

Yancy Garrido Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Yancy Garrido served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras from January 1987 to August 1990 in a community mental health program.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Yancy Garrido

December 9, 2018
Ringo, New Jersey

By Candice Wiggum

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

WIGGUM: [00:00:04] Okay. Today is December 9, 2018. This is Candice Wiggum and I am interviewing Yancy Garrido.

GARRIDO: [00:00:12] Yancy Rubén Garrido Gutierrez.

WIGGUM: [00:00:16] All right. Who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras from January 1987 to August 1990 as a community mental health volunteer. All right. Let's get started.

GARRIDO: [00:00:29] All right.

WIGGUM: [00:00:31] Can you tell me why you joined the Peace Corps?

GARRIDO: [00:00:33] Why did I join the Peace Corps? Ah. I probably first heard about the Peace Corps sometime in high school. I did lots of service things in high school, like lots of kids. I was an athlete. I did all sorts of projects.

Key Club, all those things. So I think it got stuck in my mind that it was there. And certainly during college I was exposed to what is Peace Corps, but from a negative angle. All my professors were liberal sixties professors, and for them Peace Corps was, um, not a positive thing in how it was structured. It was, you know, from their perspective, a negative intervention for the United States, imposing basically other kinds of policies on countries that really didn't need that kind of service. But that never stuck with me.

GARRIDO: [00:01:23] I'm the son of Cuban refugees. My parents left Cuba because of the Cuban revolution and actually probably would have never have met if it had not been for the United States, because my mother was the daughter of Batista's diplomatic photographer. No one of high importance in the government, but still in the government. And my father cut sugarcane on a farm that my grandfather worked on, and they had a cantina in the little town that they lived in in Marti. So if not for the revolution, they would never have met because the rich city girl doesn't marry a campesino from the middle of Cuba. But they met in New Jersey. And so always in my mind was just being thankful for living in the United States, for having opportunities that I never would have had. I'm sure because of what happened in Cuba, I would have had a fine education because that was one of the things that got established. But I wouldn't have the freedoms and the things that I have today.

GARRIDO: [00:02:20] So it was always in my mind, how could I give back, uh, not as a Peace Corps at the time, but to Latin America and represent my country. So after studying abroad in Spain, and I partially went to Spain because I knew I would always go to Latin America having, you know, being the first generation here. I didn't speak English till I went to kindergarten, so it was always on my mind. I'll go to Latin America. I don't have to study abroad there. And when the opportunities started to arise, okay, what am I going to do? I looked at Jesuit Volunteer Corps. I looked at a number of other nonprofits that were working abroad. But then I got to meet the Peace Corps volunteer recruiter who came to Bucknell University, where I went to school. And that's a whole other story of how I got to go to Bucknell, because I wasn't slated to go to college, so I was slated to go and work immediately to help my family. But again, I bucked the trend of what my

family said. And I said, hey, everybody I see successful in this country goes to college. So I'm going to college. And paid for that myself because they didn't want to pay for it.

GARRIDO: [00:03:22] But at Bucknell I was exposed to, I think, the beginning of what were some challenges I've always had all my life, which is what's it like being, um, a minority student or person in the United States trying to assimilate, trying to become one, but always not being part of the big group? And at Bucknell, it was an economic change for me. You know, my father was working class. I had the fortune of being from a two parent family with all the strengths. My cousins were not so lucky. I am the first graduate of college and other advanced degrees in my family. And when the Peace Corps volunteer came, the way they spoke about what the experience was exactly what I wanted. And it wasn't what the commercials were, you know, toughest job you'll ever love. And all this other stuff, which ended up being true. But the way it was pitched, I never thought Peace Corps was going to appeal to me because what I thought was, and to be honest, I just saw a lot of looked like rich white kids going to foreign countries in Africa.

GARRIDO: [00:04:23] And I really didn't know what that was about. That's why I looked at Jesuit Volunteer Corps and others, because I came from a Catholic background. But once I spoke with the volunteer and they really express how, no, no, no, you know, don't get stuck with the messaging. You're really going and you're working in another country. You're trying to see if you can add value. And if all goes well, when you leave, you know, you'll help to establish something and people will continue that project without you. The idea was to help get things started, not to actually take the place of someone, because the last thing I ever want to do is take somebody's job. So hearing that, after that conversation with that Peace Corps volunteer, it was just one of those things inside me that said, this is for you and you're going to go. You know, it's funny. Everyone always says, you know, I knew this was meant for me until it didn't happen, but it happened.

GARRIDO: [00:05:11] When I, um, so I applied. And of course, my professors did not want me to go. They were grooming me to be go get my doctorate and be

a professor of Spanish literature. My parents didn't want me to go because they said, we left Latin America for you. Why are you going back? But I went, and it's the best decision I ever made in my life. And again, the challenges were in, in just getting set up for that. So I actually, and I think this is offered anymore, but when I graduated in May of '86 and there wasn't a posting available immediately, so I had to wait. So I did a grad, I did some graduate credits at Bucknell. And then in October they called and said, well, we have a placement for you in the Philippines. And I said, why are you going to send me to the Philippines? No, your skills match up. I said, I am bilingual, fluent in Spanish. I'm sure I could pick up Tagalog, but I have no contact with that culture. It doesn't make any sense to me. Well, we've decided this is what would make sense for you.

GARRIDO: [00:06:10] I'm like, I'm not going to do that, but I'll wait for another posting. And I don't know if it was that the recruiter liked me or there weren't that many Latinos in the Peace Corps or whatever it was. They said, okay, okay, you can wait. She called me back in December and said, there's two postings coming up. Actually, there's three postings they said. There's Dominican Republic, there's Paraguay, and there's Honduras. Which would be best for you? We're going to give you a choice. And I said, you know, let me talk to my parents, you know, and I spoke with my parents. And I was going to go to Paraguay because I wanted to go as far away as possible. But no, my parents said, please go to Honduras, because none of us wanted me to go to the Dominican Republic because we had had family that had bad experiences there. And so my mother said, look, my best friend's from Honduras, and I'm like, okay, let's go to Honduras. So that's how I ended up choosing Honduras.

GARRIDO: [00:07:05] And then a few weeks later, I was going for the training in Miami, which was, again, it was like going back to college actually, because that first, I guess it was we were there for, I don't know if it was a week or a few days, but it was all these people coming out of college, like me, and it was like orientation that first year, freshman year college. And I was like, is this what it is? Because that's not what I signed up for. I thought this would be like more adult experience, but you bring with you what you are. And so if college partying is what you bring with you, that's what you find. We went in country, um, and this is where I had my second

kind of, I don't know, it was kind of this, the same thing happens again but it's different. So obviously, having grown up in the United States, even though I had heard about my parents talk about Cuba, especially my father, about the poverty that he had lived in, I had never seen that kind of poverty.

GARRIDO: [00:08:02] When I got to the country, and whether it was intentional or accidental, you fly, we flew into Tegucigalpa, which in itself is an experience to fly into that airport. And we. So this was '87, yeah. And then we drove, uh, it took about 2 hours. Now it takes about an hour because they fixed the roads, but it took about 2 hours to get to, I think it was Nacaome in terms of where we were, where we did our train. No, somewhere in southern Honduras we did our training. I don't remember where it was. For like an initial one week initiation where you went and you were near a volunteer site and they did all the first intro welcome to Honduras stuff. And I was, a small group of 25 in our training group. The groups prior to us were much bigger because there were 400 volunteers in the country. It was a big build up of volunteers at that time.

GARRIDO: [00:08:58] We had a small training group, but unusually for the training group we had, uh, I can't. It was 7 to 10 people of color in the 25, which was unusual for my later experience of finding out how many people of color are in the Peace Corps. And of us, we were three Latinos. Actually, four Latinos, if you count Norma and Norma was from Puerto Rico. And Norma didn't speak English. So Norma had a whole different challenge, which we tried to help her address in that beginning and then the three months of training that we later did, because all the training was structured in English and she couldn't do it. So we had that week of training, and again it was this, it was once again beginning to find our way because as Latinos we spoke, most of us were bilingual. Only one of us wasn't. And, you know, the first few weeks I understand it, they're like, you know, teaching you basic Spanish. I'm like, I taught Spanish. Why am I being taught Spanish?

GARRIDO: [00:09:57] So we expressed these concerns. But since they're outside consultants doing the training because everything gets bid out, it was this group Arawak, and they didn't know what to do with us. And when we got

to Tegucigalpa, and we got to Tegucigalpa, we were all placed in this town outside of Tegucigalpa, a wonderful, idyllic village called Santa Lucia, which, um, at the time because Peace Corps is now pulled out of Honduras. But at the time, part of its economy was built around Peace Corps training, because all these families hosted these volunteers and it was extra money and extra lots of things. So, you know, again, I think it was pretty typical. We all went through the how do we adjust not to living in Honduras, but how do we adjust to living in this kind of weirdly structured society where we were actually the paid wards of these host families who were wonderful people, but were more interested in knowing about us and the United States than actually teaching us anything about what they did in Honduras or how their culture worked.

GARRIDO: [00:10:57] Because they're not trained professionals. They're not trained nurse or teachers. They're just people who live. And, you know, and they were given all these rules of what you should do rather than just saying, you know, feed them, let them live in your town, you know? And that was part of, again, probably the trainers' problem. The training site, which was right there and walking distance, was for us a bit of a joke. You know, how to do basic gardening. I mean, I think at the time it was still, you know, very unstructured of how training was set up beyond language. It was really high intensity language training. So they didn't know what to do with those of us who already spoke the language. So we kept, they said, well, you should take the courses because there's different words in Honduran. I'm like, I know there's different words in Honduras and there's going to be different dialogs and different accents and curse words. But we're going to learn those pretty quick, you know.

GARRIDO: [00:11:54] If anything, if you want us to learn how this culture is different, let us live in the culture. So different people, as we did when we were minorities in university, responded in different ways. Some people just said, oh, just going to do the training and just go with it and not rock the boat. Others protested and didn't go to any training. I took a middle ground and I said, set up an internship for me. You say you're going to have me work in mental health. That's fine. I have no background in mental health outside of having done poetry workshops and doing legal work with prisoners in a prison in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, and doing, I mean, my

background is community development and teaching non-formal education. But you want me to do mental health work? Okay, I'm not a trained psychologist. That is not my major, but we will give it a try.

GARRIDO: [00:12:43] So what they did was they placed me to work in a community center in Comayaguela, which is the sister city to Tegucigalpa. And it's where you see the shantytowns and everyone living on the mud stacks and in, and God bless them, because I really liked the Peace Corps office itself. And these were the trainers I didn't like. But the Peace Corps office, once they figured out. They got me a placement. They talked to the minister of National Mental Health, who I got to meet and ended up being a mentor for me during the time I was there actually, from afar. I forget his name right now, but very nice man. He actually, part of mental health was they did all the film gradings for, uh, for all the American films that came through. They did, they did the grading and the censoring of what needed to be censored.

WIGGUM: [00:13:32] Interesting.

GARRIDO: [00:13:33] And so he would always share those stories with me. So I was in Las Crucitas Medical Center and it was great because I really got, over the course of a month and a half, a precursor to what my experience would be out at the site I would eventually go at. And that was more valuable than any training that could have been given to me. And also because I got my first counterpart, which was the Minister of National Health, who I would speak with every now and then and say, this is happening. And look, what am I going to do in a month and a half? Learn how their health system works. And that's what I did. I learned all the politics of the health center itself, how the union worked, which was, um, what was the union? SITRAMEDHYS. And I can't tell you what the acronym stands for anymore. Sindicato Union, yeah, probably the Union of Medical Workers of the System of Honduras. Um, how the different departments worked in that health center.

GARRIDO: [00:14:28] So I got to understand that mental health didn't really exist. There was a psychologist assigned to each region and each region had multiple health centers. And so the psychologists were being assigned

mental health workers to go and do projects which mostly revolved around education, around drugs and drug prevention, and epilepsy, which had, which was considered still, unfortunately, a mental health issue, even though it's a totally a physical issue.

WIGGUM: [00:14:58] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:15:00] So the psychologist of that health center, because that health center was big enough to have a psychologist and that was her base, she was kind enough to talk with me and basically explain to me, this are the problems you're going to have as an American when you go and work in your health center. They're going to think you're CIA. They're going to think that you're paid a lot of money. No one is going to trust you. They're going to trust you less because you speak fluent Spanish. And they're going to trust you less because your Spanish accent is a weird accent for them. So that was the best training I could get, really understanding. And again, this is what the training should have been about, not how do I get along and cultural training about the culture, but as a professional going into a professional environment in a country. My job wasn't one structured where it was necessarily, oh, I'm, you know, the quaint guy in sneakers in a village building latrines.

GARRIDO: [00:16:00] Initially I'm going to be, even if I'm dressed in khakis and a polo shirt, I'm going to be viewed as a professional with a license, with a *licenciatura*, which is a college degree, which has this pecking level of respect in this culture, which, whether you like it or not, you got it. And all the machismo and the mix with that. She was very, I mean, this was a woman struggling, one of the first psychologists, and I got assigned to the other one. I'll tell about her in a second. And so what she had to deal with day and day just for people to give her respect are the same things that we're seeing now and the Me Too movement has really highlighted. You know, getting paid half of what other male psychologists got. But also understanding, her telling me, you're unconsciously, and she was right, not even going to realize all the privileges you have as a man in our society and as a foreign man in society. So to use a.

WIGGUM: [00:16:54] And a college degree yet.

GARRIDO: [00:16:55] Well, I mean, to use a term coined, not coined by me, but coined by my former law professor at Columbia University later, when I went to Columbia University for law school, Kimberlé Crenshaw. It's the intersectionality of race, gender, class. On top of that, foreign country power, which, whether you like it or not, you're part of it. And look, Sargent Shriver did a smart move in not putting Peace Corps in the embassy and in AID, which were the first things, and having its own separate office, even though it was a big budget drain. I get that. But it made all the difference. And it made all the difference in a time in '87 to '90, during the Contra wars, when people just assumed I was in Honduras as a spy because they didn't understand how CIA worked. And, you know, as I explained to people, I'm not probably going to be the spy. It's going to be somebody higher up than me and probably your colleagues, because that's kind of how intelligence works. You recruit local host people, but hey, I can't change your mind. I can only be here. Won't go into, I go down these rabbit holes. I apologize.

WIGGUM: [00:17:57] That's alright.

GARRIDO: [00:17:58] The big issue, though, was coming to terms, identity issues that I had begun in college, which was not only who I was, but who I was as an American. And understanding that I was there, but a lot of people in the country weren't necessarily happy that I was there. And, you know, that would change on a local level, because after my three months of training, I was assigned pretty far. I was, at that time, it would have been a two day trip. It's now much faster because the highways have been fixed out to Gracias Lempira which is in western Honduras. So Gracias a Dios is the capital of the Department of Lempira, one of the, at the time it was 21 departments. I think there's like 27 now. They've split up some more. Population of Honduras at the time was four and a half, 4 million, four and a half million. Now it's like 9 million, uh, 30 years later.

GARRIDO: [00:18:51] And I worked in this really western region where I had to take, I had to travel. It was 6 hours at the time to San Pedro Sula. I would spend the night to travel another full day to get to Lempira. Although I spent, actually I did a stopover in Santa Rosa because Santa Rosa, which at the

time was 2 hours north of Lempira. And Honduras is about the size of Massachusetts, just to give you a concept. But it's all these mountains, so everything takes a little longer. So I went to Santa Rosa because that's where the regional psychologist who was going to manage me was from, and her name was Lorena Cordova. Brilliant woman. The other female psychiatrist, actually, not a psychologist, psychiatrist in Honduras who was assigned to the mental health department. And she was based in the center, the *región número cinco*, the region number five, area one. I was working in area two, I think. Yeah. Area two.

GARRIDO: [00:19:53] And so I met with her, and pretty typical. She didn't know what to do with me. I mean, her thing was, here's a list of the trainings I want you to do around epilepsy and drug prevention at the health center. Make sure you go with a suit and tie. I'm like, I didn't have a tie, I had to go buy one. To work at the health center because that's the status of your job. And I was like, what do you mean status of my job? I went in thinking a whole different thing, but I quickly realized, you know, whatever I thought, I had to remove my preconceptions of what I should be because my job was to assist here. And I was assigned, and this is what I did like about the Peace Corps. I wasn't assigned to a Peace Corps office, I was assigned to work for the Ministry of Public Health. I was an extra employee of the Ministry of Public Health and Peace Corps paid me.

GARRIDO: [00:20:42] And so I went to Gracias. There were a couple, there were volunteers in Gracias, so I had a place to stay for the first few days until I could figure out my own apartment situation. And it was, it was funny because I went to a site that had. There was a joke because, uh, it was, they called them the models, because it was seven thin, tall, beautiful women who were working in that region of Gracias. And then I popped up. I was the first man in a long time. So they, right away there were all these preconceptions about who I was. Not by the volunteers, but by, but by the locals. I spoke fluent Spanish. I was the first volunteer ever to go to this region that spoke fluent Spanish. And the fact that I was Cuban American even made them even more suspicious because from their perspective, you know, Cuba was a good thing.

GARRIDO: [00:21:36] And I soon learned, and this is something very important that I actually have debates with my family about still, because I say, look, I understand if you compare Cuba to the United States, especially if liberty is your focus, you're going to say, why would you want to live in Cuba? But if you start working with the people that I worked with, which were poor, you know, I wouldn't even call them farmers. They were poor people who worked a plot of land to hopefully raise enough chickens with eggs or raise enough, you know, corn or beans that they could sell them and have enough money for their family to survive, um, on land that they probably didn't own anymore. It was leased to them. I mean, it was almost like a sharecropper situation. They had terrible schools. Malnutrition was horrible. You know, we want to talk about infant mortality rates, and there was no hope from their perspective for their children at all.

GARRIDO: [00:22:29] So if you tell that person your child will be healthy and live a long life. Your child is going to get a top-notch education and graduate from college. Your child is going to be employed and have a job. Your child will never worry about eating, um, eat much better than you do. Oh, but they're not going to have any rights to vote. What do you think they're going to say? They're going to say, take me to Cuba.

WIGGUM: [00:22:55] Feed me.

GARRIDO: [00:22:57] You've got to put things in perspective. And now there's all sorts of things you can do to change that, you know, but that wasn't my job. And also, you know, I really had to, and it wasn't that I was a fan of what had happened in Cuba, because the issue is how do you provide so people have their basic needs and then also provide a civil society and a civic society that they can function in and flourish in, which still isn't happening in Honduras, unfortunately. Um.

GARRIDO: [00:23:28] So the funny story about my first day at the health center is, and I was told this by the, by the psychologist, you know, they're really hostile down there. So they're hostile to me. They were hostile to her because she was a woman with power, in a situation of power. She also wasn't from that region. She was a woman from southern Honduras. I

mean, within countries, you have what we have here. You know, you're from the south, you're from the north. You know, we all have these.

WIGGUM: [00:23:52] Tribalism.

GARRIDO: [00:23:52] You know, it's your localisms, I like to call them, because the bottom line is, when you have nothing, all you have is your localism. Um, so and I'm being dumped into an office in this health center that somebody else should have gotten through the union, etcetera, etcetera.

WIGGUM: [00:24:11] And these seven women that worked there?

GARRIDO: [00:24:13] They did not work at the health center. They worked in Gracias, in the region. So two were assigned to the public schools. Actually, they all were in education, but they were in different schools across the region. It's just that Gracias was the base of where they were. And then when I arrived there, three of them were ending anyway. Just at one time there were seven.

WIGGUM: [00:24:33] Yeah, yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:24:33] And then by the time I was there, it ended up being they all left actually. People cycle out. So I got, so I arrive at the health center. I went to the health center. The doctor, head of the health center, came out. Shook his hand, introduced himself. Dr. Pineda. He was a politician kind of doctor because you get those positions by appointment. Here is your office. We're so glad you're here. When will you start seeing patients? I'm not that kind of mental health person. Oh, we thought that you would, you know, you have a *licenciatura*. I'm like, yes, but my degree is actually in Spanish literature, English literature, and Latin American studies. But I have a lot of experience in non-formal education. Oh, that's nice. I thought you were a psychologist. Well, here is your office.

GARRIDO: [00:25:26] So I sat in my office for a week, tried to meet people. No one was really meeting me or talking to me. Got to know people in the town. Walked around. Because I had done community service work. So I knew

you just, you're there, you're working. You go to work every day. You sit in your office. And it's a typical thing you see in the movies and stuff like that.

WIGGUM: [00:25:43] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:25:45] And then on the seventh day, Dr. Hernandez walked into my office, the sub director of the health center, to sit me down and to berate me for one hour about what was my place there, gringo? Go home. Why are you here? Tell the CIA we don't need them. Um, I'm not speaking for Dr. Pineda, but you don't seem to add any value to us. You're just taking up time and resources. You don't speak any Spanish, and we don't have any time to deal with you. So I took that in. There were many ways I could have responded, but he was very, very hostile to me. So in the nicest, um, dirtiest Cuban words that I knew, I proceeded to berate him for half an hour in Spanish. With all due respect, after every single time I spoke an incorrect word, about how I had only arrived there to try to help. If he could guide me, I would be happy and thankful for his guidance because all I was there was to help.

GARRIDO: [00:26:46] And if it turned out that I needed to leave and go work at a different department and a different part of the country, I would do that. But at this point in time, I'd not begin even an opportunity to see what were the needs of the center and if I could contribute in any way. And who was he, after Dr. Pineda had told me that I was welcome here, to tell me that I was unwelcome? I could smell alcohol on his breath. And why was he even spending his time wasting his time talking to me if he had patients waiting for him out the door? He was total silence. He goes, you speak Spanish? I said, is it obvious? Okay. Now, understand that Dr. Cordova had told me, look, you may have to show your machismo at some point, and whatever you do, as long as you give me a heads up afterwards, I will back you up. So I called her up right away. I said, look, this is what happened. This is what I did. She goes, you did the right thing. Maybe I wouldn't have cursed as much as you did, but you did the right thing. What are some of those Cuban words you used? Because they don't know them. Okay. I'll take care of it.

GARRIDO: [00:27:45] I never saw Dr. Hernandez again in terms of meeting with him. He was always in the backdrop. It turned out he was actually a chronic alcoholic and there was a problem in the center with him. But, you know, um, perhaps it wasn't the best move to do at the time. But hey, you're on your own. You're 22. You perhaps do things because your brain isn't fully formed yet that you would not do when you're 54 like I am now. But I did what I did and I said, I'm just going to keep coming here. And what happened? Finally, you know, people come in, they introduce themselves. But as I heard from when I went back to, you know, talk at the bar or at the local *comedor* where I was eating with other people, well, you know, you're not part of the union, so they're not going to talk to you.

GARRIDO: [00:28:27] My counterpart, who wasn't my counterpart, appeared magically. His name was Wilfredo Aviles. He was working at the time with vectors, which for those of you who may not remember or don't know, vectors is everybody who goes and keeps diseases from passing on to other places in the community. Because you are building latrines, you were spraying, you were fixing the thatch roofs and pulling out all the things that will attract the mice and the bugs that pass diseases. And educating people about this. Wil pops in. He goes, gringo, *habla espanol?* I'm like, yeah, I speak it. I speak Spanish. You want to come with me? So I went with him, not knowing I was going for a two day trip to southern Lempira, but I had, I had always carried a backpack with all of the things you would need. And I began just shadowing him to see all they went, to round down the 150 villages and towns that they would visit, the 10,000 people that were part of this region.

GARRIDO: [00:29:32] And I went everywhere with him and would assist. I was his assistant. I would take things, move things. And then I started seeing, you know, he would say, you know, we're doing all these, we have these people together. You know, we're doing all these workshops. Are there workshops you can do? I said, yeah, I could do workshops. So I did workshops on some topics which anybody else could have done in Honduras. It wasn't a complicated thing, but it allowed me to get to know these communities and see what the needs were. And after time, I'll tell later, Wil ended up going to different, uh, different. He got, he rose within the health center, but then he left the health center and I'll talk about that

in a second. But he was my counterpart. And once I had a counterpart and he gave me the *visto bueno*, the okay, other people would talk to me, you know. Because while he was, he was a respected person who was in the union but was outside the union because he didn't really get involved in all the politics of the union. But he was very well respected and people knew he got stuff done.

GARRIDO: [00:30:28] So I got lucky that the guy who got stuff done said, come with me to see if you can get something done. And what did I discover traveling with him? I discovered that, and again, I had to keep in my mind that I'm a community mental health volunteer supposedly. So I did workshops on epilepsy, basically, you know, sharing with people what is epilepsy, which was good because a lot of these towns and villages had epileptics and didn't know what it was. And it wasn't from the devil and all these other religious things that were there. But it was really once I could get them to the health center with, so the nurse could take care of them and they'd get the Dilantin that they needed at the time, maybe phenobarbital if they happened to have it in health center. But most of the time all they had was Dilantin. That's a whole other issue of medicine.

GARRIDO: [00:31:14] But you know, I did some drug prevention workshops, but that was really ridiculous. I mean, there was drug trade going through there. But the biggest problem was, you know, some kids smoke pot. It really wasn't a big issue in this part of Honduras. In other parts of Honduras, it was a huge issue. Alcohol was the problem. But, you know, doing alcohol prevention outside of getting somebody to AA in a country that doesn't have anonymity is not going to work too well. And I'll be honest, I didn't have a lot of experience working with alcohol prevention, but what did I have experience with was in non-formal education and what did I discover over time? And it took about six months to figure this out. There were all these centers where people would congregate, the health center or the school. So there were true community centers and you had all of these teachers and nurses trying to do health education, but they had no idea how to do it.

GARRIDO: [00:32:19] The teachers were too formalized in how do I teach academics. The nurses and the health promoters were never trained in non-formal

education techniques. I'm like, this I know. So what I ended up doing over time was building a network to train, and I trained about 10,000 people in how to deliver workshops.

WIGGUM: [00:32:40] Wow.

GARRIDO: [00:32:41] *Charlas*. Which was, and at the beginning the health promotor, the psychologist was very upset with me because she was like, you're supposed to do this amount of workshops for me. And that's how I then get judged, because I've got you doing workshops. And I said, you're doing workshops in non-formal education techniques. That's not workshops in mental health. I said, but wouldn't you rather have 1,000 people doing workshops in your topic if I train them to do it? Oh, that's different. Let me see if I can talk to the director of the region to see if this is okay. Because there is a hierarchy which they don't teach you about when you go to these countries. Maybe they do now. You've got to tell somebody who's going to work in a hierarchy, this is how the hierarchy works.

GARRIDO: [00:33:30] It took me two years to figure out the hierarchy, which is why I asked to re-up, because after two years I had built goodwill with the people I needed to build goodwill with, which was the local teachers and their union. The local health workers and their union. And then they would say, give, bring us people with the content now, you know. So I love my experience in Peace Corps because they say toughest job you'll ever love. There was a joke in the Peace Corps, only job you'll ever have. Because no one ever thought in Honduras, how am I going to get employed after doing this?

WIGGUM: [00:34:07] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:34:08] Because until you came back, you didn't realize the prestige that a Peace Corps experience had at that time, which was when I came back, was the early nineties. I can't speak for now, although I still think it's a fantastic thing. Um. But while we made fun of the toughest job you'll ever love, I actually embrace it now because what I learned in Honduras was what am I good at and what do I love to do? And what I love to do is what

I'm doing now. I'm the senior program officer at a very prestigious foundation in New York City. We distribute in New York City alone about, uh, what is it? \$18 million a year in grants to what we consider to be 90 of the best nonprofits in the city. But I also provide technical assistance coaching to executive directors. I connect resources, and that's what I learned in the Peace Corps. I am really good at connecting resources and learning how a bureaucracy works and then helping people to maneuver that.

GARRIDO: [00:35:11] And that makes sense. That's what I had to do in college as a person of color. That's what I had to do in the Peace Corps, both within the Peace Corps and in the bureaucracy of Honduras. And that's what life is. And if I've never had that one cause or the one thing that says, I'm going to be a teacher and teach kids all my life. I am dedicated to the environment and will kill myself, because I've been offered jobs as an executive director of different nonprofits. But I'm like, unless you love that cause. My cause is infrastructure. My cause is how systems work, how people work. And I discovered that in the Peace Corps.

WIGGUM: [00:35:50] Nice.

GARRIDO: [00:35:51] And so I'll give you a story to what I think the impact that ended up happening. It wasn't the impact that I thought I was going to have. You know, they always talk about leaving your legacy, and I certainly wanted to set it up so when I left Honduras, someone could take my job, which would exist at the health center, but that wasn't in my power. That's the bureaucracy of Honduras in determining is mental health an important thing and what kind of thing. And they ended up, yes, getting a psychologist at the health center, as they should have always had, but not doing what I was doing, because I was doing something different. I was doing true community development, which, again, I learned this from the counterpart that I had, from other volunteers who were around over time that I met, but mostly from other volunteers. Let me rephrase that, from other workers.

GARRIDO: [00:36:41] So I met all the people who were working for Catholic Charities, who were mostly Germans and Dutch people. But again, they had

structured it like, this is your job and you're going to work there for five years.

WIGGUM: [00:36:54] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:36:54] It wasn't a two year volunteer commitment. This is your job. And so that was my mindset. This is a job, Yancy. This isn't like, oh, go and get to see the world. No, this is a job you're working here and as long as you're here, you're going to be professional. And these people, they think you're bringing great knowledge. So if you're not bringing great knowledge, at least bring great knowledge about systems that you know and then bring the content. So that's what happened. Once I set up so the health workers could do their training, I didn't need to do that training, but I was able to help set up within the school system because there were more schools than health centers.

WIGGUM: [00:37:29] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:37:29] And I discovered at the time there were still normal schools. And this is important for another reason I'll talk about later. There were normal schools in Honduras, so you had to these students who graduated high school and they were teachers and they immediately were sent out to these villages to run one room classrooms, 12 grades. These kids, they were kids, when they were in their final year, were sent for three months to a local school, supposedly under the supervision of a teacher, to teach and run the school, in groups of 12. At most of these schools, the teacher would go on vacation for three months and they would leave poor kids who are being learned. Twelve juniors in high school are running your school. All dedicated, excited. They're supposed to be your teachers. I looked at this. In the region I was working at this normal school, there were 150 a year doing this. I'm like, these are my volunteers.

GARRIDO: [00:38:27] I developed a program that was called Facilitadores Comunitarios de Salud Mental, Community Mental Health Facilitators, because I always had to be at mental health. We built a curriculum with the teachers in that normal school and with them. And I built a curriculum around how they would do this one week of the mental health week, which

ended up becoming this kind of national thing, in their school with a whole curriculum of activities. But what did that allow? That allowed me to do for them what Peace Corps could not do for me, which was to give, uh, set up a structure where they actually got a pre three day training in what are you going to experience when you go out to become a school teacher? The same stuff I went through, because from the villages' perspective, these were rich kids who are coming from a high school imposed upon them. Same stuff. It's funny how humanity is the same everywhere.

GARRIDO: [00:39:27] And so this one particular class of 118 was kind of my gestation class. And I would go out to visit them. They were in 30 different schools. I would visit them all once a week, ostensibly to see how their mental health week was going along. But over the three months it was more of, how are you doing? I was their counselor. How is it going? What issues are you having in terms of learning this? And then during that time, I'm like, these kids, they've got a lot of the content knowledge. They have no practical implementation knowledge. So I brought in the volunteer, the Peace Corps volunteers who are experts in education, because they did exist. And so it wasn't difficult for the locals who were like, local 2 hours away from me, to come and do it. But I brought some who are specialists and the mental health people like this specialist in, um, I don't have the words for it right now. IEPs. In deficiencies. So kids who are.

WIGGUM: [00:40:23] Learning disabilities.

GARRIDO: [00:40:23] Learning disabilities, maybe dyslexia, maybe just other things. They were doing WISC testing. I said, we had hot springs in Gracias, natural hot springs. So it wasn't tough because Peace Corps volunteers had all these vacation days they never used, to say, hey, why don't you use your vacation and come and spend two weeks with us and do a workshop for my teachers? Because this had grown now from the students. Once the teachers saw what I was doing with the students, the union wanted me. So I ended up doing it for the thousand teachers in the region.

WIGGUM: [00:40:53] Wow.

GARRIDO: [00:40:54] And again, my job was to set up just, this is how you do non-formal education technique. But when they wanted more content, I drew from other resources. I would bring in people from mental health, and this is what got me into trouble. So, uh, and I'll say her name, Ana de Ortiz, who was the Peace Corps ACP, are they called? The assistant? Okay, I had the supervisor, I forget what it was called. My supervisor was Angela and then it was Terry, who oversaw my sector. And then there was the education sector. So Ana Rosa came out to see me because, with Terry actually, because why was I working in schools? I was supposed to be working. And now if I don't know if it's still this way, but it used to be that half of the whatever their title was, these, half of the supervisors were U.S. based former Peace Corps volunteers, half were local Hondurans, which is great. I think they all should have been local Hondurans.

GARRIDO: [00:41:52] And I actually knew a couple of them, but not her at that time that well. I got to know her very well. And she came out because her volunteers, that was the excuse, had been coming and working in schools that were not under my authority. And she knew the head of the Ministry of Education, who was concerned that I was doing so much work in schools. So she came out, she saw what I was doing. Terry said, do you have a problem with this? She couldn't say no, but she said, well, if he's going to work in the schools, he has to report to me too. I said, okay, I can fill out another report. That's not a big deal. I don't care about that. I respect that. And I told her, I apologized profusely. If I had known that I had to speak with you, I would have done it. But you guys all say, you know, I see you once every four months. You know, I'm out, way out there.

WIGGUM: [00:42:42] Go out and do your stuff.

GARRIDO: [00:42:44] Do your stuff. And my, and my supervisor in Santa Rosa is very happy. The director of the Santa Rosa is very happy. Okay. Well, Ana Rosa, and during this time you should know Honduras was in a very difficult time. The military was very, very, um, active. Special forces were active in Honduras. U.S. Special Forces were very active because we were on the border with El Salvador. So there was the El Salvadoran conflict happening. There were the refugee camps in Honduras from El Salvador and Guatemala. You had the contra war happening in the south.

And there were, and I won't go into it today, but there were people coming through and out. I certainly met from all sides everybody. In fact, I met my counterpart who had been in Honduras running special forces, when I went to law school at Columbia.

WIGGUM: [00:43:35] Oh, wow.

GARRIDO: [00:43:36] We were in the same class. He actually won the social services scholarship to Columbia, which is called the Patino Fellowship, which I didn't know actually, it was, it was, they called it that was a military fellowship, which I had applied for. I didn't win this. But that's a whole other story. Um, so. So during this time we did have, um, there were people being disappeared. There was forced recruitment happening of local school, of locals, especially school, high school age kids. They would close the movie theaters during date night and raid it and bring kids out and drag them to the military.

WIGGUM: [00:44:17] Wow.

GARRIDO: [00:44:18] And I actually on a number of occasions, this is nowhere recorded anywhere, got into the trucks with my pass as a Peace Corps volunteer, bludgeoning it like it actually meant anything. And with my ID that I worked with the Ministry of Public Health and with Education to get my students out of being forcefully recruited, because they weren't supposed to be recruited if they were in school. And then also, there's a whole other story about how one of the, uh, the serious girlfriend that I had at the time, who I almost married but didn't marry and was dating, caught the eye of a local lieutenant of the, we had a military installation actually in the town at the, at the little prison that they had. And one that he got drunk and put a gun to my head because he wanted my girlfriend and I shouldn't be with her.

WIGGUM: [00:45:10] Well, I was going to ask you if there was ever any time that you were afraid.

GARRIDO: [00:45:14] Oh, yeah. That's when I, my first, you know, you think you're invincible until something like that happens. He put a gun to my head. *Ta*

niente. And, uh, it was interesting. We were actually in the local priest, Father Rudy's, in his, his I guess the casa coral, the priest house, checking out his collection. He likes Bengal tigers, photos of Bengal tigers that he had, with another woman, Rosario, who recently passed away from cancer, unfortunately. But she was in another room, an adjoining room. We were there talking when the colonel jumps in, puts a gun to my head, literally, like I'm showing you now, about a foot away. And at the window is his, uh, his assistant with a machine gun in the window saying, hands up, we heard that there are rebels here from El Salvador.

GARRIDO: [00:46:12] And in my mind, I could smell the breath of his alcohol like he is drunk. This all happened in a second. In my mind, it feels like still to this day, it feels like it was an hour, but it was literally a couple of seconds. Antonio's drunk. He's got a gun pointed to my head. Rudy is with me. He doesn't like Rudy. He thinks he's a rabble rouser. He wants to kill him too. I don't think he necessarily wants to kill me, but he wants to be with my girlfriend and he doesn't have problem killing me. Uh, it's been a good life. And somehow Rosario walked in at that moment, saw what was happening, and started saying, lieutenant, lieutenant. And like in his eye, the, something changed. You could see the flicker in his eye. He put the gun down and said, oh, I'm so sorry. I thought you were robbing the Father. Um, if Rosario wasn't there, I don't think I would be here today.

WIGGUM: [00:47:06] Wow. And Rosario was your girlfriend at the time?

GARRIDO: [00:47:08] No, no. She was just another person who was there because she was in this cultural society that we had formed, which also was threatening to them, although it still exists to this day. It was the Sociedad Cultural Lempira and it was about helping people, because part of mental health is self-esteem. So we built into the curriculum a whole thing about your Mayan heritage, because it was 500 years happening at that time, and the Lencan heritage of that area of Honduras more than the Mayan heritage, to be honest with you. The Lencans were workers for the Mayans. They did also amazing pottery and other stuff. Um. And maybe that's in the Peace Corps. I did, I do think I shared, I do think I shared that with my supervisor later, like a year later, because if I had told them that at that time, they would have pulled me out.

WIGGUM: [00:47:52] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:47:52] So I didn't say it. That was after I'd been re-upped though. But. But what was one weird thing about was Ana Rosa de Ortiz came to me one day and this, during this time there was this intelligence gathering happening. And she goes, I want you to write for me the names of all of the people that you train and all of the people who talk to them. And I said, I'll send you the list of the people who are trained. Why am I going to send you the people who talk to them?

WIGGUM: [00:48:19] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:48:20] And she goes, well, I want the names of people in your cultural society. I'm like, no. We have a list of who the members are. It was very unusual. Now, she was married to Colonel Ortiz, so I don't know to what extent Colonel Ortiz. But again, that's what made me realize. I told people, look, I said, you know, I'm not involved in this stuff. And it's happening though, and you have to understand it's happening. So anyway, to make a long story and not to go down rabbit holes anymore, I ended up integrating myself into that society and becoming part of it. And that's the difference I was saying before. I don't know if I changed the lives of any of the kids who we did workshops with. Probably not. You know, like I say, Mr. Urban was a great science teacher and I remember a couple of classes he had because they made me think. They might say, oh, I remember that gringo and he made me think that day.

WIGGUM: [00:49:09] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:49:09] But the people who changed were my close friends. So it was my counterpart who I'd become friends with. His life changed. Without realizing it, he started picking my brain. I know a lot about small business. He started picking my brain about small business. He left the health center and started a small business. He now has one of the largest Home Depot kind of organizations in that region.

WIGGUM: [00:49:29] Nice.

GARRIDO: [00:49:29] Because he was a smart guy. He had a college degree and he figured out. And he set up now scholarships for local students. He, he is the good employer. He is the good, uh, business for the local people.

WIGGUM: [00:49:44] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:49:44] Because he gives them, he doesn't gouge them on prices of things and all sorts of stuff. You know, he does community development like I always think, look, I live in the United States. I live in a capitalist society. Let's take advantage of the good of it, you know?

WIGGUM: [00:49:56] Yeah, yeah. And you're still in contact with him?

GARRIDO: [00:49:59] Uh, with his, with his children. Yeah. He's gotten very ill recently. So but, I mean, his sons were like my younger brothers. My youngest brother, when I left for the Peace Corps, he was five. And then I pop in and here's a family with a five, a seven, and an eight year old. So I've been at their weddings. But even the group, at the time in Honduras, there was a big thing. Your graduating class had a sponsor, a father, a godfather, a *padrino*, and these kids, God bless them. They, uh, four, four, went the traditional. We pay the, we ask the local politician to be our sponsor, pay for our big party, and we give him a ribbon. And they raised the money on their own and made me their sponsor and their godfather for the day. And then the irony of all that is that in that class of 114 was my future wife.

WIGGUM: [00:50:56] Oh, nice.

GARRIDO: [00:50:57] Now, I knew her at the time, but I reconnected with her ten years later. And I almost stayed in Honduras at that time, you should know. So I, when my time ended, my two years, I said, you know, the work is just beginning. You know, is there a possibility I can stay? And they said, yeah, you could apply and stay for a third year. We'll see if it's approved. It was approved and it had to be requested by the Honduran government. That was the issue at the time. I don't know if it's changed. Then the Honduran government requested that I stay for another year and

then my counterparts told me, if you want to stay for another year, that's fine. But if you stay, it's because you're going to stay here. You're going to stay for another ten years. Because the work you've begun, you're only going to have an impact if you really stay more time. If you're still about you want to go and study more, you need to go do that now.

GARRIDO: [00:51:48] And they were right. I wanted to go and continue further education. It wasn't to get my doctorate in literature. I've always had the social service bug in me, so it was to go to law school or something like that, and I did end up going to law school. I went to Columbia Law School and I did my master's at Columbia as well. And that set me up for life. But like I always say, you know, it was Bucknell that set me up for the Peace Corps and the Peace Corps that set me up for Columbia. And then Columbia set me up for where I am today. And that's the American dream. That's the American pipeline. That's the dream I think that we want for more people in our own country and we want for people in other countries, which was why I was, it always appealed to me about the Peace Corps. You know, look, I studied political science. I studied John Kenneth Galbraith, all those people who said, you know, look, the way the Peace Corps was structured wasn't necessarily the best way you do community development work.

GARRIDO: [00:52:39] You know, you don't say, oh look, there's a disease and we happen to have this vaccine. It cures it. No, you know. Oh, what do they need in Latin America? They need money and technical assistance. We got that. We can solve their problems. Doesn't work that way, as we know now, many years later. And, you know, and Galbraith wrote about it in his books and many other political scientists. But what always appealed to me about Peace Corps were the two other angles of it. I'm sharing who I am and who I am is a representation of my culture and my country. And for me, the United States is about diversity, it's waves of immigration. It's waves of tolerance, it's waves of struggling. We have a Constitution which is a, it's even though, you know, when it began, it had slavery embedded in it. Those guys were smart enough to know things will change. Slavery itself was a compromise within the Constitution. It ended up getting undone because the Constitution was a living, breathing, debatable, working document.

WIGGUM: [00:53:36] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:53:37] I still believe that I'm not a literalist like they are, uh, many other judges. I think it's really about where society moves us and takes us together. And that for me was what Peace Corps represented in the sharing of who I was, but more importantly in what I brought back. People have no idea where Honduras is still. People do not understand. I mean, it's timely, what's going on at the border. I can tell you, sure. I have no doubt in my mind that among now the thousands of people who are in the border, there is going to be, because they are in Mexico, a bunch of drug dealers and other bad people. They've infiltrated. Yeah, they always do. Sure, there's going to be. I actually met once a person from the Mossad in Honduras. There's everyone and their mother. But 99% of those people, they've walked barefoot.

WIGGUM: [00:54:29] Over thousands of miles.

GARRIDO: [00:54:30] Something you would not do with children because they think this is their only alternative, because in their country, there's not. And I know the president of Honduras. How do I know him? Because I dated his cousin. Actually, technically, it's his aunt because it's a generation removed. When I was in Honduras, I lived in the power center of power of Honduras without me realizing it. My letter of recommendation to Columbia Law School was the current president's half brother, Marco Augusto Hernandez. He was secretary of Congress at the time. Now, did I know when I was at the Rio Lempira on Semana Santa, which is Easter Week, with Luisa and with her, with, uh, with Juan Orlando Hernandez, or Joh like they call him, J-O-H, when we were swimming there that he's going to become the president of Honduras? No, but I should have known because they were grooming him for that.

GARRIDO: [00:55:25] They sent him here to get a college degree in New York State. He went back. They set him up in the post that his brother had had a secretary of Congress. He learned how all the politics work. And I won't go into the politics of Honduras, but basically they got another strongman of now, it's a bigger oligarchy in structure. And the people are leaving

because people disappear in Honduras still. People get killed. A woman who spoke out against him and came out on Facebook has disappeared recently. It's sad. It happened when I was there. It continued to happen. It's still happening. That structure has not changed and that has a lot to do with us and not a lot to do with us. It has more to do with the people in power knowing how to work the international system. It's not just the United States. It's Japan. It is Holland. It is China. They're in power and they're going to stay in power.

WIGGUM: [00:56:14] What was your daily life like, like you had your own apartment?

GARRIDO: [00:56:18] Oh, yes. And in the first six months, or I say first three months, I stayed with the volunteers. Then I stayed in this, because you don't know any better. I stayed in this, you know, basically you call it like a pension. It was like, you know, row apartments. I had a room with a window. It was like a jail cell, until finally I was able to get to know a family who said, oh, you know, our cousin has an extra room that you can rent. And that was, um, that was the, oh, gosh. I spoke with her the other day. Uh, with. No. No, that's not the Bolles family. Well it's, it's.

WIGGUM: [00:57:00] Anyway.

GARRIDO: [00:57:00] Anyway, my memory's not what it used to be with the names. And so then I had my own apartment and again it was like, I'm living in the town. I've got my own single apartment. But no, my, my day was, uh, much like my days now. I would set up so at least once a month I was a week in the office in the area, and then the other three weeks I was traveling around the department.

WIGGUM: [00:57:24] I mean, how would you travel? Just on local transportation?

GARRIDO: [00:57:27] Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I was work part. I mean, yes, if in the beginning. But I became part of the health center. So I just coordinated my trips with them. I tried never to go alone. It would be, I told people, I said, when you're doing non-formal education where you're bringing all these people together and you are not necessarily wasting their time, but you're taking up their time, you think they don't have things to do? They got kids

to raise. They got water to walk to the river to go get. There's lots to do in the day. So for them to come and spend an hour with you, we're entertainment. So we structured, if we're going to go to the town, you know, I always call it the audit. You know, why can't auditors all go to the nonprofit during the same week? No, they go different times during the year, which is incredible time and effort resources.

WIGGUM: [00:58:11] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [00:58:12] So I would go with vectors. I would combine with the early childhood people. I would combine with the maternal infant care. Find out what their schedule was, and then just put my schedule on top of theirs. So I'd go out in, at the time it was Toyotas or I'd go out with one other guy on a motorcycle. Learn how to drive a motorcycle, realize I'm really bad at it, and let somebody else drive the motorcycle. But no, we set up. It was a traveling carnival show. And then we actually, uh, once a year, which would start now in January, we did what I called the festival tour. In Honduras, in Lempira anyway, every village has its own festival, kind of like their own Mardi Gras or their own Carnival, and that's what they call it, *carnavales* or *fiestas patronales*. And it's all tied to the saints. In Lempira, it begins. So if Lempira is this piece of paper.

WIGGUM: [00:59:07] Here.

GARRIDO: [00:59:07] If Lempira is this, and I'll just use it as a square piece of paper, okay? In the northern area had Gracias, which was close to Santa Rosa. But then you have the southern area, which is all border with El Salvador and then with another poor province, Intibuca. So along here there were, there's 100 villages, but there were like about 20 key villages. And literally the dates would follow the villages of having these festivals where, what would happen? All, like in the old days, these traveling carnivals would go with them, the vendors would all go, the food vendors. We would just go with them. And so we would be able to structure in the daytime after, when people were hungover, but before they would start partying again, but they were hanging around, these workshops. Because schools were closed, so we could use the schools. And they still do it to this day. I helped to set up

a system where it just saves everyone time. This is the day where we're coming.

WIGGUM: [01:00:09] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:00:10] And as part of that, that's how I got hooked up to medical brigades.

WIGGUM: [01:00:14] Mm hmm.

GARRIDO: [01:00:15] And what you do with medical brigades is you just try to make the best of them. Nothing is worse than a medical brigade without a purpose. So the medical brigades that are dentists that are going to areas of Honduras and they have schedules with local health centers and saying, we're coming here twice a year for this, to do work. They're fantastic. There is no dental care. People go to these, they call them dental mechanics, who destroy their teeth with instruments you don't want to know about. Paying for dentists is incredibly expensive like it is here. So to be able to say, you know, dentists are coming, that's a beautiful thing. Keep doing it. I just help them set up so they could connect with the people. And rather than set up their own system of intake, follow the medical, use the health center, use those people because you invalidate their purpose when you show up and take over their health center. People don't think that they actually are, are as good as you, or as it educated as you. So with dentists, that's fine. Those who go to do the special operations for mouth.

WIGGUM: [01:01:17] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:01:17] That's all good too. What is terrible? We're general practitioners, and I don't care if you're just secular, non-secular, faith based, if you are going to a village you've never been to before and you don't have a relationship with and you're just going to parachute in and we're going to bring medication and we're going to provide doctors for you. You're doing more damage. You are undoing the year of community development prevention that those people have been doing. You are getting people who are coming and they're going to walk for hours to you

to basically tell you that their back hurts and you're giving them back pills for their back because you think. It's not helping. Their back is always going to hurt. Now, if you were there, you had a long-term relationship or you structure with the doctor, perhaps they would tell you, well, in addition to my back is hurting, I've got this problem. I've got that problem.

GARRIDO: [01:02:08] But most of these things, which is why the best tool I was ever given were all the books from the Hesperian Foundation, the Where There is No Doctor, Where There is No Dentist. They've developed how to help health workers learn, which when I discovered it, I incorporated it into my training stuff.

WIGGUM: [01:02:26] Great.

GARRIDO: [01:02:26] That, and I still donate to them. She's still doing great work out there in California. That is the best tool because they were books I could leave with people in their language. They, the books are even structured with pictograms so those who weren't at that time as literate, because literacy has come a long way since then, thankfully. But the brigade. So I ended up joining these brigades to basically try to mitigate damage. I did four of them because they were in my region and my job was to try to talk to the leaders who had set up, but they didn't know where we're going. And so luckily this one group set up to structure it with the health center. So the health center wasn't going to do what I was going to do about pre-work and prep work and go out to the other health centers and say these people are coming. What's happened in the past with them? This is what's happened. Okay, let's do this. Let's do that. So we could at least have follow-up on the visits.

WIGGUM: [01:03:18] Yeah, yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:03:19] You know, again, something small, but it was about systems and that's why I ended up being the boring guy about systems and the Peace Corps.

WIGGUM: [01:03:26] Did you take any vacations while you were there?

GARRIDO: [01:03:28] Yes, I took. But my vacations, um, I knew I was going to do traveling in Latin America afterwards, so I didn't bother with that.

WIGGUM: [01:03:40] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:03:41] And on weekends we could go to Guatemala if we wanted to. So that wasn't a big thing. So I got to see Tikal and all those things, you know. So, no, my vacations. I was forced to take a vacation back to the United States when I re-upped for a year.

WIGGUM: [01:03:52] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:03:53] So I came back to see my family. And then I didn't have to take vacations back to the U.S. because I came twice as a facilitator for Honduran business people with Partners for America. Was that what it was called? Partnership for America? It was also started with Peace Corps at the time. It no longer kind of exists, and its goal was the reverse Peace Corps. It was you bring people from a foreign country to the United States.

WIGGUM: [01:04:17] Mm hmm.

GARRIDO: [01:04:17] But it got kind of moved into we bring business people for training here.

WIGGUM: [01:04:20] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:04:21] So I did reverse. I was a facilitator. We went to Mississippi and Vermont. It was done with another foundation. And so I was, I was loaned by the Peace Corps to them. So those were my trips back. And then my vacations, I just did local stuff. I went to La Ceiba, I went to the coast, but I tried to mix it with work. So I went to the northern coast of Honduras, and then I repaid the favor of all those people who'd come and done training for me.

WIGGUM: [01:04:46] Yeah, yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:04:46] I went and did stuff for them. And then.

WIGGUM: [01:04:49] And were there a lot of other Peace Corps volunteers in your area, since there were so many in-country?

GARRIDO: [01:04:55] Not when I, for a while I was the only one. And then they started sending in environment ones, which was good. So they sent this guy, Bruce Gunn, who was fantastic. He helped set up the national park structure there.

WIGGUM: [01:05:08] Oh, wow.

GARRIDO: [01:05:08] In Honduras, which Peace Corps volunteers did in Costa Rica. So it's nice that they're doing it somewhere else. Um. But in that area, because Honduras already had some national parks that were very famous in. But Celaque, which is the highest point in Honduras, 2,849 meters. And it's a cloud forest. He really helped set up what is their visitor center and all this other stuff. Now, he made Ben Box's Central America travel book, I think he's still in it. Not his name may not be in it, but the center is there. A couple of others came to Gracias to work in the school system, but I have to be honest with you. And then this is, this is outside of my group of volunteers. This was a point of contention for other volunteers. I would go to some local reunions that would happen in Santa Rosa. We had a house there that we all chipped in and used because if you had to travel, it was good to spend the night there.

WIGGUM: [01:06:00] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:06:00] But I know people, many people, and this was my tension with my own fellow Americans. They thought I'd gone native because I spent more time in the country with the people that I worked with than with them, that I thought I was better than them. I didn't think I was better than them. I just, I was like, I don't have time to deal with you in country. You know, when first people first came, I introduced them to the town, I showed them around. But, you know, um, I wasn't there to train them. They had to have their own experience, you know, and many did. But we interacted if, a couple ended up dating people that I knew who were Honduran. So we

had interactions. But there was some friction at times because, um, you know. I can't even remember this stuff now, it's so long ago. You know, I would go work in villages in a different way than other people would go work in villages.

WIGGUM: [01:06:53] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:06:53] And they would feel that I was badmouthing them or saying they did things wrong. And I didn't. I just did my thing and they did their thing.

WIGGUM: [01:06:59] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:07:00] Many thought that I got too involved with the local culture, and because of that, with the local politics. I never helped anyone run for an office. I never did that. But Honduras is a political place, so if you are doing things then, you know, and I worked the bureaucracy of the school system to do stuff. And so, you know, and perhaps so, you know? I think the, to talk about bureaucracy, but I guess was my, I'll call it my comeuppance. But I think it was a valuable lesson I learned. I had an ego. I was in my mid twenties. I helped establish this kind of structure. They did this for the first time in the health, the health centers across the country, they did, um, it was a contest of projects. Like, what is the best project in the country? And every health center, every health region could nominate a project.

GARRIDO: [01:07:50] So my psychologist, my supervisor came to me and said, Yancy, why don't we present your community facilitator project? I'm like, okay. I said, I like it. She goes. So I wrote, and I'm a Spanish literature major so I can write in Spanish. So I, it was very formal. It's kind of like the grants you write today. I answered 100 questions, laid out all the framework. It was an echo environmental framework that I used and all this other stuff. Laid it out. We had photos of everything that we did from turtle races, mental health day. It's a lot of activities. But I wrote it out. It was a wonderful rubric. Submitted it and then never heard anything back. And then the lady said, oh Yancy, it wasn't picked. Another project was

picked. Well, it turned out the other project ended up winning on the national level. So it was released, what the project was.

GARRIDO: [01:08:45] I kid you not. It was my framework, verbatim. But they had changed the words for another project in a different part of the region. Now you can imagine at that time, my ego, I was so upset. I was appalled, I was cheated. It was taken from me. I didn't get the recognition, you know. You know, it passed. On hindsight, and this happened really when I was in law school in reflection, you leave it. I was like, boy, you know, you were really stupid in your arrogance. What you wanted to happen happened. You set up a framework that was so good, it got co-opted.

WIGGUM: [01:09:27] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:09:28] The people who, who, the project that, they did a good project. Okay. Their project was about teaching teachers, I'm sorry, teaching health workers about something else and they never really did your thing, but that's what got presented. It's a model that's been adopted by the country and is getting adopted by Central America. Not all of it, but portions of it.

WIGGUM: [01:09:50] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:09:50] I'm like, your name's nowhere but what you said you wanted to do, you got done.

WIGGUM: [01:09:55] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:09:55] And now I'm very proud of that. But at the time I was really upset. And you know, again, it's life, we're humans, we make. I'm still crying about it, you know, I'm not crying about not winning it, but just how I stupidly reacted. I mean, I just became what everything I didn't want to be. But, you know, you're human. And that has really served me well. That was the biggest lesson that I have now taken it with me. You know, I do work now where I'm meeting, I'll go on site visits to see nonprofits in New York City. And, oh Yancy, you understand what's going on with poor people. I don't understand poor people. I'm not a poor person anymore.

Yeah, I was poor growing up, but even poor growing up, I had a two family parent household. I wasn't a single kid or a foster care kid. Oh yeah, but you understand the health workers who work with them. Not anymore. I worked for legal aid. I did have clients where I did legal services work and met with them after law school, but I don't do that work anymore.

GARRIDO: [01:10:51] Oh, Yancy, but you work with their supervisors. You were a supervisor of people like that. Yeah, but I don't do that work anymore. The closest I can do now is I can talk to executive directors. They're dealing with back office infrastructure challenges. How do I manage people? What do I do? They need someone to talk to. They can call me and I can be an ear for them. You have to know where you are and your place. And this is good hierarchy. People need to learn things and share practices. And, you know, my, I fell into philanthropy just quickly, although it's because of Peace Corps. I tried doing the corporate law thing. I had loans to pay. I graduated law school with, you know, \$100,000 in loans, which would be more now. So I tried being a corporate lawyer. I worked at two big law firms. I could do the work. It just wasn't for me. It wasn't my environment. Yes, because I was Latino struggling in a really, really white male environment.

GARRIDO: [01:11:51] But yes, I mean, it was tough to help rich Brazilians hide money in offshore companies in the Cayman Islands, or help get a bond deal through that I knew was going to put my state in debt for years, because we did bond and future interest rate bond swaps and all these other things. Intellectually, it was all fascinating, but it wasn't me, and it wasn't the kind of law that I thought I was going to practice. Then I did human rights law. I did asylum cases. I was a consultant. I couldn't pay the bills. And my dream job of working with a human rights organization, because there are not many of those jobs, popped up but not at that time to be able to do it. So I ended up doing going back to Columbia and for a year I was doing administration. I basically was the assistant director of the Center for Public Interest Law, helping shepherd Columbia Law School students into nonprofits, internships, setting up systems to guide them.

GARRIDO: [01:12:51] And I ran the international placement program. We sent every year 50 students to go do a Peace Corps kind of thing in law in a foreign

country, which I had done myself. I did that in Brazil in law school. I didn't mention it. In law school, I did three months, I extended it to five months actually, in Brazil doing civil rights work. And the same thing happened. I was assigned to work at the university where all the white Brazilians were. Of course, the definition of white in Brazil is different than the definition of.

WIGGUM: [01:13:21] Yeah, yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:13:22] But I was closer to that definition than anything else. And in the university they were doing all this thinking, but they weren't really doing all the work that was happening on the ground. I happened to bump into and meet by accident over coffee one day the head of one of the major civil rights organizations. Civil rights in terms of not doing protesting but actually doing civil rights cases. Defending the black Brazilian boy who was near the scene of a crime and got arrested because he was near the scene of a crime.

WIGGUM: [01:13:51] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:13:51] Stuff that still happens here, but not as, it was more frequent and still is more frequent in Brazil. And also the condition of the prisons. He was at Igualdades SOS Racismo and he himself was a man working for 20 militant Brazilian women. That was the nonprofit. I ended up working with him for eight months and living with him and his family, and they're still good friends to this day. I sent my daughter to go spend a month with, actually two months with them in Brazil, between high school and college. So, um, but it's Peace Corps all over again. It's sharing cultures and bringing back what you learn here. And so.

WIGGUM: [01:14:30] So that's one of the ways that sort of Peace Corps is continuing to impact your life.

GARRIDO: [01:14:34] Yeah, no, no, Peace Corps impacts everything that I do. And then it helped me make that choice of after I was doing law school administration, I'm like, this isn't for me. I went to work for a nonprofit. And then I discovered two things at the nonprofit. I did, I had 100 cases a day helping people get their food stamps, Social Security benefits. I did all the

civil side stuff, domestic violence, simple divorces, all that stuff. I discovered two other things. I really love teaching and training people. I'm not really good at day-to-day. I never could have been a school teacher. I never could have been that health worker they wanted in Honduras who would have seen clients every day.

WIGGUM: [01:15:14] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:15:15] It's not me. And also I like the history of law. I like everything about law. I don't like doing law.

WIGGUM: [01:15:21] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:15:22] I like systems law, doing cases even though I do them well. And also, and this was the Peace Corps law school kind of coming together. I was working for the Passaic County Legal Aid Society. And part of my job was food stamp cases where people got denied their food stamps. Well, I learned very quickly, gosh, it took, it took sometimes up to a month for someone who had been cut off from food stamps to go to court with the administrative law judge, adjudicate it, and then get their food stamps back on. And I would discover that sometimes the reason that, most of the time, not sometimes, most of the time the reason they didn't get their food stamps was they forgot a piece of paper. They filled out something wrong. The caseworker made a mistake. The caseworker didn't like how the person talked to them that day and cut them.

WIGGUM: [01:16:12] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:16:13] It was an issue that could be literally resolved in a day.

WIGGUM: [01:16:15] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:16:16] What would I discover if I went before the ALJ would always say, do you want to have a conference beforehand to see if you can settle this? And policy at our office was not to do that. What if I did that? In one month, I resolved 152 cases that would have taken. And people got their benefits on that day, because I knew the statutes back and forth. I went to

Columbia Law School, for Christ's sake. I knew every single statute and how to manipulate them, and these people were just doing it wrong. And all I was telling the judge was, I'm just asking them to reinforce their policy. I never blamed it on the person or said they did a bad job. I learned that in the Peace Corps. I said, look, they just made a mistake and the policy just wasn't applied right to my client with AIDS who needs their food stamps. The judge was happy. This was fast. And the people, the clients were happy. They were not happy at my office. Our grant was tied to adjudications.

WIGGUM: [01:17:09] Oh wow.

GARRIDO: [01:17:09] My salary was paid by my grant, that grant.

WIGGUM: [01:17:12] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:17:12] So we didn't get reimbursed for all those 152 cases because I settled them. And that's when I realized, you know what, I'm a systems person, I've got to be somewhere where we're working on these systems or helping people who work on these systems and changing these practices. And I thought that was going to be going on higher up in Legal Service of New Jersey to policy. But that's when somebody I went to law school with at Columbia called me up and said, I'm at the Robin Hood Foundation. We're looking for a program officer. You have all of the criteria that we need. They wanted somebody who had on the ground national and domestic community development experience in the areas that I was working with at Passaic County Legal Aid Society, who had a corporate background, who had gone to an Ivy League school, that wasn't stated, but that was kind of understood, and who was, uh, spoke multiple languages. I also speak Portuguese fluently. I learned that.

WIGGUM: [01:18:12] In Brazil?

GARRIDO: [01:18:12] Before and after. Again, I'm a, if you're a student of literature and of language, it's easy to pick up these other romance languages.

WIGGUM: [01:18:20] Especially Spanish, or Brazil it's Portuguese. No?

GARRIDO: [01:18:23] English. No, it's English to Brazilian. The big mistake people make is how things are written is what's important. Now you learn you, if you try, the people who learn Spanish can't understand Portuguese. The Portuguese understand Spanish. You know why? Because there's more, there's more sounds and consonants that exist in Portuguese that aren't used in Spanish. And if you just hear, if you're a Portuguese speaker and you hear Spanish, it sounds like a slow Portuguese. If you are a Spanish speaker hearing Portuguese, you can't make it. I'll just tell you one, one word that you would know. You've heard the last name Andrade, right? Andrade, Spanish. In Portugal they go Andrade. In Brazil, Andrade. It sounds Italian. If you look at it on a paper, they're spelled the same way.

WIGGUM: [01:19:07] Oh, wow.

GARRIDO: [01:19:08] The same goes with how grammar works. Portuguese grammar is more complex, slightly more complex than Spanish grammar, and it's used differently. So in Portuguese. Um, okay. So in Spanish, no is no. So in Portuguese people say no, no, all the time. And in Spanish they don't understand what. In Portuguese, no is *nao*, N-A-O with the tilde. No, N-O, is the pulling together of two articles. In Spanish you have *en la casa*, *en el car*. In the house. In Portuguese, it's M-U. Well, it is house, so *la casa*. And Portuguese, *em la casa*. They combine the M and the la and they go *na*. So it's *na casa*. *Na escritoire*. You're in your desk. So when you're saying *na* in Portuguese, you're saying two articles.

WIGGUM: [01:20:11] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:20:12] So it's simple things that, you know that if you're a student of literature and you've studied the grammar and you can see the differences, then it's easy.

WIGGUM: [01:20:18] Yeah. Can I get back to.

GARRIDO: [01:20:20] Sorry.

WIGGUM: [01:20:22] When you first came back to the United States.

GARRIDO: [01:20:23] Yes.

WIGGUM: [01:20:23] What was that like for you after three plus years?

GARRIDO: [01:20:26] It was culture shock. Huge culture shock. I was in a village with, it's different now because now there's all the phones and everything. But I didn't know what "where's the beef" meant. Because that happened when I was away. So I was culturally behind. My parents were frustrated with me because I learned how to speak Honduran Spanish, which is much slower than Cuban Spanish. I came back with a lot of machismo, unconscious things that I did, like not washing my plates. Not because I didn't want to, I washed my plates in Honduras. They wouldn't let me. So I'm sitting there. My grandmother is like, you think I'm going to wash that plate? And things like that. Law school was probably the best environment I could go into in the first three months. It was a distraction. I had to read 1,000 pages a night. So I just focused on that.

WIGGUM: [01:21:15] So you went almost directly into law school.

GARRIDO: [01:21:16] I literally walked off the plane and walked into a classroom the next day.

WIGGUM: [01:21:21] Wow.

GARRIDO: [01:21:22] I didn't go to the law school orientation. Nothing like that. I walked.

WIGGUM: [01:21:24] That would be.

GARRIDO: [01:21:25] It was fine. I was, I was high energy already. I was high energy coming back. The crash happened in February. When I came out of the, I had really high grades in law school and the first semester I could have gone, if I'd kept them up, to law review and I crashed, it all hit me. I hadn't processed my experience in Honduras for four years. I hadn't processed culture shock. I hadn't processed the differences of everything, the noise at the malls. I brought back a parasite with me which damaged my

intestine. And so I weighed 119 pounds when I came back because I had caught this. I'd gotten sick with giardia before coming back, which was my bane of my existence there. And I got photos. I mean, I was pale. And then I just crashed and it was just too much, too much pressure, too much everything. My grades, I had a good year long.

WIGGUM: [01:22:25] GPA?

GARRIDO: [01:22:25] It's not a GPA in law. It's a whole different thing.

WIGGUM: [01:22:26] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:22:27] But I certainly dropped enough second semester that I barely passed a couple of classes. I didn't make law review and I didn't care. I mean, I almost didn't go back to law school. I almost dropped out. You, again, I don't know how. It's funny. In a way, it is a grief thing because you are leaving this, if you had a good experience, this high. I also, um, I also. Oh, okay. So the other thing that happened to me in Honduras is that I did end up meeting somebody there who had a child, my daughter, but I did not marry her. So that was still in the back of my mind. And I didn't know I had a child when I left Honduras. I found out after I left Honduras. So I actually now, I've had a 30 whatever year, because I would go back to Honduras to see my daughter. I did not raise my oldest daughter. My oldest daughter was raised by her mother who married somebody else.

GARRIDO: [01:23:29] And I did have a relationship with her, although she didn't find out that I was her father till she was 16. I was able to get her recognized. That was a whole other story of how I got her recognized and what we had to do. But Honduran recognized her as my daughter, because if you're born into the daughter of a matrimonial, Honduras doesn't matter the biological father, it's not considered. I actually had to get the biological father. That was a hard conversation. I'm sorry. The non-biological father to agree to not fight my request for custody of her. So Honduras would put her name, my name on her birth certificate. So then the U.S. Government would accept her legally as my daughter. And she is here now in Dallas, a U.S. citizen, and my two grandchildren.

WIGGUM: [01:24:17] How nice.

GARRIDO: [01:24:17] So I brought her over when she was 18 because there was no opportunities for her in Honduras. I paid for her to go to a private English speaking school. It wasn't that good though, so she didn't even learn English. But here she is. And she's set up in Dallas. Now, because I kept going back, that's when I reconnected in San Pedro Sula many years later with my current wife and with her daughter, who is not my biological daughter, but I adopted her and I've known her since she was born. And then, you know, I was involved with her mother since she was six. And when they finally came over, I was able to adopt her when she was 11. And she just graduated Fairleigh Dickinson University. So, uh, and she's working at the W in Hoboken and she loves tourism and hotel. That's her thing.

GARRIDO: [01:25:04] So, yes, Honduras had a big impact because I really looked at Honduras. Um, I didn't plan to have a daughter there out of, out of wedlock. But I did become part of that culture. And again, if I had known that I had left, had a daughter in Honduras, I probably would have stayed. I wouldn't have left. I would have done a different thing because family has always been primary for me.

WIGGUM: [01:25:26] How did you find out?

GARRIDO: [01:25:31] Um, I'll tell you later how I found out. It's a long, long story. But when I found out, it was, it was easy to confirm. It was easy to confirm because, well, you can't see my hair because I don't have any more. I had black hair and brown hair, but I was born with blond hair. And we have a side of our Cuban family that had blond hair. And in this Honduran family with a long line of how people look, there was this, uh.

WIGGUM: [01:25:58] Blond.

GARRIDO: [01:25:58] Blond and, uh, you know, and believe me, getting a daughter recognized in two different countries is, is, a bit of a challenge. But I learned how to work the bureaucracy. And by working I don't mean

subverting it, I mean just how it works, getting what you need in front of the person that you need.

WIGGUM: [01:26:16] Finding a way to do it.

GARRIDO: [01:26:17] And getting everything done legally and appropriately. But sometimes you've got to give it a little, a little grease to just get it moving because it just stalls sometimes, not because of anybody's fault. It's just a paper. It gets accidentally filed in the wrong place. It took two years for my wife and daughter. I married my, I did do everything you're supposed to do. I married my wife in Honduras because there was no way to bring her daughter with her here. She could have come here. But I wasn't going to have another child left behind. So I married in Honduras and I had her, and she should have come over in eight months. But paperwork got misfiled. It took two years to get them over and it actually took a contact I know knowing somebody at Homeland Security, Homeland, um, Office of Homeland Security to just look at the file, to find it, and say this should have been processed a year ago and processing it.

WIGGUM: [01:27:09] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:27:10] You know, and I'm always thankful to those people who, again, if there had been a problem, you know, not going to tell you. But it wasn't a problem. It was just that it wasn't followed appropriately.

WIGGUM: [01:27:19] Yeah. Is there anything else you want to say about Peace Corps or your experience?

GARRIDO: [01:27:23] Yeah, I still think it's a valuable thing. I think we need it. I mean, the, if. I may not have been as active in the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Honduras, but I'm very active in all the things that have to do with educating people about what's going on in Central America in my daily life and when there are campaigns that pop up. Liberia wouldn't be Liberia today without returned Peace Corps volunteers. We've had Peace Corps volunteers now serve in all sorts of positions of government, and they bring just a perspective of we live in a big world and we need to understand our indirect impact that you may not think we're having, but

everything that we do. When I was in Honduras and Clinton beat Bush, people in Honduras did not believe that Bush was going to cede power to Clinton. And that sounds funny. But, you know, in Honduras, that hasn't happened recently.

WIGGUM: [01:28:20] Well, that was the big thing when Obama got elected, too, people couldn't believe that, A, somebody not from a rich political family had won.

GARRIDO: [01:28:29] Exactly.

WIGGUM: [01:28:29] And B, that he would be allowed to take power.

GARRIDO: [01:28:32] And we don't, you know, what's, what. Everyone identifies different things that make the secret sauce of the United States. Thinking as a lawyer, there's a couple of things that just don't exist in a lot of these countries. You know, we take for granted our judicial system because it's a system based on faith. People believe in their day in court. You're indoctrinated in this, not so much in school, in TV programs, since you grow up. You'll have your day in court. Yes, there are problems and excesses. This is why Black Lives Matter, these other things have come to challenge this. What does it mean to have a fair, independent judiciary and a country of laws? Life is life. Humans are humans. We're all going to have bias. But is there a way that you'll eventually have your day in court? We have retroactive justice. You're going to get arrested, but then you have to be proven innocent. In most countries in the world that doesn't happen. It's totally opposite. It's very rare. And so that we keep promoting this.

GARRIDO: [01:29:27] And what does that, how does that happen? It happens because there's an independent judiciary. In Honduras, I'll use the example because I know. Those in power behind the scenes, which a lot of them are drug dealers, understand this faith, which is why they kill judges. They kill prosecutors. They kill anything that will allow a rule of law, which is rule of law, is a system of belief that the U.S. supported with structures that reinforce that belief that you do get fairness. It's not perfect, but there's a fairness to it. We need to keep that alive. That's why I'm

scared about all the rhetoric. I am liberal. That's me. But I have friends who are conservative. But we can't have dialogue. We can't have discourse. Where are the days when Clinton and Dole would cut a deal? Nobody was happy. But we move forward as a country. The same goes with how law is done. It's never perfect, but we move forward because something is unjust and we don't get caught in rhetoric and we move together.

GARRIDO: [01:30:34] It's not evolution, it's just movement, but it's got to be a movement. And Peace Corps is about that. And if anything, I think it's valuable. I think we need to promote getting. The more people who are exposed to other things in other cultures, the more they can question their upbringing and then validate what makes sense and what doesn't. And not get caught in an echo chamber of cacophony, which reinforces antisemitism and all sorts of things that are happening now. I'm not Jewish, but that's what's on the news today. And I'm a recovering Catholic. I'm not a practicing Catholic anymore. I just can't accept the things that are going on in the Catholic Church and its structures. And it has to take a look at itself. And it seems like there's a pope that's trying to do this, but there are systems in place that I just, I can't accept patriarchy anymore. And it's not that I'm the biggest feminist, but just it's wrong. Things are wrong.

GARRIDO: [01:31:28] Bringing things to light is what Peace Corps is about, helping people expose. And if anything, I just, you know, wish that when, and maybe it's not when you're recruiting people, but when you're down there, it's helping people understand what your role is when you come back.

WIGGUM: [01:31:44] Mm hmm.

GARRIDO: [01:31:44] There wasn't enough preparation about preparing for you when you come back. Here's what you should do. You should be sharing these stories, not just, hey, it's been 30 years, let's put some archives in. But you want to be a Peace Corps volunteer? Hear about the stories. And you see this written, you see this in the Peace Corps Facebook. Everyone has these experiences, because how can you not be changed by cultures when you're involved with them? And that's what makes, you know, and

I'm really not all that different and there's no superiority. If there's any superiority, it's because of privilege. And privilege comes in many shapes, ways, and forms beyond race and color and beyond class. And it's understanding that makes us better and it's what we strive to do every day.

GARRIDO: [01:32:24] I mean, people talk about being Christian or being, you know, other faiths or religions. It's being human. And if we want to survive, and this really takes me back to the early days of law school, I mean, you know, if we want to survive, what does it mean to be human? What are the basic things that you need and what do you deserve? You know, I'm still appalled that we don't guarantee, truly guarantee health care for children, you know, but let's debate it. Let's just not get stuck in a quagmire of nothing happens. Because when nothing happens, we don't progress as a country and it's hurting us.

WIGGUM: [01:33:00] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:33:01] So that's, that's my soapbox.

WIGGUM: [01:33:03] Well.

GARRIDO: [01:33:03] But it's all because the Peace Corps and Peace Corps just helped me fine tune and reflect because I tell people it's the greatest graduate education you could ever have. I went and got my master's of international affairs at the School of National Affairs at Columbia. The smartest people I've ever met. They were killing themselves to pay money to get the experience that I basically got for free. And I wish more people had that. I wish more people of color and Latinos had this. The proposition isn't presented to people about how this actually helped set you up for the future. So much of even going to college now is about it's a zero sum game of how much does it cost? Will I make money? No, this will set you up for life. Peace Corps is the American dream. You want it? Go back and do this.

GARRIDO: [01:33:47] I mean, that's the biggest recruitment I try to do is when I'm in schools and I hear about that kid who's like they're interested in social

services, or the college student who's looking at jobs and they don't see for that point in time. I mean, I had great corporate, I had great corporate experience. It just wasn't for me. But at that point in time, they're not ready to go to business. They want to do a social service thing. Peace Corps is a great option, and no one's presenting it to them because it's still viewed as a thing that privileged white kids do. And it's, that's not what it has to be. You know, um, you're going to have a culture shock no matter who you are because you're going to go to Bosnia or someplace else, you know, you're not going to Honduras right now. You're going someplace else. But that's the big thing. And then, you know, you're going to learn humility. And I think it's the biggest lesson we could all learn.

WIGGUM: [01:34:34] Yeah.

GARRIDO: [01:34:35] So, sorry to spout off so long.

WIGGUM: [01:34:37] Well, no, that's great. Thanks, Yancy. Let me turn this little sucker off here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]