

**Larry Grobel Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Larry Grobel  
**Interviewer:** Robert Klein  
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**Biographical Note**

Larry Grobel served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana from 1968 to 1971 as a teacher at a journalism institute.

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Oral History Interview

with

Larry Grobel

February 9, 2003  
Los Angeles, California

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:02] Today is February 9, 2003. This is Bob Klein. I am interviewing Larry Grobel, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana from 1968 to 1971 in an education program. I usually ask people to start by sort of going back oh maybe a year before they joined the Peace Corps [inaudible].

GROBEL: [00:00:28] Well, I was always motivated very young by Kennedy. There was, I used to. When I was 14 years old, 13, whatever, I followed Kennedy speeches. I listened to him. I was, I was very taken by them.

KLEIN: [00:00:43] And where were you in 1960?

GROBEL: [00:00:44] In New York, I was actually on, I lived on Long Island, in Jericho, Long Island. And I was politically motivated. I was president of my class and all that. And I edited my newspaper and.

KLEIN: [00:01:01] You went to high school on Long Island?

GROBEL: [00:01:03] On Long Island, yeah, Jericho High School. And actually, when Kennedy died in '63, I was in, I was in Washington when that happened. And I visited the gravesite with my class. And I have a picture still framed of me at the, with the eternal flame and all that. So the idea of the Peace Corps was always very strong with me, and it had a lot to do with the idealism that Kennedy represented and what he brought. However, by the time I was ready to go into the Peace Corps or even consider it, we had a war going on.

KLEIN: [00:01:41] Let's go from high school then.

GROBEL: [00:01:43] From high school I went to college. I went to UCLA.

KLEIN: [00:01:45] And during this time in college, did you do anything related to travel?

GROBEL: [00:01:52] I went to, no, the only. I did travel. I spent one summer in Europe. I spent, I think I had \$300. And I think I went for three months throughout Europe, Spain and France and England. And it was quite an interesting, Italy, experience to me. And I must have seen every cathedral and every museum that you could possibly do at that time.

KLEIN: [00:02:17] Did you do any volunteer work during the year?

GROBEL: [00:02:21] Not really. Not that I can remember. I was very occupied as a writer. I became the editor of UCLA's humor magazine, satirical magazine, called Satyr, S-A-T-Y-R. And, um. And, uh, I didn't have much of a staff, so I did a lot of the, most of the magazine myself. But I, you know, I had an art director and all that stuff and it paid me. I was able to, I mean, I had a budget, so I was able to get a salary. At that time, I think I made \$150 a month and that paid for my \$90 apartment and some of my food and expenses and stuff.

KLEIN: [00:02:59] And what were you studying?

GROBEL: [00:03:00] And I majored. I started as a political science major, and I moved over to English by my sophomore year. I was more interested in literature, and so I majored in English and I started writing a novel actually while I was in at UCLA and finished it before I left. And then the last year, I mean, as the war got intensified in Vietnam, there was much more of a concern about what one does. I was thinking of going to graduate school, and at that time, San Francisco State, I think, had the best writing program, and I was very interested in attending that. But I also knew that unless you were going into medical school, I don't think you're going to get deferred.

KLEIN: [00:03:46] This was '67?

GROBEL: [00:03:48] '67, '68, yeah, '68. The June of '68.

KLEIN: [00:03:51] OK.

GROBEL: [00:03:52] So, um, so I, as I started to realize that, um, there was a situation here that I had to make some decisions about. What I realized also was that I was a conscientious objector. I just objected to the nature of war itself. And I started to do a lot of research. I spoke to rabbis, I spoke to priests, I spoke to, I remember speaking to a Yale graduate who, um, I think he even had his doctorate, who worked as a tree trimmer. And I remember spending a lot of time with this man because he said to me, it was the only job he could see that didn't contribute to the war in some effort. And know this this didn't do it.

KLEIN: [00:04:38] This was during your senior year?

GROBEL: [00:04:41] This was during my senior year most likely. And, um, although maybe it was towards junior senior year because I remember applying to the Peace Corps, but still took about a six, nine month process or something, you know, once you applied.

KLEIN: [00:04:54] Do you remember which board you were registered with?

GROBEL: [00:04:57] Yeah, I was registered with the Great Neck Board in Great Neck, Long Island, and not Westwood, although it probably wouldn't have mattered because from my understanding, the two most difficult draft boards in the United States were Westwood and Great Neck. They didn't let you out for any reasons, and they were, you know, so it was hard.

KLEIN: [00:05:14] And you don't recall when you first [inaudible]?

GROBEL: [00:05:21] Oh, no. Well, that I don't recall. I think I might have. But I don't recall that. You know, I'd have to look that up. I even have, I still have on files here all my papers, because I wrote quite an extensive, uh, number of pages about why I thought I was and all. And, I mean, I, I backed it up with, with the Bible and with the Talmud, and I just went into a lot of areas with it. And, um, but it didn't matter. When I, when I applied for the Peace Corps, the Peace Corps did not qualify at the time as service, as conscientious objector service. So it wouldn't have mattered at the time. But my thinking was, if I could go into the Peace Corps, that could be two years. That would take me from '68 to '70. I don't know where the war would be then, but then I would deal with the conscientious objection at that time, that was my thinking.

GROBEL: [00:06:13] However, what happened was I got in, and I also applied. I wanted to go to Kenya. That was the country I requested because I had met a friend in college who was from Kenya and he told me all these wonderful stories about Kenya and all. And I thought it would be really interesting.

KLEIN: [00:06:30] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [00:06:30] No, he wasn't. He was actually from, he was actually Indian and his name was Paul Sequoia. And I still keep in touch with him. And he became the principal of a high school on Long Island. Very sweet man. And anyway, so but he used to tell me these stories about growing up in Kenya. When I applied and I got back that I got into Ghana.

KLEIN: [00:06:57] Do you recall the application process? Did you have to take an entrance exam and get six references?

GROBEL: [00:07:02] Yes, you had to get. Oh, there were tons of references. I don't think six, but I remember that the FBI did a check on you and the, um, you were very thoroughly investigated during this period of time. And that was one of my concerns was that I had because I was, I wrote a column in the newspaper and the Daily Bruin. And a lot of the things I did were antiwar. And so I always wondered, I mean, I thought I fit in ideally in the Peace Corps, but who knew what they were going to do, take you or not take you.

KLEIN: [00:07:36] So all these [inaudible] went into Peace Corps.

GROBEL: [00:07:37] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:07:40] Do you remember what month it was where they finally responded?

GROBEL: [00:07:42] Well, let's see. I mean, we left at the probably in June of '68, so I probably would have been accepted a couple of months earlier at least. So, you know, to get some idea. So it had probably been sometime after January, February of '68, I would have heard that I'd gotten into Ghana.

KLEIN: [00:07:59] And you've been out of college?

GROBEL: [00:08:00] No, I'm not out of college yet. I hadn't graduated yet. I didn't graduate yet. And I think this is part of the interesting story was that I didn't graduate, I didn't attend my own graduation because, um. Well, first I get into Ghana. Let me explain this. And I think it's South America. I think it's Guyana. I didn't know where Ghana was, you know, and it's so interesting, too, because when I was in college. When I was in the ninth grade in high school, I had a teacher who, this is a geography class. And I remember this, the very first day of the class, everybody had a piece of paper and they said and she said, draw a map of Africa. And I drew a circle and everybody else did pretty much the same, whatever, you know, who knew? And she collected the papers and that was it, there was nothing unique, she went over it or anything like that. But then we had the class.

GROBEL: [00:08:46] At the end of the class, the end of the year, she had us draw a map of Africa and by that time we knew what it looked like. And then she handed back our original drawings, and it was the first, one of the first times in my educational life that I actually got to see what I've learned, you know what I mean? It's like there it was, you know, this is what I thought it was and this is what it is. So, I mean, there was always something about Africa. I had read Henderson the Rain King, by the way, Saul Bellow's novel about Africa, too, and there was something that fascinated me about Africa. But so then I found out that Ghana was in West Africa. And so I said, well, it's not. It's in Africa, it's not Kenya. It's about, what, about four or 5,000 miles away from Kenya. But, you know, it's still on the continent. So I started to do a little bit of research. I took an African literature course, by the way, also with John Povey at UCLA. And I had studied a number of African novelists and stuff. That I took before I got into the Peace Corps. So, I mean, it wasn't because of the Peace Corps. Um, so when I went there. Thank you very much, my wife's coming with tea, how nice. Um.

GROBEL: [00:10:01] So, the training was going to be in country and I remember having to go to Philadelphia, so I had to go, I went back to New York and the day, my graduation from UCLA was a week after the training, the time we were leaving to Ghana. So I thought, well, I won't attend my graduation. I knew I wanted to get out of the country and do this, you know, I didn't want to have to deal with any draft or anything. And I was still classified 2-S.

KLEIN: [00:10:31] During this point, what was your family's reaction?

GROBEL: [00:10:34] My family did not want me to go. Interesting. My father, they were afraid, you know, they just didn't understand Africa. I mean, here I am, I'm graduating college, and now I'm going off to Africa for two years. What am I doing, you know? And I kept saying, you know, you don't understand, Pop. You know, it could be Africa or Vietnam. And there's no way I'm going. My father, who was in the Army and was not a hawk by any means, but he believed you served your country. And I believed it too, but we just believed different ways to serve your country. And, you know, and I kept. He didn't quite see that the Vietnam War was wrong at that time. He did see it the next year. I mean, after we mined the Haiphong Harbor

and all that other stuff came out and he started realizing I had made the right decision and, you know, getting ahead of myself, I remember him encouraging me to stay there. But at that time, there was, they were not pleased about it. They were nervous about it.

KLEIN: [00:11:28] Amongst your friends at UCLA?

GROBEL: [00:11:31] No one I knew, no one I knew applied for the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:11:35] So they were willing to take the responsibility.

GROBEL: [00:11:37] Certain ones were. One of my assistant editor at Satyr magazine, as a matter of fact, his name was Mike Curley. And I remember he actually enlisted to go. And I said, Mike, how could you do this? You know, I mean, and he said. He wanted, we both had the same desire to be great, good writers. You know, that was what we wanted to be. And yet he said, look, Hemingway went. You look at all the great writers that went, they all had the experience of war. You know, this is important to experience it. I said, you know, I think I could be a writer without it. I don't remember Fitzgerald went to war, but, you know, I remember his war novel. But the thing about, um.

GROBEL: [00:12:14] And the story about Mike is, he was a year older than I was. So he went to Vietnam and he sent me back a letter telling me that he was on guard in a, wherever he was guarding in some area in Vietnam. And his training was such that they said if anybody approached within 100 yards or 50 yards of the camp and he's on guard, you have to, you say stop. If they don't stop, you shoot them. This was in the instructions. And he told me that, you know, he said there was a six year old boy who was walking towards this thing and he yells out in Vietnamese or whatever to stop. And of course the boy doesn't stop, he just keeps coming. So what is Mike going to do? He's going to shoot a six year old boy? Of course not. The boy tripped and blew himself up. He had been, you know.

KLEIN: [00:12:58] Wired.



GROBEL: [00:12:58] Wired with, you know. Now, those are stories that, are they apocryphal or not? I don't know. He wrote that this happened and it happened to him. And that was what made me all the more determined not to ever put myself in a situation where I would be faced with having to shoot a six year old boy or perhaps get myself blown up as well. It just made no sense to me.

KLEIN: [00:13:15] So you report to Philadelphia.

GROBEL: [00:13:17] I go to Philadelphia.

KLEIN: [00:13:18] How many were in your group?

GROBEL: [00:13:20] 35 people. We had a group of 35.

KLEIN: [00:13:23] And how would you describe them?

GROBEL: [00:13:24] They were very, they were an interesting group of people. There was probably half and half men and women. And I remember one was a philosophy major. Most of them were young. No, I don't think, I don't think anybody was over 25, 28 at that time.

KLEIN: [00:13:40] And at this time you were like, what, 21?

GROBEL: [00:13:41] I was probably 21 or so, yeah. And the.

KLEIN: [00:13:48] Had you been told what the project was?

GROBEL: [00:13:51] No. No, no. We weren't told anything. It was just that we were going there and whatever you qualified for. I mean, what did I qualify for? I was an English major and I wrote. So I figured it was maybe something along the lines of teaching, is what I assumed. But I wasn't told that. I mean, I didn't assume that I was going to be put into agricultural engineering or anything because I didn't have any qualifications. But I would have done anything. I would have been digging ditches if they wanted to do it.

KLEIN: [00:14:15] And others in the group?

GROBEL: [00:14:15] I think the same thing. I think it was just, I mean, we seem to have been a selected group that were mostly going to go out and teach. So I guess, you know, we were mostly in that liberal arts college graduate kind of thing. But what they did is they, we had three days training, or pre training I guess, in Philadelphia. And at that time you had to go through your medical and your dental. And I had received a notice from my draft board that said that they wanted me to come to a draft meeting at midnight on the day, the second of the three days that I was supposed to be in Philadelphia. So already I had a conflict. So I remember telling my, whoever was the director at the time of this program to go to Ghana in the Peace Corps, I told them that.

GROBEL: [00:15:04] And they said, well, go through your first day here and then take a train back and go to your draft board meeting and then we'll meet you at the airport when we fly off the day after. And I said, OK. So I went, and this was the horror story to me. I mean, the worst part of the entire Peace Corps experience happened on that next day when we had to go to the dentist. And the dental, they took us in and in an hour, I mean that's all they gave me is an hour. In an hour, they told me that they had to fill. Well, they told me I had 28 fillings I needed, 28. And this is after I had been, I had a clean bill of health at my own dentist. And I said, what are you talking about? I don't have any cavities. And they said, well, you have soft spots and we want to drill all these soft spots just because we don't know where you're going to be in Africa. And you may, you know, when they turn into cavities, for preventive medicine.

GROBEL: [00:15:54] And of course, these guys were getting paid by the number of fillings they filled and every one of our volunteers. This to me was like the punishment for trying to beat the draft. They were going to kill your teeth. And literally they did this. But with me because I only had one hour, they numbed my whole side, one side of the mouth. They filled 14 teeth in one hour. You can imagine what butchers these people were. I mean, this is the one thing I really resented. And then, this was probably like by 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, I then had to take a train up to New York from Philadelphia. I was completely numb. And that, my teeth, my mouth did

not wear off very quickly. And so and then I got back to my parents' house in Jericho. I put on a suit and a tie and I went to this draft board meeting at midnight and I drove there. And I talked on one side of my mouth like this. And I was basically, you know, I was numb as hell. I'm feeling terrible. And I'm going to this thing that I'm scared to death about.

GROBEL: [00:16:50] And I remember sitting in the waiting room there while these other young men are also going in one by one. And the draft board consisted of five men. There were three lawyers and three or four of them were Jewish. I happened to be Jewish. And they would, it was like an inquisition, you know, and they would say to me, we see you, we see that you're a conscientious objector. I said, that's correct. I said, I did apply for that, but I would like that to be put aside while I'm serving in the Peace Corps. They said, well, we see you're going to go into the Peace Corps. You want to go into the Peace Corps, but you can't leave the country if you're 1-A. And I said, yeah, I understand that. I said, however, I haven't graduated from UCLA. That happens next week. I'm still 2-S. And I wasn't trying to be sarcastic at all. I was just saying, you know, be very, very levelheaded as I could be. And then they said, well, you're Jewish. I said, that's right. They said, well, Jews can't be a conscientious objector. I said, why is that? And they said, well, because, you know, but they didn't give me reasons. And I happened to have had all this information that I knew.

GROBEL: [00:17:44] So I said, well, if you look at so-and-so or this part of the Bible and this part of the Bible, and this was said in the Talmud and turn the other cheek and don't do this and don't kill animals and don't. You know, I mean, I said it doesn't sound like to me like that that we can't do it. Anyway, they, uh, I left that meeting at around 1:30 in the morning, came home, and did what I was told to do was, not by them, but some advisers say to write down everything that happened at that meeting just in case. So and I did. And I spent another hour at home writing everything down. So around 2:30, 3:00 in the morning, I went to bed. At 6:00 in the morning, 3 hours later, we had a special delivery come to my house in Jericho and I was reclassified 1-A from the draft board, which meant I really couldn't leave the country. Well, my mother said to me, what are you going to do, you know? And I said, what, I mean, how much more paranoid do you

have to be now? You know, I mean, do you think that the government is out to get you? They are showing you that they're going to get you.

GROBEL: [00:18:37] So I just said no. I talked to my mother. Look, I'll deal with this when I get to Ghana. Let me just get to the airport. And I think I had to be at the airport around 8:00 in the morning. So we got to the, they got to Kennedy Airport, I think.

KLEIN: [00:18:49] You were flying out of Kennedy?

GROBEL: [00:18:52] I think it was out of Kennedy, yeah. And so we get there and I remember the director at the time, again, I don't remember his name, but he came up to me and said, how did your draft board meeting go? And I said, I'll tell you about it when we're in Ghana. He said fine. So I get on the plane. And now we're sitting on the plane and I'm sitting next to this guy. His name was Lee, and he became a friend later, but Lee was kind of a long haired, hippie like type character. We get in this thing and we don't move. We don't, the plane doesn't move. And then we were half hour late and then they make an announcement saying we're having some delay, but please remain in your seats. So they didn't let us off the plane. And I thought I knew for sure what the delay was. It was because the FBI was coming to take me off the plane and put me in a uniform and send me to Vietnam.

KLEIN: [00:19:38] Do you recall that there were others in the group as?

GROBEL: [00:19:42] As paranoid as I was?

KLEIN: [00:19:43] Well, who were, uh, choosing Peace Corps as an alternative to the draft?

GROBEL: [00:19:51] I didn't know because I didn't know anybody really. Remember, because I, even in the quick training, even in the dentist thing, I didn't get to know many people because I was leaving the next, you know, early. So I really didn't know anyone. And so I didn't trust anyone. And I thought everyone there was possible CIA, FBI, whatever. And everyone on the plane. I didn't trust a single person and I just kept to myself. I didn't want to

talk to anybody. And so this guy kept saying to me, wow, you know. I'm sitting there speechless. And this is really something, I wonder why we're delayed. I just would look at him and nod. I did not say a word to him. So later he tells the story because I was probably the weirdest guy he had ever met. He says, like, even once we. You know, I couldn't believe that we actually took off, you know, that I wasn't, that they didn't get me. And so we finally, three hour delay in the plane and then we fly 13 hours or so, I think it was, to get to Ghana.

GROBEL: [00:20:40] And we fly and we're flying there, and again, I didn't say a word. It was like amazing. Just let me get to Ghana, let me get to another country. And this guy was talking to me and I didn't talk back. And so finally we get there. The first thing we do when we hit Ghanaian soil, the very first reaction was, of course, I had a wool suit on that I had worn in, uh, in the Peace Corps, for the draft board meeting. And but the minute that door opened from the, when we landed, the heat just hit you immediately. It's amazing because it's only five degrees from the equator. And so that was quite a, quite an experience. And I just remember just wanting to tear off this, you know, I took off that suit and I put it in the closet. I don't think for three years I ever looked at that suit again.

KLEIN: [00:21:28] Do you recall what happened the day you arrived?

GROBEL: [00:21:30] Well, the very first day, I mean, the first thing we did was we get off the plane and.

KLEIN: [00:21:35] [coughs]

GROBEL: [00:21:35] Your cough is going to get into all these tapes and they're going to wonder why he's coughing. But when we arrived, I do remember the very first thing I said to the director who was there. I said, by the way, I had been reclassified 1-A and I just want to let you know that. And he said, well, you know, had you said that in New York, we couldn't have let you come. I said I suspected as much. That's why I didn't say anything. I was being very upfront. I didn't want to hide anything. I wanted to see where do I stand, I don't know. And the Peace Corps said, well, look, we'll do everything we can to keep you here. I said, good. That's what I want.

GROBEL: [00:22:09] And so we were taken, I don't even think we spent the first day in Accra. I think we were taken right to Winneba, Winneba Teachers Training College, which was the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute when Nkrumah was there. And it was a pretty interesting because they still had the signature book where people came and signed in. But, you know, anybody who signed that thing under Nkrumah was put in jail later on. And I found because one of the people I taught with, was one of the people who signed that thing, told me. And the silverware still had Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute on it. And we ate, I think I stole the fork and I don't have it anymore, but I always thought I'd keep that as memories.

GROBEL: [00:22:52] But we were put into a group and there was a psychologist there and, you know, and I remember we were told that we were being psychoanalyzed in this, during this training. I think we were considered the first training group in Ghana, outside of the United States, the first group that was being trained. And so they were going to watch us, basically. And so we were kind of like lab rats. And we had, uh, we were given dormitory rooms and we had roommates. So I remember having a roommate and there were things, I mean, and basically it was language training. I think it was about six weeks before they put us in the field and given us a place to live for two weeks in Mampong and some good training stories in the second about that, what happened. But when we, I was never very good in languages, you know, and so I'm learning Twi now, T-W-I and we don't know where we're going to be placed or anything and they don't know either.

GROBEL: [00:23:45] They're getting to see what your abilities are and then they'll decide on where they want to place you and etc. So I had written a novel before leaving and I had taken the novel with me as I thought I'd work on it or something. It was the first draft of it. And I mentioned it to this psychiatrist or psychologist who was there and he said, can I read your novel? And it was sexy and that stuff. I said, yeah, you know, somebody wants to read it. So I did, I let him read it, you know, and it was interesting because he did, he made some interesting comments later on. But I think that may have had something to do with the fact of where I was ending up being chosen to go.

GROBEL: [00:24:19] And we, I remember that we used to eat together at a table and there would always be this giant bowl of rice in the middle. And everybody was always hungry, you know, because we didn't have much food. And always in the beginning, I guess you're not sure what you're going to eat. You don't know what the nature of the food and we used to eat like, or so we were called later, like animals, you know. I mean, everybody was grabbing. And they were watching us, and they told us this later, you know, who passed the food first and who grabbed the food first, who did all sorts of things like this, you know. They were judging you, you know, and I don't know if anybody passed. I just grabbed it, you know, no, I don't want to miss out on my rice or whatever. It was mostly, you know, a lot of rice.

KLEIN: [00:24:59] Do you remember going to the beach?

GROBEL: [00:25:01] Not. Well, I remember a lot of things about Winneba because I went to the, there was a Winneba deer hunting festival. I even wrote about that as an article in the Newsday later on.

KLEIN: [00:25:13] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [00:25:14] So not, no. The deer hunting festival, I think happened a little. Well, actually, I think it did happen while we were in training because I went back to it a couple of times actually, each year I think, it was such an event, but um. That was the first story I ever heard. There was a bar in Winneba and I remember afterwards we would go sometimes and sit in the bar. And that's where the man came in, a Nigerian trader, and he was selling a Rolex watch for about 20 bucks. And my friend Mark, he was looking at it. No, he kept saying no. I'll buy it, \$20 for Rolex? But I bartered it, of course. I think I said, I'll give you \$14 and a beer. I had put the watch on it, I had actually, you know, listened to it tick. And I bought it. And I remember about an hour later it stopped.

GROBEL: [00:26:17] And what I never did with the watch was open it up. It was very fascinating what they did. It was the inside workings. They put an aluminum band around. So the actual workings, if it's a Rolex, I guess it's

supposed to be a jeweled watch, 17 jewels or whatever. This was a zero jewel watch. And the workings of this was like maybe a little Mickey Mouse watch or something that made it work. And they fit that mechanism into a bigger Rolex and put a silver band, you know. So it was like, I thought about it. I was going to smash the watch. I was actually kind of angry that I was so taken. But then I also thought, it's a symbol. I should keep it. And I did. I still have that Rolex somewhere in some box, somewhere, you know.

GROBEL: [00:27:00] But we were told stories. Like, um, the first time I heard about *sasabonsam*, which was the devil, I guess. And there were people in the village who said that sometimes you can't, you couldn't go out at a certain time at night. It was on a Saturday night, it's almost like the idea of the Sabbath, I guess, it began. So people, if you went out on a Friday night, let's say after 10:00 at night, and this figure, the *sasabonsam* figure, would come out and if he saw you, you would freeze, you know, like the story of Lot, you know, whatever, Lot's wife. And I actually talked to a doctor who, you know, an educated man who told me the story. He says, yeah, well, he was on a call and he said it was that time. And this character walked by him and he went to turn his car on. And the car just stopped. And he stopped stayed frozen to the, inside the car until the next morning when the sun came up.

GROBEL: [00:28:02] Now, do you believe these things or you don't believe these things, you know? But what I did find in Ghana was there were a lot of ghost stories there and educated people, people I really respected and people I got to know, they all had ghost stories. The boy who became my houseboy told me about, you know, when he was a boy, they'd put certain charms on him and cut his face in a certain way because when they would go to war, if anybody shot bullets at you, these bullets would go around you. They wouldn't go through you. And he claimed that they tested it on a lot of these boys. Of course, I didn't quite believe that, but I know that they believed that, you know, and I always felt a great deal of my learning experience in Ghana was to accept other people's beliefs and not, you know, just try to tell, try to be correct all the time. And that's a, uh, it was a pretty big experience in understanding.



KLEIN: [00:28:51] While you were still at Winneba, you said it was about six weeks.

GROBEL: [00:28:56] Right.

KLEIN: [00:28:56] There was language training. There must have been area studies as well.

GROBEL: [00:29:00] A little bit, it was more.

KLEIN: [00:29:03] How did they teach you about Ghana?

GROBEL: [00:29:03] Well, we learned about Ghana, yes. But, you know, also, there was also a lot of dope smoking. You know, I don't know if anybody wants to talk about this or not, but I mean, this guy Lee was the one, the guy I was sitting next to. And he went into the village and somehow he found the marijuana. And marijuana was very strong in Ghana. And he came back. You know, none of us, I don't think, would have dared to have gotten it, tried it, or any of that, because, you know, who wants to get kicked out of this place, you know? But Lee just went right for it. And he came back. And I remember, you know, he got almost everybody stoned and it's just like, whoa, all of a sudden. And that, you know, that was very mind blowing because it was like, oh, suddenly we're having a different kind of experience, you know? It's like, well, you know, we're walking around Ghana with our eyes open. We're in foreign country and learning, you know, and experiencing things in a very psychedelic way. And so that existed, you know.

KLEIN: [00:30:01] At this point, you were pretty comfortable that you were in, that you had sort of made it?

GROBEL: [00:30:05] Well, we didn't know that because, you know, we did know that psychologist was there and he could tell us, you know, you don't fit, you know, I mean, anything could happen. And I.

KLEIN: [00:30:13] Did any people disappear?

GROBEL: [00:30:14] No, one person dropped out. He didn't like it. And I remember, as a matter of fact, he might have been my roommate. I'm not sure. But I think there was one that, you know, cracked up.

KLEIN: [00:30:27] But that was known, it was a middle of the night disappearance.

GROBEL: [00:30:28] Yes. No, no. I think he just, you know, he just was unhappy. It was a very tough thing to get used to. Number one, I felt like I was a giant candy bar that had come to this country, because I got bitten up. The mosquitoes there were very ferocious. And I've been, I've been around enough countries now to know the difference in mosquitoes. And I'd say Ghana has the fastest mosquitoes I've ever seen. They're small, they're fast. And I guess they carry malaria, too, and it was very hard to get them. But I think the first three days I was there, my body was covered, just covered in bites, top to bottom. And I thought, this is, this is agony, you know? I mean, I just, I mean, this alone, it has nothing to do with the country. But I also understood, that that's exactly what I thought I was. My body was full of American sugars and American foods and I smelled differently. And that was what was attracting the mosquitoes to us.

GROBEL: [00:31:20] Whereas, you know, Ghanaians I'd meet, they would laugh at me. I said, well, how do you live here? I would say, you know. And they weren't getting bitten up. So I thought, all right, it has to do with this food. And it's true. I mean, after a few months, when you've eaten their food and drank their water, even if it's, you know, hopefully you're boiling your water. [tape break] Turned over by itself?

KLEIN: [00:31:42] But you were on malarial?

GROBEL: [00:31:45] Anti-malarial, yes. And we had to have the gamma globulin shots, you know, all that stuff which was pretty annoying. I mean, it was what, it was up to your weight. So if you weighed 100 pounds, it was 5 cc's, 150 pounds, seven and a half cc's or whatever. And that was a long, a long shot. A lot of liquid went into you, you know.

KLEIN: [00:32:04] Do you recall if there were volunteers who had served in Ghana before you at training?

GROBEL: [00:32:09] Yes. Yes, there were. I remember Charlotte MacPherson was one of our trainers, you know, and she had been there the year before. So she was one, she had been there one year, so she had one more year to go. So we had a few of those and, you know, we got to know them. And they also were judging us. I mean, everybody was judging you, but you didn't know what that meant. But you just knew that you were being looked at and watched and analyzed.

KLEIN: [00:32:31] Was there during the six weeks, was there any kind of screening or indication of where you were going to be assigned?

GROBEL: [00:32:39] No, that we had no idea.

KLEIN: [00:32:41] It was still up in the air?

GROBEL: [00:32:42] Right. And I mean, there was one guy, I remember he was a philosophy major. I remember exactly what he looks like, I don't remember his name right now. But he got sick. He got very sick. And he ended up in the hospital. He got sick from eating lettuce or something, you know, a salad. So that was another quick lesson to learn about. You have to be very careful about the fruits and vegetables and the water. And we had, I mean, I remember two or three of us went to visit him in the hospital and he had to be fed intravenously. And he started telling us this horror story that the needle they used was very dull. So, first of all, you know, you'd like a sharp needle when you're being fed. And they kept jabbing him to get it into his vein and they couldn't get it in. And that was, he was just like, well, when we went to see him, he looked like death warmed over. It was scary.

GROBEL: [00:33:30] But, you know, but he stayed, you know, and he got out of there. But I think that had a real visual effect on us. We saw where you could end up if you ate a piece of lettuce that wasn't clean. And so, you know, I was very, very careful about taking my malaria pills, eating, uh, boiling my water. I think we were given little pills, little red pills, to put in the water. I remember it used to color the water red. So I did that and boiled it as well. So, uh, we had all of that kind of thing. But what, we were

divided up into, I think it was six. There was Mampong and Larteh and there was five or six villages up the road from Ghana, north of Ghana. And that's where we were put to do training, you know, to, and we were to teach in secondary and middle school.

KLEIN: [00:34:18] At the end of the six weeks?

GROBEL: [00:34:19] Yeah, we went to these to these things.

KLEIN: [00:34:24] How many were in each?

GROBEL: [00:34:25] There were 35 of us total. So we would be about six in each, six or seven in each one.

KLEIN: [00:34:33] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [00:34:33] No, you know, actually in Mampong, I don't even remember who else was there besides myself. I don't remember ever meeting with anybody while I was there, so I think I might have been alone in that place. So maybe they divided us up into more areas, you know.

KLEIN: [00:34:47] Did language instructors go out to the villages with you?

GROBEL: [00:34:48] Not with us, but they would come and visit. We were pretty much on our own. And this is, it was pretty, pretty interesting because I was put into a family with ten children and a mama and a papa. But these were, neither mama and papa were the parents of any of these children. They may be grandparents, more that age anyway, but it seemed like, you know, and Ghana was a kind of country where people had children and they would give them all to somebody to take care of, you know. And so these kids were anywhere from ages, let's say, 6 to 17 or 18. And I was at that time about 21. And I was a big hit, of course, in the family, cause here I am. I'm coming in with long hair, not that long, but hair that you could comb different. And a lot of learning experiences.

GROBEL: [00:35:37] I was given a little room with a cot and the room was not much bigger than the cot. The kids loved having me around. And I was actually

like a play toy for them, you know? I would come out, we'd sit in this one room and I'd try to read to them and they would love to touch the hair in my legs or the hair on my arms. Or they would, one of the girls would get a comb and just keep combing my hair, you know, and so, like, I was like surrounded, being touched and felt and poked and would try to. And one girl, she, her name. She said her name was Laughing Jacka. Like, laughing jackass, like Laughing Jacka. And she, because she always laughed about things. But she was about 13. And she wanted, she'd say, I'd like to learn. I'd like you to help me learn English because I want to be a lady, you know. So I would work with her.

GROBEL: [00:36:21] And papa, he liked to drink and he was, you know, kind of a skinny, wiry man. And, you know, I would bring things for the kids. And he always took them, you know, and then would be like, he could get to give them. I think he, you know, if I brought them candy, I think he ate them. I think he, you know, whatever it was, I always, I never trusted Papa too much, but, um.

KLEIN: [00:36:42] Did you eat with them?

GROBEL: [00:36:43] Yes, I ate with them. I did everything. You know, this was my family now. And sometimes I'd eat by myself and sometimes I eat with them. Going to the bathroom was an experience because it was an outhouse. It was outside. And sometimes you'd get up in the morning and you'd go to say hello to somebody on the way down and nobody would talk to you. And I didn't get it at first, you know, I said what did I do wrong, you know? But I realized as I started to figure it out, people left you alone to do your duty, so to speak, you know, to go to the, you know. They saw you holding the toilet paper in your hand. They knew you were going to the toilet. They weren't going to stop to talk to you. Just go do that first.

GROBEL: [00:37:17] To bathe there was a little tin shack. And I remember you went with a light, either a kerosene lamp or a candle. They gave me a bucket of cold water and a coffee bucket of hot water, you know, a little coffee tin. And with that little two little buckets, I had to wash my hair and bathe, you know? And I would do this in the light of the candle or the kerosene lamp. And I'd hear, hehehe, like this, and I would look at all these little eyes

because this tin place had so many places you can look in. So again, I was on display. They were watching me bathe and it was so hard to bathe, you know, because I had to figure out how to do it, you know, and keep some water. So that was tricky. But, you know, you learn to do it.

GROBEL: [00:38:00] But the most, one of the most interesting things to me about that experience, I mean, I was teaching and all that and that was pretty interesting. And I remember one time going, I was late, it was raining, and I had an umbrella in my hand or whatever. And I was trying to get to the class. And these couple of men were drinking palm wine, and they said, you know, they said something to me, hello or whatever. And I had my books and the umbrella in my right hand. And so I just said hello, you know, *wo ho te sen* or whatever I said, you know, and I waved my left hand and as I passed them, I heard this, *obroni bra!* Which is, white man, come. I said, oh, I insulted them, because I used my left hand and I. Can I test this thing?

GROBEL: [00:38:50] OK, so they called me *obroni bra* and I went over there and they said, oh, you know, you can't do what you did. You insulted us. And I said, I'm terribly sorry. Please, I said, I'm late for class. They wouldn't take a, they wouldn't take an apology. I had to sit with them and drink palm wine. So now, I mean, palm wine is pretty strong and it gets fermented over the, as the day goes on, it gets stronger, you know, but this is still early in the morning. So here I am with a, drinking from a half gourd, you know, and you've got to throw a couple of drops onto the ground and you're drinking this stuff up, you know. And now I'm, you know, half bombed and I'm going off to teach this class and I remember that.

GROBEL: [00:39:27] But what I was saying about one of the most interesting experiences while I was there was when Papa came to me. It was when I was about to leave about, maybe about two weeks before I, I think we were there two weeks. So maybe it was after the first week. He said, uh, I'd like you to have a child with one of the girls who was 16. What? You know, what? You know. And he says, I think this would be very good. He said it would bind you to the family and it would keep you, you know, you would have, you would have something here. You know, we'd have to remember you. But it was absurd. You know, it was almost like a cliché of

what you might think might be happening. So I said to him, and I remember, you know, it's like, what are you going to say to somebody? I said, Papa, I said, um, you consider me a part of this family, is that correct? He says, that's right. You are my son. I said, well, I said, in America we have a word for this, because if you're sleeping with your sister, then it's called incest.

GROBEL: [00:40:26] And he said, oh, don't be ridiculous, it's one fuck! One fuck, that's all it is, you know. And I said, I said, yeah. And I'm thinking one fuck and I'll be fucked, man. You know, can you imagine having a child, you know, when you just arrived. So I had to decline it politely. I said, oh, you know, as much as I thought that's a great idea, though. I knew what was going on, what he wanted. He wanted me to be able to leave a child back there that I would send money to for the rest of my life so he would have something to drink for the rest of his life, and the kid would probably starve to death.

KLEIN: [00:40:55] In the two weeks do you recalled the experience of going into the middle school class?

GROBEL: [00:41:01] Well, yes, because it was, you know, again, it was like a one-room schoolhouse type situation. You know, the kids had desks and the chalkboard and all that stuff. And I do remember trying to teach them. You know, it was always a little absurd to me to try to, you know, teaching them poetry. Sometimes they had English books and things that they had gotten from England and all, and you know, or Shakespeare things, you know. But just I mean, a lot of the stuff they had had to do with snow and, you know, if hair be white, why then her hair is done, you know, but you know, I mean. The black-white images were negative and they were wrong. It was, you know, the wrong kind of thing to teach. You know, I remember trying to teach them what snow was, you know, or what ice is or what, you know. You're in a country that has no clue. There's no refrigeration there, you know, so it's like, you know, or they may have some refrigeration, I guess, but they would have cold beer once in a while. But that would be just that, that one bar there.

GROBEL: [00:41:59] So I do remember, you know, working with the kids and these were young kids. These were kids who were in the second and third grade, let's say. So it was kind of cute and it was kind of interesting. And, you know, you'd gather the kids around you and all that stuff. But I wasn't really learning how to teach, so to speak. I was learning what it was like to stand up in front of a classroom, you know.

KLEIN: [00:42:20] Did you have any sense of, you know, panic?

GROBEL: [00:42:24] Not yet. Not yet. I mean, you know, but they were still young enough and I think I could blow my way through that. But then I got visited by, I think, the psychiatrist or psychologist, and the director came up to Mampong and wanted to talk to me. And they had decided that they, I remember they said, we think we know where we'd like to place you, but it's going to take a great deal of tact to be there. And do you think you have tact? That was my question. I said, what is tact? I said, I think I hope I would have tact.

GROBEL: [00:42:56] Well, we're thinking of placing you at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. It's on a college level. So the kids, you don't go there unless you're out of secondary school. And oftentimes people who are sent to that school are from all over Africa and India. And so people from South Africa, from India, from Kenya, they all come to this school to be trained. And it's a two year training and usually they are working press already. So they would be, let's say, an assistant editor of a newspaper that was going to be promoted to the editor. They'd come to the Institute of Journalism for two years, and then they'd become the editor of the newspaper. And if they'd be on radio, they'd be getting the same situation. They're getting a raise in their own career. But they had to go through this institute.

KLEIN: [00:43:41] It was a free standing institute, not associated with a university?

GROBEL: [00:43:42] Yes. No, it wasn't. Today I think it is associated with the University of Legon. But at that time, it was not. It was separate. It was a separate place. And I thought it sounded pretty interesting to me. And they said to me, if I said anything that because I'm dealing with journalists, basically, who are professional journalists at the time, they may write



down something I said in the newspaper. And if it creates a controversy, there's nothing the Peace Corps could do to keep me there. You know, if I said, if I did something wrong, all they could do is get me out of the country, you know, basically. And that was what they mean by being tactful, without telling me what to say. They would, you know, and don't forget that our country's at war right now. And this is, you know, who knows what I'm going to be talking about. So I said, OK. So I remember that was a pretty interesting assignment.

KLEIN: [00:44:33] What was the political situation in Ghana at that time?

GROBEL: [00:44:36] Ghana at that time had just become a democracy, just been elected. Dr. Acosia Busia became the, uh, they went from. Ghana was the first country, I think, that went from a coup, because there was a coup d'etat over Nkrumah. And then the army was in there, and the army relinquished power to Busia, and then they took it over again from Jerry Rawlings after I left and they went back to that. But that little period of time that I was there for three years, there was a democratic country, and even to a point where Dr. Busia came to speak, one of the speeches he gave at the Institute of Journalism, and I was asked to introduce him. So that was one of those strange situations where here I am as a young kid, basically 21 years old, being given this assignment to be at the school. And all of a sudden, would you mind introducing the president of the country? You know, that was.

KLEIN: [00:45:25] Did you have a sense that it was a politically sensitive environment?

GROBEL: [00:45:29] Yes. Yes, I did sense that. And I also challenged it a great deal in a way, because, I mean, the first thing they did when I went to the institute, they said to me they would like me to teach the journalism that because I had some background in college, but they wanted me to teach English in journalism. And I said, and there was a guy named Kobina Assim, I think his name was, and he had applied. I met this guy and he had applied. He was a Canadian who had been to and graduated from the Columbia School of Journalism. He was totally qualified to teach there, and he was applying for a job to teach there. They turned him down, so I

would be the teacher. Now I didn't have a degree in journalism, I had a degree in English, and I said, I'm not as qualified as this guy is. He said, yeah, but you're American. I think it was, yeah, you were free, you know, and it was like, you know, they didn't have to pay me.

KLEIN: [00:46:18] Who was paying?

GROBEL: [00:46:19] Nobody. The Peace Corps. I didn't get any money out of anybody else. And the Peace Corps, I think I was getting \$70 a month, I think is what it came to. And it was the same amount of money that everybody got. And I remember going to the Peace Corps office every six months saying I wanted, I thought I should get more money, me and Mark, who was also, because we were in Accra. I said, you know, we can't afford, we can't go out. You know, there's not enough, we're not getting enough money to even take advantage of being where we are. And they agreed with that. So I think they may have given me 20 more bucks a month, you know, so I could at least go to a movie or go to a, you know, go out to eat or something.

KLEIN: [00:46:57] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [00:46:58] Right.

KLEIN: [00:46:59] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [00:46:59] Right.

KLEIN: [00:47:00] Did you reconvene at the end of that?

GROBEL: [00:47:01] Yes. We came back to Winneba afterwards and I think we spent a couple of months, maybe a month there, maybe one more last month. So it wasn't like we went to an assignment right away. It was like we came back. Had more language training. And by now everybody was exchanging ideas and, you know, and all that stuff. And so now was getting a little exciting because we all were getting a sense of direction. I was going to stay in Accra, I mean.

KLEIN: [00:47:23] When you went back you knew?

GROBEL: [00:47:24] Yeah. By the time I went back, I knew that my assignment was the city and there was only one other volunteer, Mark Brown, who lives out here now. I see him a lot and he's one of my best friends. But he also was put into a school in Accra.

KLEIN: [00:47:38] And what was happening with the rest of the group?

GROBEL: [00:47:39] Everybody was getting ready to go off in the other direction. On-Offin or Kumasi or, you know, to teach. Most of them were all going to teach in different middle schools or secondary schools. Yes. Mark was at a secondary school. He was teaching like 10th grade math. I had the only unusual assignment that I remember. I mean, everything else was teaching, you know, in secondary schools.

KLEIN: [00:48:01] Were most of the people math science teachers?

GROBEL: [00:48:04] Yes, math and science. Yeah. And history a little bit. I mean, one was in history, I remember that. Yeah. And I guess some were English, but not too many now that I think about it.

KLEIN: [00:48:14] Do you remember how things played out as [inaudible] final selection?

GROBEL: [00:48:23] I think we were already selected. I never thought of it being final selection in my mind. I thought that once they said this group was going to Ghana to train, I think we were, we were selected. We may be deselected, that is, if we did something wrong. But I don't think anybody had, you know, I didn't think we were still trying out for it. I thought we, once they spent the money to send us there, we were there, you know.

KLEIN: [00:48:46] In spite of the profiling and the psychologist?

GROBEL: [00:48:50] Right. Right.

KLEIN: [00:48:52] Essentially you felt you were in.

GROBEL: [00:48:54] Yes. We were in. And essentially we were, I don't think, uh. As I said, I think one person left the group and on his own accord and wanted out. And one person got sick but stayed in. And everybody else. You know, there's a little bit of romance. I remember this one guy and this one girl got together, you know, but that was the only one that I recall. The romances I think that I knew about were mostly, you know, people you met while you were there, you know, and we can talk about that. I don't know how much time we're going to have today to do all that. But, um, the, my experience in. When I was told about the Ghanaian, the teaching the journalism, I remember going to see the director and I said, look, I don't think I want to do that.

GROBEL: [00:49:40] I said, I'll be happy to teach English. I'd be happy to teach current events, and I'll be happy to teach literature because I think I'm qualified, at least I know enough to be able to do that. I don't feel qualified to teach the journalism in a school of journalism. I say, that's too much, you know, and they kept saying, oh, no, no, it's okay. It's okay. You could do it. And I went to the Peace Corps as well, and I insisted. I said, look, it's not right. You're taking a job out of this man's hands that it should not get there. It goes against every principle I believe in, etc. And I think it's cheating the students right off the bat. And also, I'm not qualified to do it. I wouldn't know how to teach them. So, I mean, I wrote, yes, I did journalism, but I had no idea how to teach it, you know. So anyway, they finally came around and hired this guy to do the journalism class.

KLEIN: [00:50:26] Oh good.

GROBEL: [00:50:26] Which was good. I mean, even though, I don't know, he was a bit of an egotistic person, but I just felt it was better that Ghanaians should teach Ghanaians, you know, in such a sensitive subject. So then my experience, my first day of class. I go into this class, I prepared for a lecture on a Shakespeare play. It could have been Julius Caesar. It could have been Hamlet or Macbeth, because I taught all three of them. And Othello, I taught that one, so it was one of those four I did. And the literature. That was the literature. The English was just general, whatever I'm going to try to do in English. And the current events was what was

going on in current events. And I had three classes in a row, so I had 3 hours with these students.

KLEIN: [00:51:09] All the same group?

GROBEL: [00:51:10] All the same group, it was one group that was in there. So I remember walking in and I was very nervous, very nervous. And, you know, my first day of class, you know, and they all stood up, every one of them, you know. And every, I think only two students were younger than I was and everybody else was. I had a village chief in there. I had a chief police, chief of police was in there. He had ten children. One man had about six wives already. So I mean, these were pretty, these were adults, you know?

KLEIN: [00:51:42] Was it all men?

GROBEL: [00:51:42] No, it was, uh, there were quite a few women as well. So I would say it was probably even, almost even. And again, you know, but it was like the experience of someone of standing. No one prepared me for that, you know, English behavior, you know, not American. So I remember just saying, please sit down. And then I started to talk and I said, you know, my name is so-and-so. I did remember saying, how many of you believe the war, that the Americans should be in Vietnam? And everybody believed it. And everybody there thought that the Vietnam War was right and America was right and all that stuff. And I said, well, I said, I'm teaching a current events class here. And so I just want you to know this, that you're going to have to make a pretty convincing argument to convince me that America should be in Vietnam, because if, I believe that I'd be in Vietnam and not here and I'm here right now because I don't believe we should be in Vietnam.

GROBEL: [00:52:33] And I just, I was very straight forward about that, you know, where I was standing. So, yeah, I was being political right off the bat, you know. And I thought part of my job was to maybe make these people understand, you know, that we all didn't believe in war and that kind of thing.

KLEIN: [00:52:48] But no one had indicated that that was the role?

GROBEL: [00:52:52] No, they didn't tell me I had to play any role at all. That was a, that was what I loved about the Peace Corps. I mean, that they didn't say to me, you have to do this. They'd tell me I had to be tactful. I had to be careful. Yes. But then you're on your own and, yes, so the first thing I did was tell them where I stood as far as the war in Vietnam went and whatever.

KLEIN: [00:53:09] Do you recall the process to teach Ghanaians English?

GROBEL: [00:53:09] Well, Ghanaian English is English English, you know, the British English more than the American. And that's what I was about to say. So I started teaching and I did all three courses, which is 3 hours worth of classes in about 40, 45 minutes. I'm finished, you know. And I said Shakespeare [talks very quickly]. And I talked fast because I'm from New York and I've never quite lost the New Yorkese in me. And there was blank looks, you know, I finished. I looked at my watch. Oh man, it's not even an hour. I got through it. I said, well, any questions? Nobody had any questions. I said, OK, I'll see you tomorrow. And I went into my office. I had an office they gave me. I sat there and I remember like my hands were shaking and I'm going, what the hell was that all about? I can't do this. I'm not qualified. I can't teach. I was, I had the most self-doubt that I've ever had in my life about me was at that time.

GROBEL: [00:53:58] And I went home. I had a driver that used to take me, the bus would pick me up, a small little minivan or something. So it would take me to my place. And by the way, I should talk about where I lived because it was pretty interesting. And back and forth.

KLEIN: [00:54:11] Well, let's stick on the teaching for a minute.

GROBEL: [00:54:13] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:54:13] So did you get any kind of syllabus?

GROBEL: [00:54:15] No.

KLEIN: [00:54:17] Or guide?

GROBEL: [00:54:17] No. There was no syllabus or no guide. I had to create my own syllabus and everything, you know. And they didn't have that many books. I went to the USIS, I got to know a guy named Mike? Oh jeez, I still keep in touch with him. He's such a sweet man. Uh. Anyway, he was then connected with the USIS. He used to be in the Peace Corps in the Cameroon, then, you know, to the USIS. And I said to him, listen, I'm teaching at the school of journalism. They don't have much of a library there. I'd like to get some books and stuff. And so I got from the USIS, they sent me, I got Shakespeare books, I got, you know, a complete course of Shakespeare from them. I got books on history, I got literature stuff. It was great. So I got from them. Then I wrote to my high school. I had, and I started building a library and.

KLEIN: [00:55:03] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [00:55:03] It took a little, yeah, yeah. Well, some things were emergency. Like, you know, right at the very start I remember saying how fast can I get some books because I need some stuff. They didn't have very much, you know, which is surprising, you know? What they did have I used, but you know, but when I. The next day I taught. I went home and I wrote a letter to my old high school economics teacher and, you know, telling him how much I appreciated him as a teacher now because, I said, I don't know how you did it all these years because I just taught my first class and, my first three classes actually, and I said it, I was like the worst possible teacher you could imagine and how do you do it? So the next day I had to go back, you know, and I didn't want to, you know. And I prepared a great deal more, you know. I mean, I started reading stuff and what am I going to talk about, you know? And I tried to stretch these classes out to make for the full hour each time.

GROBEL: [00:55:54] But each day, you know, and I try to read roll, I would try to find out their names. But I could not get them to participate. And I kept, you know, I'd call on them and they may say something, but otherwise. And it went on like this for almost three weeks. And finally I started getting some

reactions, you know, and then I started getting to know the students and after about three. So I remember one student came up to me. He says, oh, Mr. Grobel, they said, you don't understand. We didn't have, we didn't know what you were saying for the first three weeks of class. We had no idea what you were talking about. They didn't understand my English. I spoke too fast and I spoke in speaking, you know, a New Yorkese, American English. And they were too polite to ask me or to say, can you slow up? They were looking at me like I was an alien and speaking a foreign language, and I'm trying to, you know.

GROBEL: [00:56:45] And I was so appreciative of that, you know, once I got to understand that they didn't understand me, I could start going back. And say, OK, look, this is the deal. If you don't understand me.

KLEIN: [00:56:58] How many students were in the class?

GROBEL: [00:56:59] Maybe 20, 25. Maybe 25 or 30 at the most.

KLEIN: [00:57:02] Was it a conventional classroom?

GROBEL: [00:57:04] Yes, it was. I remember it was a, yeah, it was kind of a conventional classroom. And there's only two classrooms.

KLEIN: [00:57:11] [inaudible] writing instruments?

GROBEL: [00:57:12] Yeah. Yeah, they would. Well, there were books that you'd tell them to bring or write or loose-leaf books or whatever that would be. And I remember, oh, here's something else I remember very quickly. The first day of class, I said to them, this is how, this is what I believe. I don't believe in grades. I said, I think we're all, I think everybody here is an adult. I said, you know, you've achieved something to get to this school. So I would think that maybe we could come to some kind of agreement where you can grade yourself. You can tell me what you believe you deserve. And we can discuss it. So other than that, that's it. They went running to the director after this class complaining because they wanted grades.



GROBEL: [00:57:54] And they were so used to the English system of grades that this concept that you could grade yourself was like, whoa, where am I coming from? And I got called in right away. The director said, you told them that they're going to grade themselves? I said, well, I said, look, these people have got children. You know, it's not like they're. They said, no, no, no, no. You have to grade them. I said, OK, you know. I said, fine. I said, if that's what you want, I'll do it.

KLEIN: [00:58:19] Now the structure was? It was you and?

GROBEL: [00:58:22] A director, the head, yeah, the director of the program, who was.

KLEIN: [00:58:27] Were there other Ghanaians who were teachers as well?

GROBEL: [00:58:27] There was a few other teachers there. There was a, there were about maybe four. You know, one was teaching typing or whatever that stuff was.

KLEIN: [00:58:37] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [00:58:37] Once in a while, yes, we did. And it was a, it was a Looney Tunes kind of thing. You know, the director. See, what I found out about. I had a few students who told me, you know, I mean, again, my own sense of morality was challenged a great deal in Ghana because what I thought was moral and ethical didn't exist for what in their world. The examples being some of the students told me that they weren't going to get books unless they slept with the director. And I said, you're not sleeping with the director. You know, I'm just right away. I said, I'll get you your books. You don't have to sleep with the director. That's bullshit. And they looked at me like, you know, this is the way it works, you know?

KLEIN: [00:59:22] And then they started telling me. I said, well, what was it like in your secondary school? We always had to do it. The girls would tell me this. You know, if we wanted to take the exam, they wouldn't give us the exam unless we slept with them. Wouldn't give us. I was so outraged by this at first, you know, I mean, I still am when I talk about it. But I mean,

my sense was at first was, how could you? That kind of thing, you know, to them. And then it was like, hold on man, this is their country. You can't change their country that dramatically, that quickly. And maybe you or I, you have no right to do that, you know, I mean, you have to adjust to these kinds of things. So, I mean, one of the things that really. I'd say, why do you want to be journalists? I remember talking to them and they'd all. It was because you get free things. It wasn't just for the nobility of the job. It was a very low paying job being a journalist.

GROBEL: [01:00:13] I would send them out on assignments. I had one guy, I made him a movie critic and so he would go to the movie theater. He would come back and give me the reviews and I'd read his reviews and every review is wonderful. It's a great movie. These were some of the worst movies, and I'd seen them. I said, how can you call this a good movie? Oh, you know, he says, we get free tickets. I said, you're reviewing the movie. If we don't like it, we won't get in. Another one would come back, he'd go to a Lebanese shop owner and he'd come back and he'd tell me how, you know, a wonderful guy this was. I said, he's a corrupt man. I mean, he's doing all these things. I said, that's why I sent you to do the story. But look at the shoes he gave me. You know, it was that kind of thing.

GROBEL: [01:00:48] Even when the politicians came to the school, I remember seeing this, you know. I don't remember when Busia came, but it was, I think but there were always some events happening at that school. And then the real journalists, not just the student, my student journalists, but the journalists from the newspapers would come and on every chair would be an envelope. And it was money. It was called soli, solidarity, you know. So these journalists would get five cedis, ten cedis, 20 cedis, whatever they were giving them, you know, to help write their story. You know, it's like so, you know, and I would lecture about that. I was, you know, I would try to teach them the nobility of journalism for what, you know, what it could be, and that you don't take bribes and it doesn't go into story.

GROBEL: [01:01:29] You know, I had, uh, I even gave an exam once that I'm not proud of right now when I think back on it, you know, because of the end result of it. But the final exam I gave once was, after all the legitimate

questions, the last two or three questions was to get the second part of your paper. You know, I had the secondary questions. I want you to, uh, stand up, tap your hand on your head, rub your stomach, and jump with one leg to the front of the class and take, I don't know, take the paper or take it with you. So it was as ridiculous a thing I could possibly imagine, something I expected no one to do, you know, to just say no, basically. But that's what I was saying no to about Vietnam. And that's what I think you should have said no to in the Holocaust and, you know, with Hitler. And that's what I think. And I think we have to judge, make judgments. And when the teacher or anybody in authority tells you to do something, if it's really outrageous, don't do it.

GROBEL: [01:02:32] And here I am telling them to me and to make a fool of yourself in front of everybody. And this one, my one student, this girl who, you know, she's my smartest student. And I just, I just could never see her doing that, you know? I mean, I just. And I, you know, and I waited. I'm watching this test, and they get to the end of it. And sure enough, you know, one by one, they said they did it. And I was crushed. I was absolutely crushed. And when they got the paper, the second paper I gave them said, you have just failed your test. You should never have done this. This was an embarrassing thing to do. I had no right to ask you to do this, you know. And of course, I didn't fail them. But, you know, I mean, I wanted. But you know, looking back on it, everyone did it, you know, it's like, it wasn't like, you know, there was nobody who'd said no to it. I had a. [tape break]

GROBEL: [01:03:22] I had a student named Joseph, and Joseph was a pretty good student. So he always wore dark glasses in the class. And I would ask him, you know, he and his papers were always short. I would give, you know, I want a 3,000 word paper. And it always came in 1,500 words at the most. He never read more. So I said, Joseph, come see me. So he came. I said, you're too stoned, I said to him. And he was shocked. He was shocked at me. What? I said, Joseph, take your glasses off. I mean, he takes his glasses off, his eyes were red as a beet, you know, and I said, I said, look at you. I said, you're stoned right now. And he said, oh, oh, oh, he says, you can't say this to me. You can't say that to me. I said, Joseph, I said, I'm not reporting you. I'm not, you know, I said, I'm just

recognizing something and I want to discuss this with you. He said, how could you tell? How could you tell? I said, because you don't ever write long. I said, I said, I have a feeling that your brain works at a certain point and then just stops. And I think it's because of the dope you're smoking.

GROBEL: [01:04:18] And I started asking him about his history of this smoking. He was smoking since he's like 9 to 10 years old. He smoked. He came over once to my house and he, I watched him. He put in a newspaper that was the daily graphic was like The New York Post kind of size. And he would roll. He would take out one full sheet of that paper, roll enough grass to make himself a, not quite a joint now, it was a funnel because this low. And he smoked it. And now literally, when I smoked any of that stuff, one hit was all I needed to get high on that stuff. I mean, and I didn't, you know, and I didn't smoke very much. It was like on weekends or something, but never during the week. And I and I saw this and I said, you know what? I said this. I knew, I always knew from this experience with Joseph that smoking too much marijuana is going to affect you. It's not, you know, I think, I believe in the legalization of things and I believe things in moderation.

GROBEL: [01:05:19] But, you know, I saw the effect that this had on this very, very bright guy. And I say to him, Joseph, just write me a paper that's, you know, ten pages long. And he would always do five. He could never get it to ten. It would be a good five, but he could never make it more, you know. So you saw that stuff, you know, anyway.

GROBEL: [01:05:36] But he said to me, I was the first teacher that ever said anything to him about it, you know, because every. The other thing about grass in Ghana, which is interesting, was everybody smokes it, it seems, but nobody shared it. It wasn't, you know, in America, it was a shared experience. You know, everybody passed a joint around. There you didn't do it. And I said, why was, if somebody had that on you, that people are always getting in trouble with the police for one reason or another. Because everybody, it's a bribe society. It's a, you know, it's a dash society basically. So if I got in trouble because the police were after me, I would say, don't turn me in. John smokes dope and go get John. OK. So they would, so if you knew somebody had smoked, you know, you could

get him in trouble. So everybody would smoke by themselves. It was a very singular event rather than a very sharing event, which I thought was kind of interesting, you know. But OK, the housing.

KLEIN: [01:06:29] Well, did the school arrange it?

GROBEL: [01:06:32] Well, when I first got to the, you know, knew I was going to be in Ghana, I went to the school and they did, they had a house for me. And I went to see it and it was way out near Legon, near the university. And I thought it was too far out of town. Number one, it was like in the middle of nowhere. Number two, there was like a small, it was like a pond. It was a, it was just, it was like a mosquito infested pond right in front of the house. And I looked at that and I thought about all those bites I've had, and I said, I didn't like that. And I didn't see a way of cleaning that up so easily. And so I just said, I don't think that'll work for me. They said, well, that's the house we have for you. So I went to the Peace Corps and I said to them, you know, I said, I don't think this is a good situation, you know, where I have to get to the school and everything. I'd rather be in the city than outside or that far away near the airport or.

GROBEL: [01:07:26] And I just was lucky. They said, well, the ambassador was leaving or something or, either the ambassador or the ambassador's assistant. But some bigwig in the American embassy was leaving and he had an apartment. And they, and I could maybe take that immediately. Sounded good to me, right? I didn't even have to look at it. And so sure enough, and there was furniture there and everything. And it was the, it was, uh, it was a duplex with a house. And the upstairs was where he was. Downstairs were the Lebanese people who were living. And, um, and that was in Adabraka. And I said OK to that. And it had two bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, and a beautiful balcony that looked out onto the street. There was a very large balcony. And I used to sit out there and watch when, because it rained in Ghana like from 4:00 to 5:00 every day, for 15 or 20 minutes there was a great storm with lightning and then it would just clear up.

GROBEL: [01:08:28] So I used to sit out there a lot and do that. So that was and I. And overhead fans, and that was very good because it was very hot. I was

offered a phone, I was offered a television, and I was offered radio. I turned all of it down, because a phone, who's going to call me except for the school? Why do I need to be in touch with them? You know, so and the TV, what was I going to watch? It had one channel, so I didn't. I did a lot of reading. I remember I read *The Source*, James Michener's *The Source* in three days. I read that, uh, *Finnegans Wake*. I mean, who reads *Finnegans Wake*? James Joyce. You know, Dostoyevsky. I read a lot of books.

KLEIN: [01:09:06] Did you have a Peace Corps book locker?

GROBEL: [01:09:06] No. No, no. We had to bring our own stuff. Yeah. I mean, I did bring a lot of reading to do. And I, you know, and I remember I used to read the international *Newsweek* or *Time*. *Newsweek* I think it was. And the, you know, I would get that and look forward to that kind of stuff, you know. And, you know, existed a lot by letters, because there was no internet, there was no computers. I had a typewriter and I wrote every day. I wrote two books while I was in Ghana. One was called *Turquoise* and the other was called *Not with a Bang*. And so, you know, so I was always writing and I loved it. So, you know, my work, I didn't work that much at the school. My hours was such that, you know, maybe I'd work. I had those three classes, so maybe it would be an hour a class. And sometimes I'd teach 2 hours in a day and then, so maybe about 2 hours a day.

GROBEL: [01:10:00] So they'd come and pick me up at 9:00 in the morning. I'd teach 10:00 to 11:00, I'd have office hours for a half an hour, an hour. Anybody wanted to see me. And then I was free to go home. I would grade papers at home as much as I could at the school. So I was not at the school that much.

KLEIN: [01:10:14] Where did your students live?

GROBEL: [01:10:15] All over. I had, one of those.

KLEIN: [01:10:19] Were there dorms?

GROBEL: [01:10:19] No dorms, no.

KLEIN: [01:10:21] Everybody stayed at their own house?

GROBEL: [01:10:21] Yeah. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:10:22] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [01:10:25] Right. Nobody lived on campus.

KLEIN: [01:10:30] Was there any faculty room that could be a meeting site?

GROBEL: [01:10:34] Well, we had our offices. I had an office that I shared with this one guy. And there was. I remember, I just remember writing once about, you know, we had a ceremony when the director was leaving. We had the ceremony and it was so insane because everybody wanted this director out. He was terrible. And he went to the Ministry of Information and but, you know, they made such a big deal out of it, you know, and it was, it was so. And then one of the teachers, I remember seeing him talking to a tree once. And I just walked over to him. Because he had been in the, arrested under Nkrumah and he had been in jail and been beaten and tortured and all that stuff. And now he's out and he's teaching a course at the school. But his mind was a little bit warped, you know, and you sort of saw that.

GROBEL: [01:11:25] I mean, I was pretty close to my students. One of the, one of my students I ended up having an affair with, but not while she was a student. You know, after she had graduated. I was close with her.

KLEIN: [01:11:39] What did you do on weekends?

GROBEL: [01:11:39] I used to, Mark used to come over. I used to see Mark on the weekends. And I'd go to, he lived by the pig farm, which was, what was that? Newtown. Newtown, yes. Yes. And now, Mark's situation was completely different. Instead of living in a house like I was living in, I was the upstairs of a house, Mark was living in the servant's quarters behind the house. And he never questioned it, never argued about it or anything. And he was teaching at this secondary school. I don't remember the name of it. And I remember once, I mean, Mark's place, I guess the *tro-tros* and

everything would drive by and send a lot of dust, I guess. Because he had windows, screened, that were completely orange that you couldn't see through. And actually, he, both of us thought that's what there was. You know, we didn't until some student came to see him once and said, oh, can I clean your windows? And I said, what do you mean clean them? And they actually took the thing down and cleaned them completely with screens. And we were like, wow.

GROBEL: [01:12:42] And Mark would do things like buy a, he would buy a camel's hump or a, not a camel, a cow's hump. A hump. And he try to boil it for five, six, or eight days. You know, I remember going, how's the hump coming along? You know, because it was terrible. But, you know, he was, and Mark was funny because he was into math. Mark spent his time doing math puzzles. So he would sit at, he never used his living room. So it was always dusty. And he had a little table by the, a little kitchen table, and he'd sit there and do his math puzzles all the time. And if I'd come over, he'd get very nervous and said, what are you doing here? Because he would always come to my place because I had a nicer place. And it was also more centralized. I also had the experience, I lived right around the corner from the hostel.

KLEIN: [01:13:23] I was just going to ask you that.

GROBEL: [01:13:23] Yeah, and so every volunteer, once they stayed at that hostel for about 12 minutes, knew they didn't want to stay in the hostel. It's not a great hostel. And they knew, they found out quickly that I lived right around the corner. So I used to have people staying with me all the time to the point that it became a problem. It became a problem for my experience there, because I think for the first three months I was in Accra, I didn't sleep alone. That is, I wasn't alone in my house once. I had somebody there. At first there was a girl named Jeanie who was living there before I lived there. And I was, you know, when they put me there, she was like a caretaker or something. She was a, she was a teacher, Ghanaian. And so when I went there, I met her and she was very nice, but I was kicking her out of that place for me to be able to take it over. And I felt badly and she didn't know where to go.



GROBEL: [01:14:15] So I said to her, look, I don't know you. And I said, you know, and I know you have to find a place, but if you'd like to stay in the other room, because there was two rooms, you know, until you find a place, that's fine. And she did. At first she said no because it wouldn't look proper. And I said, well, that's up to you and I understand that, I'm not coming on to you here. I'm just making an offer. And then she didn't for a little bit, and then she did, because she couldn't find a place so easily. And so she stayed. And she was kind of an interesting person for me because she had a boyfriend and she always had problems with him, you know. And I was involved in the, you know, seeing the, the social life in a sense of Ghanaians in Accra from a very interesting kind of perspective. And but then when she, I just got to a point where I finally said, Jeanie, you've got to leave. Just like I don't mind you staying but it looks to me like you've moved in here for good. And, you know, I do need my privacy too. So she finally did.

GROBEL: [01:15:12] And then, but then the other volunteers started to show up, you know, because they were all over the place, but they'd come in for a gamma globulin shot or they'd come in for getting some mail or something like this.

KLEIN: [01:15:23] Most of the people you trained with?

GROBEL: [01:15:23] Yes. Most of, it was only the people I. Well, yes, it was, unless the Peace Corps itself once recommended a guy who was coming in. He was a National Geographic photographer and he was trying to make some contacts and stuff. And they told him about me. So he came knocking on my door one day. His name was Victor Englebert and he was from, uh, Belgium, ended up in Colombia. He married a Colombian woman later. And Victor was fascinating. One of my great experiences was with Victor because, you know, the minute he came in, he said he's doing a book, a children's book about Ghana, and he's trying to find. And I was able to help him get the methods. My houseboy at that time, I said, oh, maybe his family and this and Jeanie had somebody. And so he ended up getting a lot of help out of that. But he stayed with me. And I always remembered Victor, you know, I'd say Victor and he would be, he'd be on the floor and

he had sandals. You know, those rubber thongs or whatever he had. And so I said, Victor, he started to lie down and go to sleep on the floor.

GROBEL: [01:16:22] You know, I said, Victor, I said, use the bedroom. There's a bedroom for you. No, no, this is fine. He would put one thong under his back, lower coccyx, and the other on his head like this. And he closed his eyes. And I said, this is amazing. But this was a man who knew how to travel. They really had experience, man. He could just sleep anywhere, eat anything. And he carried his own equipment. And Victor and I are friends to this day. I still keep in touch with him. He's in his sixties now and, uh, but anyway. He's really a great. Maybe before you leave, I can quickly share some of his work, but he's done a lot of books. So I got to know him. But most of them were volunteers and they would come. So I got to know what everyone was doing.

KLEIN: [01:17:00] Did it get to be an expense?

GROBEL: [01:17:02] Yes, it did. And that was part of my problem, because the thing was, I was hospitable. I shared whatever I had. But what would happen is, I had this. As I said, we all got 70 bucks a month. How much is that a week? You know, \$20. Not even \$20 a week. I had to buy my eggs from, you know, from wherever it was, six cents an egg. It was, you know, I bought whatever I had. So people would come and stay with me. Then they'd get up and make breakfast and then they would leave, do their thing, come back. And so I would always have to have more food and I was running out. So finally, at first what I did is I put up, I always felt bad asking for anything. So all I did was I wrote a little sign by the, in the kitchen, and I said, we're all volunteers here and we're all equal as far as making money goes. But I'm getting more guests than most of you are. So if you don't mind contributing to the food of whatever, I'd appreciate it. And sometimes they did. And sometimes they didn't. And that was that.

GROBEL: [01:17:55] But it got, it just got to a point where, you know, like every night I was kind of entertaining and I'd have to, we would talk and I was, it was fun for a while. But after a while I said, I'm not getting the Peace Corps experience. So I'd sort of pick and choose. So say there's about, maybe there's six people or so in the group that I would say, look, if you have to

come to Accra, you'd be more than welcome here. The other people, I sort of said, you know, after a while, I'd appreciate you stay at the hostel, you know, just whatever.

KLEIN: [01:18:24] Were you writing all through this?

GROBEL: [01:18:24] I was, not in the very, very beginning I wasn't other than the letters to. It took me a little while to adjust to my routine. I would say the first six months it was an extremely lonely time. I think the period of adjustment was about a half a year. I had a girlfriend that, you know, that I had left, you know, and when I came here and all that and I missed her and I missed. You know, I mean, it was just that whole adjustment. And, you know, like just, you know, coming into a teaching situation that I didn't understand how to teach and, you know, and volunteers.

KLEIN: [01:18:58] And you didn't have a life in the schools.

GROBEL: [01:18:59] Right.

KLEIN: [01:18:59] I mean, like a boarding school.

GROBEL: [01:19:00] Right, right, right. Everybody was on their own and all that stuff. So in the, it took me a while and I felt very, very alone, even though I was in the city, you know, in the city. But I felt also constrained in that city because I couldn't afford to do anything, you know, to get around, you know. But anyway.

KLEIN: [01:19:20] Did you live close to the Peace Corps office?

GROBEL: [01:19:22] Within walking distance. But then again, almost anything to me. I didn't walk to the beach until I was robbed at the end, but I, the Peace Corps office was a good distance. Like it was near Ferisco, and there was a place called Talal, which was a Lebanese restaurant I remember. I used to eat at Talal and the Peace Corps office was near there. So yeah, so it would be about a 20 minute walk to the Peace Corps office, so that wasn't so bad. And a little further down, there was a department store that I very rarely went to.

KLEIN: [01:19:53] But during, say, the first six months, did you have much contact with the Peace Corps?

GROBEL: [01:20:00] Only when I needed to, you know, I mean, I'd go and, you know. Well, if it was just, sometimes it had to do with, uh, I got a notice from the draft board that.

KLEIN: [01:20:09] You did?

GROBEL: [01:20:09] Yeah. That they wanted to, uh, because I didn't have my physical and you can't get drafted until you have the physical. So I was, they sent me a notice saying they wanted me to have a physical in Livorno, Italy, and they sent me a ticket to go to Livorno, Italy. But first I had to, they had to send my papers over, so it was going to take two or three months. So I remember going to see the doctor at the Peace Corps office, and saying, look, I don't want to go to Livorno, Italy. I don't want to do this, you know, and they can't draft me unless until I've been physically gone to the physical. So, you know, and he said, well, you know, maybe you could say you have malaria, you know, some suggestion like that. So that's all I needed. I said, OK, that sounds good. I would go back and then what I did is I'd write a letter saying, I'm sorry, I can't make the physical. I have malaria at the moment. However, please, I'll be happy to come another time.

GROBEL: [01:21:01] But there was no law that said when I had to send it, it was just, you know. So instead of sending an airmail letter, I sent it regular mail, which meant it went by sea and took three months. Now so I missed my physical and they didn't know I missed it until they got my letter. So what happened is, Livorno, I mean, this is the way it worked out. They would have my papers. I didn't show up. They held the papers for about a month and then they sent them back to the States. Now the States would get my letter. Now, OK, so now they have to send me to Livorno again on another date. So now they get my papers. That takes a little while. They send the papers back. I get this thing, I get a notice. Same thing. This time I got another. I went to the doctor. What can I get this time? I said, you know. So OK, we'll say you have this. I said, OK, so and I sent it by sea again.

GROBEL: [01:21:45] So, you know, I played that game out. I didn't, I never went to Livorno, Italy. And it was always funny because I did go to Italy with my family and I went to, I saw that we were near Livorno and I said, I've got to go. Let's go to Livorno. Just let me check this out, because this place has always been in my mind.

KLEIN: [01:22:03] What, uh, you must have done some traveling?

GROBEL: [01:22:06] Yes. As a matter of fact, they encouraged it. Peace Corps always, they gave you \$9 a day to travel, the per diem rate if you travel. And I arranged, because I was in Accra, I arranged for the, uh, a trip to East Africa.

KLEIN: [01:22:21] Oh.

GROBEL: [01:22:21] And I arranged with an airlines and I got a very good rate.

KLEIN: [01:22:26] At the end of the first year?

GROBEL: [01:22:27] Yes, and so I had everybody, all the volunteers that I was in touch with, plus whoever else was in the volunteers. And I, you know, whatever price it was, a couple hundred bucks maybe it was, you know, but I said, you know, so I had to. I had to contact everybody in the Peace Corps, which I did through the Peace Corps office. Those are the kinds of things I would do at the Peace Corps office. And I'd say, if you all want to go, it's going to go. We're going to go to Ethiopia and Kenya and Tanzania, and then we'll fly into Ethiopia for X amount of time. Then we'll go to Kenya for X amount of time and then we'll, you know, everybody's on their own once we arrive and then we'll meet back and do it. And I think I filled the plane. I think I had over a hundred people, 120 people, that came.

KLEIN: [01:23:10] [inaudible] picked up people from Nigeria? How did that work?

GROBEL: [01:23:13] I might have, I might have, I probably let them know about it, but they would have had to come to Accra. Yes, I'm sure that's what

happened. And I was dealing with money, you know, because everybody was sending me money because I had to pay for this, you know, so like, you know, so I remember that. Yeah. I mean, that was like, because I had to deal with the bank.

KLEIN: [01:23:29] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [01:23:30] No, I mean, they didn't mind. They let me do it. I wasn't making any money. I did make, I got a free trip out of it. I think that was my deal, you know, like so that what is what. And that's like, I think I got two or three free trips and I think I gave them to some friends. You know, I said I got two tickets. I said, Mark, because one of my friends wasn't going to go. Mark was the one. I said, just take this ticket. What does it matter, you know? So, you know, but it was, and it turned out to be terrific, you know, a good trip. Although we went to see the pygmies in, uh. We, five of us, just three girls and two guys, rented a car in Uganda and we went out to Bunga Bugio or whatever, where the pygmies were from, on the Congo border. It's Zaire now. And I just telling this to Mark yesterday, it is a funny story if he was here, but there we are. We're going to see these pygmies. And sure enough, there are some pygmies on the road, you know, and we stop, you know, and one woman is smoking her pipe and another one has got a little musical instrument.

GROBEL: [01:24:33] There's about 8 to 9 of these pygmies. And so I wanted to buy the pipe from the woman. Of course, as we know, it was a nice little pipe. So she wanted five shillings. I went, five shillings? You just, so I said, there's stuff in it. So I think it was dope. I don't know. But she took out what she was smoking in her hand and said, OK. So I have the pipe downstairs, the pygmy pipe. And then Mark, the best part was he wanted to take a picture, because Mark was talking about six four. So he want to take a picture with all the pygmies. So he negotiated with them or thought he did, to give them a shilling. So OK. Or maybe it was two shillings. So then I had his camera. So I take the picture of the pygmies with him and then he gives the woman two shillings and they all came up, they all wanted two shillings. And Mark said no. He said, no, no. It was two shillings just for the picture. And they would, see their understanding was

of course it was two shillings apiece. So they got angry and Mark was being obstinate.

GROBEL: [01:25:36] He was not going to pay them because he thought they were cheating him. I loved this. So this woman picked up a rock and she was bald. She was an older woman. She picked up the rock and she approached the car. She was about to smash the windshield. That was going to solve the argument. And Mark, although this is one of my favorite memories, was here he is standing by the door and before he went, shame on you! And I'm sitting there like this, shame? And I started to laugh. The concept of shame to a pygmy, right? Could you imagine this? So it was like. And this girl Nancy, she took out of her hair, this is so clever, two bobby pins. And she went, mommy, mommy, look, mommy, mommy, look, you know. And the woman, she dropped the rock, took the bobby pins. She was so happy. She was happy. So that was it, the crisis was averted.

GROBEL: [01:26:30] One of the pygmies that says he wants to go in the car with us, but we don't know where he wants to go. But OK. So he gets in the car. We drive five more miles and this guy smelled like you cannot believe. I mean, you couldn't put a zoo in your car and get a worse. I mean, it was like, we were looking at each other. We don't know where. And he's with his little bow and arrow. And he's like this. And a spear he had too. And he's looking, looking. And he's just looking around and he just wanted to go for a drive. And we went five, about five miles. And we, you know, we sort of stopped the car. He looked at us, looked like this, got out of the car and started walking back.

GROBEL: [01:27:06] But we did, we were encouraged to travel. I traveled to the Ivory Coast. I traveled to Togo a lot. I traveled to Dahomey. Ganvie, the little village on stilts, I remember going. I took my students to a number of things there. I went to Upper Volta. I never made it to Mali, Mark did. But, you know, so. I never went to Nigeria too. This Ibo war was going on.

KLEIN: [01:27:30] Let's go back to organizing trips with the students.

GROBEL: [01:27:32] Right. Yes. Yes I did with my students. I took them two places. One was to that village, to Dahomey and Togo, and another was with, uh. There was a coming out ceremony at Larteh, this was the fetish priest, this place. This is really one of the most, this was the heart of darkness kind of thing. This is your Africa that you really dream about, you know? And this is when I was in Mampong, Dr. Ampofo told me about Larteh and how the fetish priestess are trained there. So I went up there once when I was in Mampong out of curiosity, and then I went back. And the first time I went, you know, I heard that the fetish priestess, the chief fetish priestess, that Kwame Nkrumah used to go there before he made any decisions. He would consult her, the, what was her name? Well, anyway. So she was like an oracle and when she died, you know, the next one replaces her. And these, the chief fetish priestess was not allowed to have, put her feet on the ground.

GROBEL: [01:28:30] So everywhere she walks, she, you know, they put a skin, an animal skin there. And she's on her stool. You know, her feet are always touching the skin, never the ground. And so, and they had. Wasps were sacred. So you had a lot of these wasp nests. There was a cauldron when you walked came in and this was for infertility. The people who didn't, you know, were looking for having babies, they somehow deal with that cauldron. And these wasps would be flying around, these big black wasps, you know. And so it's kind of a strange place, you know. And all the women there, it was only women, were only in white. And they wore, uh, their hair was like hennaed and dirty and whatever sprayed it. And I didn't understand exactly how you got there until I took my students there. Then one of my students understood the language and talked to this woman.

GROBEL: [01:29:21] And how it worked was if you were, let's say, in the north of Accra, where would the north be? On the border, let's say, where Upper Volta would be. If you lived in this village and all of a sudden you start speaking in tongues. Now, if you're a seamstress, if you're married, if you have a child, doesn't matter. If someone recognizes what you're speaking, and it's Larteh language let's say. So Ghana had 150 dialects or something. And so they would, you would immediately be sent down to Larteh. You're speaking Larteh, you don't, you shouldn't be speaking Larteh, you know. And you would be, and that meant you had been



possessed and you are going to now learn the fetish arts. You are no longer a mother, you are no longer a wife, and you're no longer a seamstress. You are now going to be a fetish priestess. And that was so astounding to me, and I didn't understand that until, again, as I said, one of my students, when she starts talking to this girl and she said this is how she came, you know.

GROBEL: [01:30:25] So these people who are there, all these trainees, woke up one day in some village somewhere speaking [garbled] and they would say, oh, you're speaking Larteh, down you go. Now again, believe it or not, this is how, you know, how it happens.

KLEIN: [01:30:38] Did that particular trip, was that at your initiative or the students' initiative?

GROBEL: [01:30:41] No, that was my initiative. I heard about that trip and I said, hey, let's go up there, because there's also a school of the deaf in Aburi and a school of the blind, the school of the deaf, and that. I said, so I said to my director, I had to get permission. I said, let's, let me take these students to see this, because it's very, these are very sensitive kinds of situations and these are pretty amazing situations. And that coming out ceremony was unbelievable, because this woman. Coming out there basically involved, you know, this woman is going to just do her thing. She's going to get possessed and she's going to go through her possession and she's going to be judged by the fetish priestess and her cohorts, you know, what's going on. So when we were there, the, um, it started out, you know, the first. You know, you, I brought some gin and then they would give, they would pour it in a cup and I'm supposed to drink it. Excuse me.

GROBEL: [01:31:37] And I drank it at first. They poured some more and, you know, and I had to be on my hands and my knees. I didn't, I didn't like gin, first of all. But, you know, so I was being polite. They said I had to drink it again. And I don't want any more, so I drink it again. And they insisted that I drink it a third. I didn't understand. See, how you're really supposed to drink it is you're supposed to take three sips. I didn't take three sips. I took the whole thing. So they were making me, my three sips, the whole thing each time, because that's the tradition. And then you're supposed to snap the

last part out, just as you do with the palm wine and, you know, as an offering. So anyway, we were there and we're all in a circle. The students are there. You know, I'm the only white person there, you know. And I taped, I had a tape recorder. I think somewhere along, somewhere there's this beautiful thing, because they would sing these beautiful voices.

GROBEL: [01:32:26] But an old woman got up and she wasn't the one being, uh, coming out. This is, she just became possessed and she started to dance and [yells] and she's going crazy and moving around. Now, this woman was probably 65, 70 years old. And how do you know? Well, you don't know for sure when they, because they've all got this white stuff on their face and they look weird. But her towel, her toga came off, so her breast came down and she was, her breast was flat as a pancake and, you know, and old, you could see they were old. So now but she was dancing like she was 20 years old. She was amazing, you know. And then she, and they knew when she was losing her possession, because she was doing this dance. And all of a sudden, everybody, all these women picked up her robe and whatever it, you know, and she collapsed like a sack of potatoes. And they just put her thing back on. They put her in the corner. She didn't move, she was gone like she's dead almost, you know? And then this woman who was supposed to be coming out, all of a sudden, she [yells] like this and she starts doing her thing. And it was pretty weird. It was pretty strange now.

KLEIN: [01:33:34] Let's jump back to your school.

GROBEL: [01:33:35] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:33:36] Going into the second year and talk about what you're going to do differently or any goals for yourself?

GROBEL: [01:33:45] No. Well, I don't think I was setting so much goals as I was more comfortable. I understood. You know, I spent the third year there as well. So I did spend three years in Ghana. I re-upped one year.

KLEIN: [01:33:58] And your teaching schedule was the same?

GROBEL: [01:33:58] It was always the same. It was always basically three courses. So I was never, it was never stressful. I was able to handle it and do my own writing. I was just, I was fascinated that I was able to, you know, I mean, I liked, I was becoming a writer so to speak. You know, I had plenty of time to do that. Um.

KLEIN: [01:34:16] So the time that would emerge, you would do your teaching and then head back to your house.

GROBEL: [01:34:19] Right.

KLEIN: [01:34:20] And then you spend your time there writing and I assume doing some preparation for class.

GROBEL: [01:34:23] Yeah, right. Right. Yeah. I would always prepare for class. I'd always, you know, I'd do that right away. I actually had read. I remember reading that William Faulkner wrote *As I Lay Dying*, which was his own favorite book, in six weeks. So I gave that as a challenge to myself once. So I said, I wonder if I could write a novel. I wonder how much I could write in six weeks. So I kept a little chart, you know. And so every day for six weeks I wrote. And I remember one day I wrote 14 pages. Oh, that was like, it was almost like an orgasm, you know? But in the end I wrote, um, uh, I wrote a book that was, uh, 120,000 words. You know, it was twice the size of *As I Lay Dying* and probably 100th of what quality was. But nonetheless, you know, it was an experience.

KLEIN: [01:35:15] All in six weeks?

GROBEL: [01:35:15] And six weeks were up and I finished it, you know, I mean, it was like I actually got, you know, I finished the story, you know. So like, that was pretty amazing to me. So I was learning like that. So I was reading a lot. I did go out. You know, I mean, Ghana was a very hot place during the day, you know, so. Oh, and there was another thing that happened. I had a New Year's Eve party my first year with my student. I invited all my students and all, and one of my students, Joseph, my stoner, he was getting ice for somebody, so he took a knife. The ice was frozen in there. So he took a knife. And I guess I don't know what he did

because I wasn't there, but he just banged the knife into the freezer part and hit a wire or hit a thing and broke the freezer. You know, just destroyed the refrigerator. And he came, oh Larry, come here, he says, something's happening. You know, the freon is whatever is going like this. I went, oh Joseph, not too good is it?

GROBEL: [01:36:11] Now, I didn't realize what that was going to mean to me, but what it meant was I needed a new refrigerator. And you don't get a new refrigerator very quickly in Ghana. And it took something like six months. So I was without a refrigerator for six months. And that's a hardship in a country that's so hot, because you couldn't keep anything. So then now I had to get my eggs. The egg lady would come, you know, there's a woman who would balance these crates of eggs on her head, you know, and she'd walk down and I'd have to always listen. So I hear her coming, I'd run down and get my two eggs, you know, so I can make eggs in the morning. Or the same thing with, I had the groundnuts and the plantain, you know. So I had to eat out a great deal for six months until they came through with that thing. So how are we doing with time? Yeah. Is it 3:30? It's 4:00?

KLEIN: [01:37:05] You're in your second year.

GROBEL: [01:37:06] Second year. Right. So I, there wasn't a pattern that developed so much. I did get, I was able to get more and more books. I was able to build a fairly decent library before, uh, out of the USIS and from other places, you know, as well.

KLEIN: [01:37:26] And you had a class graduate the first year?

GROBEL: [01:37:26] I did have a class graduate, yes. And it was nice to see that. And I've kept in touch with students to this day. I've kept in touch with some of them. Some of them have gone on to write for the BBC. Some have been photographers. A couple have died and I've heard from their children, you know, saying, you know, so-and-so died and whatever. Um, you know.

KLEIN: [01:37:44] Did anything change at all?

GROBEL: [01:37:44] The director changed once and I thought, I didn't think that was a bad thing because, you know. Although both directors I had were, they were corrupt men, and you could see it. And they were given, it was like a plum little position because, you know, what are they doing? You know, they're directing a small institute. So they would try to, and they basically had their way with the secretaries. You know, whoever was, you know. I pretty much felt that the students were left alone while I was there. I did try to.

KLEIN: [01:38:20] [inaudible]

GROBEL: [01:38:20] No, the directors, no, no. They were coming out of the Ministry of Information and I went and visited one of them, I think his name was Tate, at the ministry, you know, after he had been the director there. So one day I went to the Ministry of Information. And of course here he was on his desk like this, sleeping right there. Oh, Larry, how are you? Oh, you know, let me get you some water. You know, but what did he have to do? Some of my experience there also because I met a guy whose father owned the casino at the, what was the hotel? Was it the Ambassador? Maybe it was. But there was a terrific, I think in the Ambassador maybe that was where they had the Chinese restaurant. There was a Chinese restaurant. They had the best corn soup I remember ever eating. Anyway, this guy's father, American, owned the casino and that Chinese restaurant, and he, the guy, was a professional handball player. I don't know if he played in the Olympics or somebody.

GROBEL: [01:39:22] So I got to know him through the guy from the USIS I guess. And he invited me to to play handball with him because he asked me once, do you know how to play? I said, yeah, I used to play. I was from Brooklyn. I played against the wall with a small ball. I got to his place and that was a whole other experience. He had his own handball court with bleachers and a glass thing that you would watch. I looked at that and I said, ah, I don't play on this level, you know? And I also felt, again, there was something about being in the Peace Corps that. The ambassador that was, you know, he invited me once to some affair there and I went and

this thing. But I never took advantage of that. I always felt that I was not supposed to do that. I mean, I could have made.

KLEIN: [01:40:09] Did Peace Corps say anything?

GROBEL: [01:40:10] No, Peace Corps didn't ever tell me anything about that, you know, as far as I was concerned. And if I wanted to take advantage. When I went to the, to this guy's house, he had the best food. He had ice cream. He had very, same with my friend Michael, who was at USIS. He would say, oh, you want some of this? He had, you know, he had stuff brought in, steaks and what have you, you know, things you didn't see. And but I never, I did it maybe once and then I never did it again. And I thought of that. I said, gee, it would be fun to go hang out with these people, but then that's not the reason I'm there. You know, nowadays I, like I look back and say, OK, what should I have done? I probably should have gotten myself a very comfortable chair. You know, I had the kind of chair that, you know, that had, was the ambassador's furniture or whatever it was, but it was like, you know, a pillow that was on the bottom and the pillow on the top and it kept sliding every time I'd go. And I lived like that for three years now.

GROBEL: [01:40:58] Now so if I would have spent maybe 70 bucks or 100 bucks, I probably could have got myself a very comfortable chair. And for three years I would have been comfortable. I should have bought myself a mosquito net. Why didn't I do that? I went to Marlon Brando's island years later to interview Marlon Brando in Tahiti, and again in that situation where I was in a hut. He put me in this cabin hut kind of thing. And the mosquitoes are biting and I'm going, oh man. I'm sitting there like I used to sit in Ghana with my little light on, late night, to kill it. And then three days later Brando came in and said, hey, you want a mosquito net? I said, yeah. I got it. And then I said, why didn't I do this in Ghana for three years? Why didn't I make myself, my life so less miserable, you know? You never think like that.

KLEIN: [01:41:39] Let's go back to the school. You were teaching current events.

GROBEL: [01:41:43] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:41:44] I was wondering, given the courses that were given you at the very beginning of the project, were there controversies on things you said or topics that you covered?

GROBEL: [01:41:56] Well, let's put it this way. By the end of the year then, or the two years that I had then, I don't think anybody believed that America should be in the Vietnam, you know, so I mean, I did, I guess I did my job, but it was very, you know, it was an anti-American job in a sense. But, you know, and that's what I thought was kind of cool about this is like, you know, I wasn't that proselytizing pro-U.S. I was anti-Vietnam, but I was very much pro-U.S. in a sense, you know.

KLEIN: [01:42:28] [inaudible] You know, the idea that.

GROBEL: [01:42:29] Well, that was hard to do. I mean, look, everybody I met would say to me, they want, they all wanted to go to the U.S. Everybody wanted to go. I'd say, look, you know, I said, if you go to the U.S., where are you going to end up? Where are you going to stay? I said, you know, you'll end up in Harlem in a room with six other people, you know, and you're lucky to afford that. And they'd go, hey, better than what I got now! I'm with 12 other people, you know? No matter what you said, it was always, it wasn't as bad as what they had. And so they had a very glorified image of America. You know, I remember going even when we were in Mampong, before we even went to, had my assignment, I'd go to the churches with them and, you know, I'd listen to the lectures that the priests would give and stuff. And they would actually, they would describe heaven. I don't know if you ever saw this, but they, you know, they actually had a physical description of heaven. And heaven was a giant house, a Mercedes-Benz. You know, it was very materialistic, you know.

GROBEL: [01:43:28] And Ghana is known for their coffins too, because, you know, you can be buried in what you wanted to be your image of yourself. Of course, if you were a fisherman, they'd put you in a fish. But you could be. There were a lot of Mercedes. People being buried in wooden Mercedes and stuff because they think that's, you know, what your ideal would be. So, you know, that's the sense of what was valuable, you know?

KLEIN: [01:43:55] And in the second year, where did you stand with the draft board?

GROBEL: [01:44:00] Well, I was still fighting the draft. You know, it took, it took, uh, it took the lottery coming. And so then the lottery came in and I was given a number. And I remember my number was 116 and I read in the newspaper that the cut off was like 115. So I said, oh this. I said, well, let me get rid of my CO right now. I just saved, I don't have to go in the draft and if I can beat this thing, why should I have to go back and have to serve something again? So I quickly went to the post office and I bribed a postman to post, pre-dated it the day before. So before the, it looked like draft came. And I wrote a letter to the draft board saying please put me into the pool. And then a day or two later I read in the newspaper that, no, the number cut off is not going to be 115, it's going to be 130. So I just stupidly put myself into a pool I didn't want to be in now. So I had to go to the telegraph office and say and telegraph my draft board saying I, uh, you will be getting a letter from me saying to put me in the thing. I don't feel that anymore. Please disregard that. And in the end I. [tape break]

GROBEL: [01:45:12] OK, so in the end, the bottom line with the draft was that I was crazed by what happened. I also knew that I would not go into the Army and there's no way I was going to do that.

KLEIN: [01:45:24] This is between your second and third year?

GROBEL: [01:45:25] Right, '70 and '71 and, well, actually, it was still in '70. It was, this was still in '70. Because what happened was in my mind, I figured I would probably end up staying. You know, when my time in Ghana was up, I would travel around and then I'd end up, would go live in Canada. I would never come back to the States if it was going to come down to that. It never did. And what happened was once the, I never heard from the draft board again and the lottery continued on or whatever, then I re-upped for the next year. And that was because I had, I really wanted to give it a lot of self-reflection. Did I join the Peace Corps just to get out of the Army or did I join the Peace Corps because I wanted to do whatever



good I could or get the experience, etc.? I always believe that we got more out of it than we gave in a sense.

KLEIN: [01:46:14] But in the third year that was still kind of an issue?

GROBEL: [01:46:17] No, it wasn't. No, I remember it was cleaned up because that was the reason I stayed the third year.

KLEIN: [01:46:21] Oh, OK.

GROBEL: [01:46:21] The third year was my year, you know, it was my, it was like I had beat, the Army was over. It was and it was no longer a question of do I have to do that now? It was a decision of, I want to be here another year. I like this, I like my situation. I like the people. I had, I was writing something that I could continue to rewrite and edit and stuff like that.

KLEIN: [01:46:39] Do you recall going into the Peace Corps office and saying I would like to do a third year and would they put any barriers in your way?

GROBEL: [01:46:44] No, no, there was never any barriers at all. I think they were happy. Because I remember they didn't have a replacement for me so easily, and then they did the next year. When I left, Mary O'Neil was a, she was a grandmother and she had written children's books. And I think I had a few of her books, Halibut, Hailstones and Halibut Bones is one of them. Nice. And I only met her at the very end. You know, she came in when I was leaving, and I think I spent a day or two giving a, you know, talking to her.

KLEIN: [01:47:15] Did Peace Corps expect you to take home leave before you did your third year?

GROBEL: [01:47:22] No, but I did. I did go back because I had a situation. I went to, uh, Europe between my second and third year. Oh, I know why. Oh, this was interesting. I got a letter from Secretary of State Dean Rusk because I had had an accident in 1965. I sold encyclopedias, so I was a sophomore in college or something at that time. And during the selling of these encyclopedias, I was told that if I sold one more set, I was going to win a

motorcycle. So I went out on my own rather than go out with my group that night. And I went to Great Neck, I was placing a set with some relatives, so I knew I was going to get it, and it was late at night. And as I was driving, I had a 1950 Hudson or some old car that my father had found for me, you know, for 50 bucks. And I remember driving it. The brakes were terrible. And a woman was crossing in the middle of the street and she was wearing a yellow polka dot dress. And the light, the overhead light was yellow. So she blended in and I didn't see her.

GROBEL: [01:48:26] And when I did see her, she was right in front of me and the car, you know, and I hit the brake as hard as I could. And but it was an old car and so the car just skid and it hit her and she went flying, you know. And then I remember just jumping out of the car and I was holding her hand and a guy came running over, didn't you see her? And I said, no, get the police or go call an ambulance. And she kept saying, my legs, my legs, and I put my hand on them. I said, they're there, you know. And I was very shaken by this, of course. And so she went to the hospital and I went to the hospital too. But then the police came and said her uncle is going to kill me, so you'd better get out of here and whatever. It turns out, long story short, was that I broke her hip, and so she sued for a lot of money, I guess maybe \$150,000. And I had to give a deposition at that time. But then so, five years go by. In 1970, they bring this thing to court.

GROBEL: [01:49:24] So I'm in Ghana, so I have to come back to the States. So that was right when I finished finals. The timing was fine because it was the summertime. So I wasn't, I didn't have to lose any teaching. So I went back to the States and I appeared in court. I said "yes sir" twice and "no sir" twice, I remember, to whatever it was. And they, New York had a law called contributory neglect. If someone contributes to their own accident, they're guilty as you are for hitting them. And that's what happened. And this woman ended up losing the case. And she, you know, my lawyer was instructed to give her \$10,000 if she wanted to settle. She didn't want to, her lawyers didn't want to settle. And then when the jury went out, it was a jury trial. Once they came back asking for what, to redefine contributory neglect, she, uh, her lawyer said, can we settle now? And my lawyer said, no. And I said, what do you mean, no? I did break her hip. Give us some money, you know. So the guy said, give us \$12,000 so it'll pay for my

future. They wouldn't do it. And finally I insisted, you know, I said, look, give her some money. What is it, your money? It's the insurance money. And I always felt guilty about it. So they did. They gave her ten grand or something.

GROBEL: [01:50:29] But then I traveled. Instead of going right back to Ghana, I went to Europe and I traveled around Europe for a while and what have you. And then I went back to Ghana and I spent my last year there, so I did get out.

KLEIN: [01:50:42] Now, you mentioned Dean Rusk.

GROBEL: [01:50:45] For some reason when you get a letter, it was a legal thing that I had to be in the States.

KLEIN: [01:50:50] Oh, I see.

GROBEL: [01:50:50] I got a telegram saying. It was signing Secretary of State Dean Rusk. You have to be in court on such and such a date in June. That was it. You know, this is why I brought that to the Peace Corps. I said, look at this. You know, I said, so they sent me back. So that's how that happened.

KLEIN: [01:51:03] All international [inaudible].

GROBEL: [01:51:07] Yeah. Right. I'm sure Dean Rusk himself did not have to, did not look at that or read that, you know. But yeah.

KLEIN: [01:51:13] So you did the third year.

GROBEL: [01:51:15] I did my third year. And my, and as I was leaving, when I was going to leave, I planned. I always said if I beat the Army and I did all that and finished this up, I'm going to treat myself to the world. And so I said, I'm going to travel. So I thought, I planned a trip to go to Kenya, then to Hong Kong. Well, to Kenya, to India, Bombay and what have you, go there, and then up to Srinagar and Kashmir and then over to Nepal and then to Hong Kong, Japan, what have you, and then take my time. So I took eight months to do that, but before I left, I had a friend, an old high

school friend of mine, who wanted to do this trip with me. So I said, well, why don't you meet me in Ghana? And so he came the week before. Maybe he came for a week or two, and I sent him up to up country while I was still teaching and stuff. And he traveled a little bit in Ghana.

GROBEL: [01:52:03] And my last day in Ghana, we go to the beach because I said let's, you know, and we took a taxi down there and I had about eight cedis, which was then \$8, in my pocket, in my breast pocket. And we went to the beach and were sitting on the sand. And a guy comes up to us and he has, uh, and he just wants to rob us, you know. And I don't believe it because I've never had any problem in Ghana in the three years I was there. The people were wonderful. I loved them. I had good times with them. I never had a problem. And now here's this crazy guy. And he's, and he pulled out a knife. So I first I didn't take him seriously. You know, I offered him a banana, whatever, but then I took the money and I had about eight, whatever I had my pocket. And I just said here and I threw it. And here was another guy there, too, a bigger guy. The big guy took off because the wind blew the money. So he took off to get the money.

GROBEL: [01:52:57] But he, this guy had his eye on my friend's camera. And so he grabbed the camera. And when my friend went to resist, he sliced him with the knife. And so, just a little cut, but it drew blood. And as soon as I saw that, I went nuts and I charged the guy and the guy charged me and stuck out the knife. And the knife, the blade went into my stomach, but it didn't puncture me. I mean, I inhaled as much as I could possibly inhale at that moment. And it didn't puncture me and, uh, but it scared me. And then he started backing up. He had also taken my, I had a little change purse and he'd taken that and took all the money. I said, give me my key because I could at least to get into the house, I didn't have any money left. So then we chased him a little and he put down the camera finally because he had to go up the hill. And so we got the camera back. And unfortunately, that was my last day in Ghana, you know, and then I. But in a sense, it sort of symbolized that it was time to leave, you know, and not in a coffin either, you know. So.

KLEIN: [01:53:59] Have you ever gone back to Ghana?

GROBEL: [01:54:00] I haven't. I have kept in touch with Ghanaian people. I've seen one or two. Two of my students, actually, I've seen since I've been in the States and they've come to visit me or I've seen them, one in New York, one here. And I do still stay in touch. And as a matter of fact, I was trying to see if I could organize a reunion of the Institute of Journalism and go back there. I thought it'd be a good article to write, you know, and but it would be pretty tough to find a lot of these people. But, you know, it's something I would love to do. I mean, one of my students was Nigerian. Another one was from South Africa, another was from India. So it wasn't all Ghanaian, but, um, you know, it would be really. Yeah, but it would be something because it's 30 years now. Yeah, more. That's quite amazing.

[END OF INTERVIEW]