

**Martha Herrin Jachowski Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Martha Herrin Jachowski served as a Peace Corps volunteer in British Honduras from 1964 to 1966 on a community development project.

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Oral History Interview

with

Martha Herrin Jachowski

June 7, 2005  
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

By Linda Millette

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

MILLETTE: [00:00:00] Today's June 7th, 2005, I am Linda Millette and I'm interviewing Martha Herrin Jachowski, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in British Honduras, which is now known as Belize, and she served in a community development project from June 1964 to June of 1966. Would you please give your name and your current address?

JACHOWSKI: [00:00:24] Martha Herrin Jachowski, [address] Bozeman, Montana [zip code].

MILLETTE: [00:00:34] Thank you, Martha. To start the interview, would you just tell us kind of your current situation? Who your present family is and work, if any? Your current, well, we have your current residence, but your current interests.

JACHOWSKI: [00:00:51] Well, we moved to Montana five years ago and my husband had a new job opportunity and we did that and he retired about two weeks ago, so we're enjoying it out there. My son lives nearby in the summertime working on a graduate project, and we're really looking forward to our retirement. I'm not involved in anything to speak of at the moment. I've done a lot of volunteering up to our move in Montana. So I'm just sort of gardening and enjoying my life.

MILLETTE: [00:01:29] I'd like you now to think back to a long way back into the 60s and tell me what you were doing the year before you joined the Peace Corps.

JACHOWSKI: [00:01:40] The year before. I'm finishing up my undergraduate work.

MILLETTE: [00:01:46] What was your degree in?

JACHOWSKI: Sociology.

MILLETTE: Sociology. OK, how did you learn about Peace Corps?

JACHOWSKI: [00:01:55] I believe it was my sophomore year when Kennedy announced the program and I was really excited about it.

MILLETTE: [00:02:01] And why why did you get excited?

JACHOWSKI: [00:02:03] Well it was my interest to go overseas in some capacity. And that program was perfectly timed.

MILLETTE: [00:02:11] Is there something in your childhood that or family that made you have an interest in wanting to go overseas?

JACHOWSKI: [00:02:18] I always had that desire. I just I think early on in college, we even looked into missionary possibilities. And my my mother took me to the Butler University. I remember. And they have a good religion program there. I was active in my church and they told me I have to

graduate from college first. So during that time I was in college, the Peace Corps opened and that was perfect.

MILLETTE: OK. Do you remember exactly how you heard about Peace Corps?

JACHOWSKI: I was in the student union and the television was on and they must have been announcing it or something. And it wasn't shortly after that that they started advertising it on campus. So it just was, you know, quite so easy to apply and get the forms and it's perfect.

MILLETTE: [00:03:25] Ok, um, let's see. Did you have did you have any place in mind that you wanted to go?

JACHOWSKI: No, I didn't.

MILLETTE: How did they respond to you? What did you do to apply to the Peace Corps? And what did you get to tell you that you were selected?

JACHOWSKI: [00:03:44] They had a meeting and I forgot what they call them on campus now. Must be career orientation. And they have different groups come. And the Peace Corps was one of them. I went and listened and got the forms and filled it out.

MILLETTE: [00:04:06] How long did it take before you heard anything?

JACHOWSKI: [00:04:10] I think I probably did that in my senior year and. You know, I don't remember there being any anxiousness about it, so it must have been the midway in the year. It wasn't like at the end of the year. And everybody's trying to find out what their career is going to be. But I'd say it was mid-year.

MILLETTE: [00:04:35] And where were you selected for?

JACHOWSKI: Belize. British Honduras.

MILLETTE: Did you have any thoughts about when you saw that? Oh, I might not like to go there. I'd like to go somewhere else or any.

JACHOWSKI: No, none. I was just going.

MILLETTE: OK, what country, what language did they speak in the country?

JACHOWSKI: [00:04:54] It was a British protectorate then and they spoke English. So we were taught Spanish. And I had many years with that in high school and college. And so I was able to get get along OK.

MILLETTE: [00:05:10] What were your friends or family's reactions to to the news when or the idea that you were going to join the Peace Corps or the idea that they've invited me?

JACHOWSKI: [00:05:20] I think they were excited and maybe a little apprehensive, but not till I got back did I know about my father's apprehension. He was very concerned, I guess.

MILLETTE: [00:05:31] And do you know what his concerns were?

JACHOWSKI: [00:05:33] I guess, just for my safety. And they received a letter from the Peace Corps director, Dick Ware, when I was there and they so much appreciated that letter, it was just confirming that he knew me, you know, use my name and what my job was and how glad they were. And I think that was a good thing for my family.

MILLETTE: [00:06:05] What was the project that you were invited to join?

JACHOWSKI: [00:06:08] We trained at the University of Maryland for community development.

MILLETTE: [00:06:13] And can you tell me something about that training? What it consisted of, what it had?

JACHOWSKI: [00:06:19] Right, it was it was a two month training program. The last. It also included the Outward Bound program, which was, I think, three weeks in Puerto Rico, the campus was the University of Maryland and they had a cultural history and. Some agriculture, we've got a smattering of everything, even though we were going to be doing it, but it was a good program, physical fitness program, they're going up and down the stairs at the outdoor football field, very strenuous physical fitness program in the Maryland summers, hot humid summers. So the Puerto Rico thing was a great thing.

MILLETTE: [00:07:13] Tell me about the Outward Bound. I've never heard of that. What was that?

JACHOWSKI: [00:07:16] Well, I don't know how long they continued it, but it was our instructor was with, I think he's been with the army, so he was very, he had a set plan about what he was going to do with this, but it included drown proofing, using topographic maps to find your way around in the tropics down there. They take you out and set you somewhere and you'd have to find your way back to camp. And they had rock rappelling off of the dam there. Things that you'd have to test your ability and idea of the group spurring you on sort of thing. So it was good. We did a lot of bonding in that.

MILLETTE: [00:08:11] What was your reaction to the other trainees in the group, maybe when you first met them, when you got to know them? Did you have any particular thoughts or reactions that you remember?

JACHOWSKI: [00:08:21] You remember certain incidences. You know the, wherever you might have met your first one, you know, oh, you're a Peace Corps volunteer sort of thing, but in the dormitory accommodations we had, you know, you meet each other pretty quickly and it's great. I mean, everybody said it just comes together and you're all there for the same idea. Back then, it seemed like people were more going. There were a few that might have been there for other reasons, but it's bonding right from the start.

MILLETTE: [00:09:00] What was the selection or deselection process like?

JACHOWSKI: [00:09:04] Three periods of interviews with the psychologist and also evaluations from your staff that were teaching new classes are being with you.

MILLETTE: [00:09:21] And how many did you start out with and how many were deselected? Do you remember?

JACHOWSKI: [00:09:24] We had, we ended up, I think, 24, and that was about a 50 percent drop, so we must have been 50.

MILLETTE: [00:09:42] Were there disappointments, surprises or anything in that?

JACHOWSKI: [00:09:45] Sure, right, that's a. Oh, my gosh, it's been you know, how can that be? But back then, they did it so that you didn't have time to find out why the people were gone and there were no explanations. So.

MILLETTE: Must've been hard.

JACHOWSKI: Yeah.

MILLETTE: [00:10:07] Do you feel that the training prepared you for the service that you were going to be giving in the country you were going to? Once you got there, did you feel like it had been a waste of time? That there was anything that was really helpful? Was it useful to your service? And kind of in hindsight?

JACHOWSKI: [00:10:24] I think the training was helpful, maybe the programing was not right, at least for the community development.

MILLETTE: What does that mean?

JACHOWSKI: I mean, they should not have program girls in this work without the right kind of facilities. They had asked us to be a traveling volunteer and had not given us any cars. Not that we need a car and not that we could even cover the amount of area they wanted us to cover, given the conditions of the roads and the traffic. You don't, you can't get out. And so that type of assignment they sent us to do, with strict instructions that that's what you had to do, was not good. But I think the girls that were in there were only two of us that ended up in CD managed to make an assignment out of it anyway in the town that they were stationed, even though they couldn't get out. Because you were required to travel with a coworker who was required to use government vehicles, which were only available at certain times. And so it was hard to start any kind of programing outside. So we both worked in the towns we were in.

MILLETTE: [00:11:55] Anything else on the Peace Corps preparing you, that they could have done better, that comes to mind?

JACHOWSKI: [00:12:02] No, we did a lot of role playing in Peace Corps and. And I'm not sure I could.

MILLETTE: [00:12:18] What was your initial entry and your reaction into British Honduras?

JACHOWSKI: [00:12:26] Well, landing and seeing nothing down there except dry scrub brush and, you know, not. The just was look like nobody live there. Of course, the closer you got to the airport, you saw signs of it, but that was my first impression, the landing. And then we stayed in the capital city for a few days. And my impressions of that are not very strong. But I remember when we went to the town, I was stationed in the house that I stayed with, the family I stayed with.

MILLETTE: [00:13:11] Well, tell me describe your project a little bit and tell us something about Peace Corps staff, and then I can get the impression of people that you might have, you know, come in contact with. And if



once you've got to the training, the physical environment and the role of the language and that kind of thing, although you were speaking English, so probably that wasn't as big as played an important role. But describe your project and Peace Corps staff and how you interacted with them, if at all.

JACHOWSKI: [00:13:45] Oh, yeah. Well, we, British Honduras has five districts and I was assigned to the Orange Walk District. And there was one lady there who was a home economics. The social development officer and her supervisors were in the capital city, um, her assignment and I was her coworker was to go to the village and villages in that district and help them in home economics. It was a broad area. It could be just how to conduct a meeting. It could be how to preserve jelly. It could be sewing. It could be. I like to work with the children so I can work with the schools and do art, or physical education. We had fairs where our projects that we would do in the villages would be brought and then they would display them and it was done to the Agriculture Department as well. So all the projects you worked on during the year, they would bring them and exhibit them and maybe prizes at. So that was pretty much my project and the like I said, there was no staff except for my coworker.

MILLETTE: [00:15:17] What about Peace Corps staff in the country? Did you interact with them much? Do you remember much about them? Or were you just sort of out in the field and that was it?

JACHOWSKI: [00:15:24] No, they were I think I had one site visit by staff when I was there. So I didn't have much interaction with the Peace Corps staff.

MILLETTE: [00:15:39] Did you have any health issues at all while you were there?

JACHOWSKI: [00:15:42] I fractured a broken bone in my lower back. I fell off a horse. And by the time they got the strap, they kind of like a girdle you put around you. It was so much later that there was no purpose in wearing it. So there was nothing to be done about it.

MILLETTE: [00:16:07] And you haven't suffered with something since?

JACHOWSKI: [00:16:10] Well, I may, but it's, it might not be from there. You know, at my age, lower back is not.

MILLETTE: [00:16:17] You mentioned you were riding a horse, is this a method of transportation?

JACHOWSKI: [00:16:21] No. Uh, my neighbor had a horse and I wanted to ride it and he didn't cinch it down tight. And so the saddle just fell off or twisted on to the belly. Yeah, yeah.

MILLETTE: [00:16:36] So who looked after you? Well, what happened when you were on the ground?

JACHOWSKI: [00:16:43] Well, I, I managed to get to the family that I stayed when I first got there and she took care of me and it was painful the first few weeks, but it subsided.

MILLETTE: [00:16:52] Tell me about the family you stayed with.

JACHOWSKI: [00:16:55] Gonzalez was their name and they were a great family. They it was an extended family and they had a room for the girls where I was. And I shared that room. I think the five I was in there and then the guys on the other side and we ate there and other volunteers came and ate because Mrs. Gonzalez was a good cook and she had cooked for volunteers before.

MILLETTE: Did they pay her?

JACHOWSKI: Yeah. Yeah. So I stayed there probably six months. And then I had another little house.

MILLETTE: On your own?

JACHOWSKI: Yeah.

MILLETTE: In that same area?

JACHOWSKI: [00:17:34] Um, and it wasn't far. Six blocks.

MILLETTE: [00:17:36] Did everyone do that? Stay with the family in the first six months?

JACHOWSKI: The girls did.

MILLETTE: [00:17:49] And how many girls were in your program?

JACHOWSKI: [00:17:51] Well, I couldn't say.

MILLETTE: Was it half half?

JACHOWSKIE: Yeah, I'd say around half half. But thinking back, I can't think of any girl that lived on her own.

MILLETTE: [00:18:02] But you lived on your own when you had the little house.

JACHOWSKI: I did. Yeah, OK, I did.

MILLETTE: And so what were your neighbors like? Were their neighbors? Or were you isolated with a village, community?

JACHOWSKI: [00:18:13] No, they were neighbors with her across the street. There wasn't any valley on either side. It was like a power plant next to me. But it was his rustic I had an outhouse and I had a little two room house on stilts and it was brand new. So I liked it, my own little place.

MILLETTE: [00:18:44] What would you say your biggest challenges were when you were there?

JACHOWSKI: Patience.

MILLETTE: Explain that.

JACHOWSKI: [00:18:56] Because the assignment was so difficult to carry out as it was outlined.

MILLETTE: Can you elaborate on that?

JACHOWSKI: Well, it's just it was a rural assignment, like a traveling salesman sort of assignment where you're supposed to go out to villages in this large district and work there for maybe a couple of days and come back. And the transportation just wasn't there. But yet they wouldn't allow you to do any other work. So you found yourself in the in the office, just sitting there day in and day out. And so we did I started some Girl Scout Girl Scout troop and a girls softball team in the town I was in.

MILLETTE: [00:19:47] And what town were you in?

JACHOWSKI: Orange Walk Town. Yeah. And so when we got out, we did and when we didn't, I tried to keep busy there in town.

MILLETTE: [00:19:59] Ok, so the patience came in.

JACHOWSKI: [00:20:04] Yeah, you were so energetic to do something and to. But that wasn't why you were there, I mean, you were there to. Hopefully get out into the villages and just never wasn't the means to do it, so they made that assignment the same people to villages or maybe nearby villages. That would have been better. But to have you work from the city.

MILLETTE: [00:20:34] Or given you transportation?

JACHOWSKI: Yeah. Yeah.

MILLETTE: OK. What about your impression of the people of the country?

JACHOWSKI: [00:20:45] Great. I mean.

MILLETTE: In what way? Give specifics.

JACHOWSKI: They're unassuming, I mean, face forward. They're easy. Easy to talk with, easy to be with, interested.

MILLETTE: [00:21:13] Did most of them speak English, understand it?

JACHOWSKI: [00:21:16] Mm hmm. Maybe the older people, but there's been enough. The British had been there long enough that the generation ahead of me, you know, and the schools were so. When you went out in the village, you'd like to try to speak Spanish, but you think you're not forced to be fall back. So. No, the people were very warm.

MILLETTE: [00:21:46] They appreciated you, what you're doing?

JACHOWSKI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MILLETTE: OK, was there any political strife at the time you were there or anything?

JACHOWSKI: [00:21:58] Well, there was always a party of friction between the two parties, but, uh, and they're not, you know, the volunteers were told not to march in any parades or anything like that, but, uh. No violence or anything like that, just they had a two party system.

MILLETTE: [00:22:19] Ok, now you said that your living conditions changed over that over time because you went from a family to yourself. Was there any other your work still stayed the same and. OK, and did you see any other PCV groups coming in while you were there, or were you of the only group?

JACHOWSKI: [00:22:43] We were British Honduras II and III came in while we were there. Small, wasn't a large group. I think they were sort of just a backup for the group that we had such a high attrition rate that they trained another group to come fill in.

MILLETTE: Why did you have high attrition?

JACHOWSKI: I don't know. Maybe we were a mixed up lot! But I know I have no idea that, you know, I often wonder, you know, people that seemed better qualified than I work. And so, yeah, I am the I always felt a little strange about the deselection process, so. But you had no way of knowing.

MILLETTE: [00:23:36] What did you had some leisure time? What happened in your leisure time downtime besides sitting in the office?

JACHOWSKI: [00:23:43] Well, let's see there when we were in in the town, not vacation time.

MILLETTE: [00:23:52] Well, that's part of your leisure time. What about when you were working and then you had your weekends off or, you know, whatever. What do you?

JACHOWSKI: [00:24:00] Well, I would travel to other towns and visit other volunteers and see what they are doing. You know, just connect with them.

MILLETTE: [00:24:10] And did you take vacations while you were there?

JACHOWSKI: [00:24:15] We spent most of our vacation time in Central America and Mexico.

MILLETTE: [00:24:21] Ok, how did you get there?

JACHOWSKI: [00:24:24] Bus. Just get on the bus and get off the bus. You get on the bust and get off the bus.

MILLETTE: [00:24:34] Ok, if you could be called the end of your first year or let's just do it at the end of the two years, you know, looking back on it, were there joys? Were there any particular things that were joyful or a disappointment, unexpected events, relationships?

JACHOWSKI: [00:24:55] Joyful, be joyful. I can't think of anything that was a great. It was really spectacular in terms of the whole two years. It was such a learning process and, you know, I think we had some successes in terms of successes. I think probably what I did in Orange Walk City and I'm not sure whether it was a first Girl Scout troop or the first girl softball team, whether they're still going or not. But I would say those of things I thought were successful and gave me a lot of joy.

MILLETTE: [00:25:51] Did you have any sense of a lack of achievement or a sense of pluses and minuses in the relationship and work with the people of the country grads or satisfactions I kind of thing at the end of that second year when you stay just two years, right?

JACHOWSKI: [00:26:09] Ok, sure. I think that's the satisfying part, was having people be enthusiastic about the two things I just mentioned, the Scouts and the softball. People helping with that, wanting to work with that and taking it on when I left. And there were some fellows in the Agriculture Department, maybe they liked the girls softball team, I think. But they were really vital in getting us, you know, getting us out to do our trips and practicing with the team.

MILLETTE: [00:26:46] And so that became part of your project. Not a leisure time activity, but it became part of the project?

JACHOWSKI: Yeah.

MILLETTE: And the other was, how was the satisfaction with the Home Ec part of it, or setting meetings, helping people in the community?

JACHOWSKI: [00:27:00] Well, it was short lived. I mean, there was it was hard to have any continuity. You go and there used to be a lady in a village who would, you know, hold a meeting at her house and she'd be your contact. But in terms of that continuing after you left, you never felt like it was always if you got back to that village, you know, what have you done since we left? There just wasn't enough follow through and a building of any kind of a relationship to make that seem like it was going to be OK.

MILLETTE: [00:27:37] So any other thoughts on your time there?

JACHOWSKI: [00:27:44] Yeah, well, of course, we have a son who's a volunteer who we talked about our service. Um, through the years as he was growing up. And I guess my thoughts are just how great of a widening of my own personality and how important I think that is to developing a good, broad outlook on life. So I'm grateful for that.

MILLETTE: [00:28:19] When you came back, did you have any reentry? Some people say it was very hard to leave. Can you tell us something about your reentry and feelings you experienced?

JACHOWSKI: [00:28:35] It was busy. You come home and everyone wants to see you and everyone wants to hear about it, and I did a little interview with my local newspaper and I was breathless very soon. And I got a little cable from the Peace Corps who asked me to train help train in Micronesia training program. And I think that couldn't have been more, right after I got home. It might have been two weeks. And so I accepted that I was really glad because I was I was in my reentry, as you said, and so that I didn't really have much time to. To dwell on that, it was I enjoyed the initial training that helped me get my feet on the ground.

MILLETTE: [00:29:32] Were there any specifics that you can think of that hit you in the face?



JACHOWSKI: [00:29:39] I was trying to remember exactly getting off the plane, getting home. I have lost that. I don't have them.

MILLETTE: [00:29:49] That's fine. Yeah, yes. Um, there were three goals of Peace Corps, and one was to provide technical assistance overseas and do our job there and help them learn about Americans to help promote better understanding from Americans. That was a second goal. And then the third goal, to help promote better understanding by people in this country about peoples of the world. And have you participated in that end of it at all? The doing things here to help us better understand Belizeans, British Hondurans?

JACHOWSKI: [00:30:37] No. Kind of not not specifically, but I mean, I worked with Peace Corps for 10 years after I had told you I've been with Peace Corps for 10 years after. I cannot say that I came back and gave lectures about Belize. I did give one. Or helped in that manner.

MILLETTE: [00:31:05] Ok, um, you said you've had you've obviously had many years with Peace Corps and training programs and then you worked on staff and the head office, personnel. Have you continued in any way with your group or are there any Hondurans? Do you have communication with any of them? Did you maintain a contact for a length of time or any time?

JACHOWSKI: [00:31:34] I did for a while after Peace Corps kept touch with my coworker. We had volunteers who married Belizeans, with those Belizeans and I kept in touch. But now it's just a Christmas card, so. And in the beginning, yes, but now mostly no.

MILLETTE: [00:32:00] Ok, just give us a brief summary of your time from the time you left. You said that you went to spend time, you came back, you went to work in training. And then if you just summarize that time from there to now, what your life has held.

JACHOWSKI: [00:32:18] Oh, I just. Simple, simple, good. I came back and I worked 10 years with the Peace Corps, but going part of that 10 would be back in Kenya where with my husband, who was a volunteer, and then I had a child and I raised him for 18 years and now I'm on my own with my husband. He's retired and here we are.

MILLETTE: [00:32:48] OK. The effect of the Peace Corps service on your life, well obviously have an effect on some of your jobs because you went back to work with future career plans. Did you have any particular career plans ever that the Peace Corps might have played a part in a long term that either came didn't come to or came to fruition or not?

JACHOWSKI: [00:33:17] I think the, the social development assignment that I had probably strengthened my interest in the work that needs to be done. However, I didn't follow that path of really working on a man-to-man or person-to-person. I got more into the desk job in Washington and that's some way if I want to say in my professional life, that was not on that personal, which is what my original motivation would have been, to go out and help. So I think I helped in a different way.

MILLETTE: [00:34:07] Helped people in this country you mean?

JACHOWSKI: [00:34:11] No, I mean, I continued my interest in the organization, but I didn't do it on the personal level or on the grassroots level, Peace Corps grassroots level. I got behind a desk and that's where I stayed until I started raising my family, my son.

MILLETTE: [00:34:32] Who went into Peace Corps?

JACHOWSKI: Yes. Yes.

MILLETTE: Tell us a little bit about that. Where did he go?

JACHOWSKI: [00:34:39] He went to the Philippines, and I was so pleased to hear him say how that had been, in his short life so far, the highlight.

MILLETTE: [00:34:48] So did you have those same feelings?

JACHOWSKI: I still do. Oh, yeah.

MILLETTE: For yourself?

JACHOWSKI: Yeah. Yeah. Not that this isn't a highlight right now.

MILLETTE: [00:35:00] All right, well, what do you think you can just one last thing. Do you recall any funny stories at all? Any funny experiences in Belize?

JACHOWSKI: [00:35:11] Oh my gosh, in Belize. The only one that comes to mind is not mine, it's someone else's. They told me that their jeep bogged down on a muddy road in southern Belize and she had Prell shampoo, which is a thick like lubricant, which they put on. I guess they had burned out the wheel bearing or something. And they put this Prell shampoo on the wheel bearing to get them out of this mud hole and it worked.

MILLETTE: [00:35:55] I never had the ingenuity to get out.

JACHOWSKI: [00:36:0g0] I never had that kind of experience. I had many times we were stuck, but we always managed to get out. I had no tragic things and I'm trying to think of anything really crazy. Sounds like I had a dull time. Memories get lost and pushed back.

MILLETTE: [00:36:12] No no no. You've done a great job. How many groups went to Belize? Are we still in British Honduras?

JACHOWSKI: Yeah.

MILLETTE: How many groups went?

JACHOWSKI: You know, I don't know.

MILLETTE: Did they pretty much stay there all the time?

JACHOWSKI: Yeah.

MILLETTE: Oh, really?

JACHOWSKI: [00:36:29] I believe so. We've had a newsletter, I might add. We do a Christmas newsletter that has been since we left. And so our group is still in touch. And that's been. It's my turn this year, so I'll be doing that.

MILLETTE: [00:36:48] Well, thank you so much for taking the time to share some of your experience. And we hope whoever listens to this again will learn and be able to use it for whatever purpose they're choosing to use it.

JACHOWSKI: Well, me too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]