smaller and we had to do a lot of scrambling. That's Peace Corps. Peace Corps is you adapt to whatever is happening at the time. So. So we did a lot of adaptation and got it all done and it was very successful and the kids were thrilled and they loved being able to come to the capital because some from the smaller villages had never been to the capital. So it was a big deal for them to come. And of course, parents were very proud and teachers were very proud. And it was just fun to see all that.

WIGGUM: [01:05:23] And man, I'll tell you, especially the older grades, some of the words those kids had to spell and could spell were amazing. And it was a different situation for them because training in post-communist countries is oftentimes very rote. And so they would have lists to study. But when you got to the finals, we would go off the list and they wouldn't know what kind of word they might get, which upset some of the parents. But the kids did a good job at thinking about what the rules were and figuring out how to do it and maybe recognizing some words they'd seen in other contexts. So it was an amazing thing to watch these kids do this in English.

WAND: [01:06:07] Yeah.

WIGGUM: [01:06:07] To spell pterodactyl or, you know, some of the words that I think most English speakers would, would struggle with.

WAND: [01:06:13] Right. So was this an annual spelling bee by this point?

WIGGUM: [01:06:17] It had started. It was started my first year there by a couple of teachers. And I got involved that first year. And then the second and third and fourth year helped out with it and, um, got people, other people involved in it. It's still going on.

WAND: [01:06:38] Is it?

WIGGUM: [01:06:38] Yeah. They don't bring everybody. They have more regional competitions now to bring a smaller number of people to Skopje, but they're still having the spelling bee.

WAND: [01:06:47] Well, that's wonderful.

WIGGUM: [01:06:48] Yeah. Yeah, it's great fun to see things continue.

WAND: [01:06:51] Yeah. So what kinds of interaction did you have? You mentioned that that one of your responsibilities in the volunteer leader capacity was to be on call and kind of be a resource for Peace Corps volunteers that might be having a little problem or challenges either in their village or adjusting to things or whatever. Can you think of an example of the kind of thing that, that you worked with in this regard?

WIGGUM: [01:07:19] Yeah, there were a number of different things. I mean, it may be that somebody had fallen in love in between the time that they had applied for Peace Corps and the time they came to country. And so they were struggling with whether to stay with Peace Corps or to go back to their love. Sometimes people would get depressed or discouraged about stuff or. You know, I know I talked to one young woman who hadn't gone to school for a couple of days and then was worried that she couldn't go back because she hadn't told anybody she wasn't coming. And to work out how to get back to her job and get started again. So there were a number of different issues that came up.

WIGGUM: [01:08:02] You know, sometimes it was a person was upset with something about their placement. So to go to try to see what was really going on and, and help out with that, you know. So that, that, that was part of it. I had been the head of the volunteer support network that we had for a year or so. And so I had contacts with these kinds of things with some of the, some of the.

WAND: [01:08:32] The volunteer support network that you were involved with happened before your third year then, is that right?

WIGGUM: [01:08:39] Yes.

WAND: [01:08:39] Uh huh. So you were one of the group that said, I'll be, I'm on call if somebody wants to talk about their situation.

WIGGUM: [01:08:47] Correct.

WAND: [01:08:47] So that prepared you to do this even more effectively.

WIGGUM: [01:08:50] Yeah. And I, you know, as a mental health counselor in universities, it was the kind of work that I was used to, to give people support and to try to help them with whatever was going on and to help them sort through what different options were and make the best possible choice that they could.

WAND: [01:09:08] Well, how else was your third year different than the first two years?

WIGGUM: [01:09:15] Well, one of the things was that I was commuting. Skopje was about an hour and a half from where I lived. And so every, two, two days a week, I would get on a bus and go into Skopje and go to the Peace Corps office and come back. And so that, I got to know the bus drivers very well and they got to know me very well.

WAND: [01:09:37] And so you would do this every day that you worked in Skopje? You would need to take the bus in that morning and come back out in the late afternoon or evening.

WIGGUM: [01:09:46] Yeah, I would catch the 7:30 in the morning bus and get into Skopje about 9:00, and then catch the afternoon bus and get home. Yeah.

WAND: [01:09:54] Um, and were you still living with your host family?

WIGGUM: [01:09:58] Oh, no, no, no. The host family was only for training.

WAND: [01:10:02] Oh.

WIGGUM: [01:10:03] After training, I had an apartment.

WAND: [01:10:06] I see.

WIGGUM: [01:10:07] Of my own and was living by myself. The other way the third year was different is I had Spike for at least part of it.

WAND: [01:10:14] You had Spike? Tell us about Spike.

WIGGUM: [01:10:16] Oh, well, Spike, uh. Especially in the part of Macedonia, but really all through Macedonia, it's not a country that's big on pets. You know, it's, people are scraping by and so to have pets is a luxury. And this side of Macedonia I was on, of course, was primarily Muslim and dogs were not considered clean, but I. So there's all kinds of street dogs. There's all kinds of packs of dogs. They help take care of the rodents. They help take care of the garbage. And there's garbage all over in Macedonia that's, that's dumped all over. And so one day I was out in my apartment complex and this about ten week old puppy came wiggling up to me. He had almost no hair. He had a swollen stomach from malnutrition. And he looked at me and he wagged his tail and he said, I've just adopted you. And he did.

WAND: [01:11:15] And he was yours.

WIGGUM: [01:11:16] He was mine from there on after. So I decided to use him. I lived in an apartment complex. There were several buildings around and of course there was a little park in the middle. There were lots of kids. So I decided to use it as an opportunity to teach the children how to take care of animals, and about dogs, because most of them had never had a pet or never really known people with pets like we think of it. And so I fed Spike outside. I gave him baths every day the first couple of weeks when he had mange so badly, to get rid of the mange, and got to know every child in that apartment complex. And so we would talk about dogs and they would play with them while I was gone. And every time I would see them afterwards, they would ask about Spike.

WIGGUM: [01:12:11] And one of the little boys named him Spike because he watched Tom and Jerry cartoons all the time. And the dog in Tom and Jerry was named Spike. So when I asked the kids what I should name the dog, this little boy came up with Spike. So that became a whole nother project and a whole nother way to connect with a different population that otherwise I probably would not have known and became quite good friends with all these kids. It was fun.

WAND: [01:12:40] Right.

WIGGUM: [01:12:40] So, so that was, that was part of it as well.

WAND: [01:12:43] Yeah. Yeah. What a great opportunity presented itself to you when Spike walked into your life.

WIGGUM: [01:12:49] Well, again, it's, you know, you never know what skills you're going to use in Peace Corps. You will use things you hadn't even thought about to use. And this presented an opportunity. And that's what you do in Peace Corps. You make the most of whatever opportunity presents you. And this was a particularly fun one.

WAND: [01:13:14] Indeed. Indeed. So, um. So you continued to work with your counterpart on, on agricultural issues.

WIGGUM: [01:13:25] Yes. And he was sort of beginning to back away from it once he didn't. He opened a cafe. But I'd go down on the weekends and he had me kind of do things that he probably would have done if he hadn't started to back away from all of this. That's when he lent me out to an NGO to write a grant for them without telling me, just having me go to the meeting. And at the end they said, okay, when you write this up. It's sort of like, huh, when I write this up? But I would represent Sheep Breeders Association to different NGO meetings and help out with whatever they needed help with.

WAND: [01:14:01] So you really stayed involved with the Sheep Breeders Association, even though it was not very active. You stayed involved with some of the activities that were associated with it.

WIGGUM: [01:14:12] Yes. And what was interesting to me is I apparently got quite the reputation throughout the Polog Valley, which is where Gostivar was and a couple of other towns, because I started getting reports. When new volunteers moved into villages that I had never even been to, they would say, well, you need to work just like Candy does. We want a hard worker just like Candy. And so it was, it sort of tickled me that my reputation, because I ended up being involved and being involved sometimes pretty independently, um, had sort of spread. And particularly as we talked about before, as an older woman who they see as being useless for anything but, but being taken care of, it tickled me that my reputation had been able to do this.

WAND: [01:15:05] So you turned the stereotype and the model of the older woman on its head?

WIGGUM: [01:15:11] Well, I like to think I did, but one of the things I also found is that they would dismiss what we did in some ways as, well, that's just Americans. So I'm not sure it turned the model for their women around, but it did give a different vision of what could happen, at least for Americans. And I hope by extension, if it could happen for Americans, it could also happen for Macedonians or Albanians.

WAND: [01:15:41] Right. Right, right. So before we talk about your transition, leaving Macedonia and leaving the Peace Corps, is there anything else that you want to point out about that third year or about just the general service or reflections?

WIGGUM: [01:16:02] One of the other things, I mean, you never know how you're going to impact a community when you go there. People oftentimes think about projects as the big thing, but oftentimes projects don't last. What lasts is that connection with people. You know, I just got today a message from one of the young people that I worked with, that I helped get through some difficult times and get started on a vision for his future.

He's now, I think, just about finishing his master's degree in international affairs. And I'm hoping.

WAND: [01:16:43] In Macedonia?

WIGGUM: [01:16:44] Well, he's in Slovenia. He went to Slovenia to get that. And he had a lot of different challenges for a lot of different reasons. But there were several people that, that I felt like on an individual basis, I could help them sort through. A lot of times it was young people who wanted to go to school in America and they didn't get in school in America. But then to figure out how they could do what they wanted to do without America was important. One woman ended up in America and went to, went to, uh, to NYU for her master's. So there's, there's just a ton of different levels.

WIGGUM: [01:17:33] And when you're in Peace Corps, the important thing is to be out there, to be talking with people, to, to see opportunities when you can and to be open. And, and to me, that's, that was the importance of my three years in Macedonia. I did things. I did some interesting things. But that connection with people I feel like is, is really that second goal is really the important one.

WAND: [01:18:09] Yes. That's a great observation of a way that the second goal of Peace Corps can be achieved on an individual basis, bringing America to the local people.

WIGGUM: [01:18:24] Mm hmm.

WAND: [01:18:25] Yeah. A goal that we haven't really talked about and, generally speaking, we don't talk about a whole lot. We sort of assume it happens, but this is a way to make it happen more intensely, more meaningfully perhaps, as you say. So let's talk now about this upcoming transition away from Macedonia, going back to the United States and your home and your, uh, your phase in life in regards to what you felt your options were. So how about some updates about that or reflections about that?

WIGGUM: [01:19:01] Well, I may have mentioned this earlier, I can't remember. But, but one of the ways I timed Peace Corps was as a transition from work to retirement. And it was great for that. Working in Macedonia, you work at a different pace. It's not that you don't work intensely at times, but that social part is so important and being with people is so important. It's just a different pace. So when I came back, I had applied for Social Security, which was an interesting thing. While I was in Macedonia, and Medicare, when I was in Macedonia, all that was set up when I came back. [coughs] Excuse me.

WIGGUM: [01:19:53] Um, I couldn't go back to my home because since I'd extended a third year, the people who were renting it wanted to stay longer so their son could graduate from high school. So I came back and the first thing I remember is almost how overwhelming everything is. The grocery stores have so much in them. There's so much brightness and sort of overwhelming stimulation in the United States. And when you come back, it takes you a while to get used to that. It's like, oh, this is too much. I have to go outside and sort of breathe and now I can come back in and do my grocery shopping or go to the store or whatever it is, where there's just so much stuff. So that was one of the transitions.

WIGGUM: [01:20:44] The second transition was what to do in the six, seven months before I could go back home. So I drove across the United States stopping and visiting friends along the way, people who had returned earlier than I, since several of my cohort had come back after two years. You know, I went and stayed down in Southern California for several months with a good friend and then drove back across America when I could get back into my home. And got involved in local events and local organizations there. I was on the school board for a while. I was on the cemetery board. It was a small village that I lived in, of 750. The township was 750 people, so it was easy to get involved. I decided we needed a theater troupe, so I got some people and we put on a play. I mean, I did just kind of crazy things when I came back that were great fun.

WIGGUM: [01:21:44] And then my daughter called and she said, I want you closer. She lived at that time in New York? No, I think she was in Jersey City by

then. Um. So I moved down to New Jersey and bought a house down here and I've done some of the same stuff. I got involved in local politics and actually ran for the township council after I'd been here for a year, which was way too soon. But that's another story. But got involved in local politics and local organizations. And I'm editor of the little monthly newspaper. And there's just always things to do and it's always fun. And it's also a good ways to meet people is to work with them. I've always had that, that theory.

WAND: [01:22:30] So can you tell us what you are involved in now in the community?

WIGGUM: [01:22:37] Sure. I am chair of the Agricultural Advisory Committee for the township. I'm chair of that Ad Hoc Committee for Deer Management. I'm editor of the VIP, which is the small monthly newsletter that we put out for the township. I work with United Way and do a bunch of things for United Way. What else am I doing?

WAND: [01:23:07] Well, you're active in the RPCV New Jersey group too, aren't you?

WIGGUM: [01:23:12] Well, I am now, indeed.

WAND: [01:23:16] Yes. We are delighted that you are beginning to do some interviewing for oral history, interviewing yourself. That's wonderful. That's a good way for us to capture more stories from Peace Corps volunteers.

WIGGUM: [01:23:29] Yeah. Yes.

WAND: [01:23:31] So before we close this, is there any other, um, reflection that you want us to do?

WIGGUM: [01:23:38] Well, I think everybody will say that Peace Corps is a life changing experience. You know, I would recommend it for anyone. But particularly, I think the over 50 people I think are underutilized. I know there's still people out there who dreamed of doing it when they were

younger. And to be able to do it when you're older is especially gratifying and exciting and adventurous. To be able to do that in your 50s or 60s or 70s or even 80s is a wonderful chance.

WIGGUM: [01:24:20] The other thing about it is it does keep you young. Our younger volunteers treated us as equals and we treated them as equals. I still have friends that are now in their 30s that were in their 20s when I went over. It's, and you, you just get a good group of friends that are the only ones who truly understand what you went through and what you experienced. And if you love to travel, you also have a built in group who also loves to travel. So it's great fun that way too.

WAND: [01:24:56] Right. Well, thank you again so much for contributing to this project and for sharing your story with us.

WIGGUM: [01:25:04] Oh, you're very welcome. It was fun.

[END OF INTERVIEW]