

Richard Wood Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Richard Wood
Interviewer: Candice Wiggum
Date of Interview: July 16, 2019
Location of Interview: Everett, Washington
Length: 19 pages

Biographical Note

Richard (Dick) Wood served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Iran from 1964 to 1966 on a community development project.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed August 21, 2019, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

Copyright

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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

Technical Note

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

Suggested Citation

Richard Wood, recorded interview by Candice Wiggum, July 16, 2019, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

DISCLAIMER

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

Oral History Interview

with

Richard Wood

July 16, 2019
Everett, Washington

By Candice Wiggum

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

WIGGUM: [00:00:01] Well, today is July 16, 2019, and I am interviewing Richard Wood, who served in Iran from 1964 to 1966 as a?

WOOD: [00:00:15] Community development volunteer.

WIGGUM: [00:00:20] Yeah, great. So tell me why you joined the Peace Corps?

WOOD: [00:00:25] That's really a very good question. And I am thinking back. I think. I had I had gone to college. I went to, I did a B.A. at Yale. And at first I thought I wanted to be an engineer because my dad was an engineer. He came out to Seattle and was one of the first engineers at Boeing. And I got partway through the program, and I thought, this is really not for me. So I thought, well, I'd taken a couple of philosophy courses in high school and kind of carry that on as a as a bachelor's degree. So in philosophy and political science and I found myself graduated. I'd been accepted at

law school in Los Angeles. And I said, I really don't want to do that. And I'm not quite sure where I'm going. And so the idea of the Peace Corps just came up. I thought, well, that sounds really exciting. And, you know, I'd never been outside the country before. And I thought, well, let's give it a try.

WIGGUM: [00:01:28] Yeah. And what did your parents think and what did your friends think?

WOOD: [00:01:31] Well, my parents I think we're kind of hoping that I would come back to Seattle. And I was dating a woman at the time and she was very encouraging about going. So I thought, well, and I had other high school friends that had indicated an interest in doing some overseas work. So I thought, well, that was that was pretty good support.

WIGGUM: [00:01:59] Nice. Nice. So what was the application process like? What did you go through in order to get into the Peace Corps?

WOOD: [00:02:06] Well, I remember filling out the application and I don't remember if there was an oral interview or not. Now, this was 1964, so it would be in the spring. I did it, on the application, I remember that I was given a choice of where I wanted to go. And I thought, well, maybe Latin America might be nice. Some mountain climbing. Nepal would be good too. So I kind of thought in my mind, the Peace Corps must have taken a look at a map and drawn a line between Latin America and Nepal and saw where it crossed right by Iran.

WIGGUM: [00:02:48] Did you have any like what? Did you have medical exams?

WOOD: [00:02:53] I'm pretty sure we did. But I but I don't remember if that occurred before or after. I think that happened maybe during the orientation process, at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. And I do remember there were some psychological discussions of some psychological discussions we had and some medical exams, because I'm pretty sure that took place at the first part of the orientation program.

WIGGUM: [00:03:19] Ok, so what was the orientation like?

WOOD: [00:03:21] Orientation was it was really interesting that Iran V was consisted of lot of bachelor's degree folks. There were some agricultural development and some manual arts volunteers who were all together and had a series of language and cultural classes. We played soccer. We were housed in the fraternity that was open during the summer. I think also that, we also suppose that perhaps the Peace Corps thought that this location was probably the closest we could get in the United States to simulate what would happen in Iran.

WIGGUM: [00:04:12] Similar kind of geography.

WOOD: [00:04:15] It was kind of desert like. Yeah.

WIGGUM: [00:04:18] So how long was orientation?

WOOD: [00:04:21] It was for the summer, so it would have been two months.

WIGGUM: [00:04:24] And what was your class like, was it mostly men? Was it a mixture of men and women?

WOOD: [00:04:29] There were no women in the program, although when we got to Iran we found that there were women who were in Iran IV, which was an English teaching project.

WIGGUM: [00:04:39] Teaching job, yeah, but yours in community development was all men.

WOOD: Right.

WIGGUM: OK, so then what happened after you had your orientation?

WOOD: [00:04:49] Well, we were we were selected. I went home briefly back to Seattle and we met in New York on an airplane and flew for what seemed like a long time to Tehran.

WIGGUM: [00:04:59] Mm hmm. I've always been curious about those days where they took a lot of people and then deselected during that orientation period. Were you guys aware that that you were always being scrutinized? Was that nerve wracking? I mean, what did it feel like?

WOOD: [00:05:16] I don't know if it was particularly nerve wracking or not. I know several volunteers deselected themselves. But I don't remember how many of us finally went to Iran. I think the group must have been around 50.

WIGGUM: [00:05:29] It's a big group.

WOOD: [00:05:30] It was a fairly good sized group.

WIGGUM: [00:05:31] Yeah. And once you arrived in Tehran, what happened?

WOOD: [00:05:34] Well, we were we were put in a hotel and we got in the middle of the night. And I remember waking up in the morning and kind of going outside and looking around and not really knowing what to expect. I had you know, there were trees growing along the street and I looked up and the sky was blue and clouds just like the Pacific Northwest. I said, you know, things aren't so different after all. So after a short stay in Tehran, we went to another orientation session in an agricultural college, a little bit west of Tehran, and we were probably be there for maybe a week or so before we were given our assignments.

WIGGUM: [00:06:20] Oh, just a week. And the language you were learning, I assume was Farsi.

WOOD: [00:06:25] The language was Farsi.

WIGGUM: [00:06:26] And how difficult was that for you?

WOOD: [00:06:29] Well, the script is different. It was not, it was, it was fairly difficult. But I remember finally, you know, and language was pretty intense. I think we probably were studying for a couple hours a day. I remember being very surprised when I got to Iran and I tried it out. People actually understood what I was saying.

WIGGUM: [00:06:52] And in the agricultural, you guys were all sitting together in a dorm.

WOOD: Yeah.

WIGGUM: And what kind of community development training did you have?

WOOD: [00:07:01] Well, back in Utah, um, it was I guess you could say there were two parts. One was the idea was we would be sent to a village and we were expected to figure out how the villages operated, you know, who the important people were and what they did. And if we wanted to effect change, how we might go about doing that. And so we had the we kind of paired up into groups of I think it was maybe four people and did interviews around Logan, Utah. And so we were trying to figure out just what the power structure was like in Logan. And the other part was physical. We did, you know, several hikes in the mountains and stayed out overnight without any, you know, shelters, just on the assumption that that would be something we would face when we got to Iran. And in my case, neither of those things were applicable.

WIGGUM: [00:08:08] Yeah, yeah. So you get your assignment. What was your assignment?

WOOD: [00:08:13] My assignment was to work with the community development office, an engineering office in a provincial capital. And the city was Sari, S-S-A-R-I, in the province of Mazandaran. So this is on the northern part of Iran. You take, Tehran is, north of Tehran there's a range of mountains

called the, uh, I can't remember the name of the range. But after you cross over, you head down towards the plain that's along the south coast of the Caspian Sea. And this is, you know, quite a big difference in climate, it's more temperate. It reminded me a lot of here in the Pacific Northwest. So one side got one on the other side, very lush and nice. And the office where I was working had an engineer and I was paired up with a with another volunteer, Napoleon, and we knew he was kind of short. And we need a lot of humor out of the fact that he would come in and say, I am Napoleon and people would be very impressed.

WIGGUM: [00:09:37] Ok, and what did you guys do when you got there?

WOOD: [00:09:42] We were housed in an apartment and there were two other American Peace Corps volunteers that had preceded us there, an English teacher and an agricultural specialist. You know, like a typical day would be to get up from the apartment and maybe have breakfast of some tea and some bread and cheese, and then we would have a five or ten minute walk to the office. And there was a director of the [inaudible], which was the Iranian development provincial office, and there was an engineer there and a number of different officers that would go out into and coordinate projects. So we would do some office work. We would travel with these. What was the name of the position out to villages and talk to people about what they had, what they'd hoped that we might accomplish? A project might include making a road, might include surveying for a water system or a schoolhouse. And so we were walking around, we're meeting people, we're talking to people, and they would take that information, come back and develop plans that may or may not get funded.

WIGGUM: [00:11:21] And did you speak Farsi in the office when you went out to these villages, did you have help translating? Did you get facile enough in Farsi that you could go to a village and just talk with people about what they wanted?

WOOD: [00:11:34] We had kind of a mix. The main engineer that we worked with spoke fairly good English and a lot of the community development kind of person spoke some English. So it was kind of a mix of Farsi and English.

WIGGUM: [00:11:51] And what did you in particular do? Did you draw up plans? Did you just consult with the engineer and work with him to draw up plans? I mean, how much did you use your engineering background that you'd had some of?

WOOD: [00:12:06] Well, we would do actual surveying. We might be sent out and would do that actual work. In other cases, we would do drawings when we got back to the office. But in terms of, you know, the actual definition of the project, that was not within our purview. That had already been decided.

WIGGUM: [00:12:35] Yeah, did you feel like you were making a good contribution to the to the projects, to the efforts of developing these communities?

WOOD: [00:12:46] Well, it's difficult to say because a project might take, you know, a year. And so we didn't always see the fruits of our labor. With some of the roads, though, I remember one road that we worked on that went from village on the Caspian Sea coast. We were part of the survey team. And then actually saw the construction. So but in the most cases of what was happening in terms of finishing the project, happened later.

WIGGUM: [00:13:18] Yeah, I would just kind of curious how many of these projects actually got done.

WOOD: [00:13:22] Yeah, that's a good question. I'm not sure.

WIGGUM: [00:13:23] Yeah, yeah. So you talked a little bit about what a usual day is. What were your biggest challenges during the day? What was it like moving to a totally different culture and getting plopped down and living there?

WOOD: [00:13:39] Well, I think we were it was it helped us that we had another, two other volunteers in town that we kind of show us where things were and kind of laid out you how you operated. It seemed like it, we adapted fairly quickly, you know, we would take trips to visit other volunteers that were scattered in different towns along the Caspian coast. That was kind of a weekend event that we would do. Looking back a long time, 50 years.

WIGGUM: [00:14:20] Do you remember any big surprises that you had about the culture, about yourself during this time?

WOOD: [00:14:29] I think one of the big surprises was that the Iranian people were really welcoming and we were a big deal in town and kids would come up and say, hello mister. Let me help me practice my English with you. Going out to the villages, the villagers that we met were extremely generous. And, you know, they didn't have much. But when our team would come into the village, they would lay out a lunch for us. And the kind of, my expectation was, well, you know, these people just living way up in the hills and they can't have very just a tenuous connection with the outside world. And that was simply not the case. They had radios and they could ask us questions about, explain American foreign policy, and we would have a hard time. And so that was a big surprise and a pleasant surprise.

WIGGUM: [00:15:27] Mm hmm. Any unpleasant surprises?

WOOD: [00:15:33] There probably were. You know, we all had health problems, especially when we were having that initial orientation at the agricultural college and we got over that. You don't, you don't remember the unpleasant parts though.

WIGGUM: [00:15:51] What was your medical care like while you were there? Like, would you go into Tehran to see a doctor?

WOOD: [00:16:00] We had a medical kit with us for minor stuff, but in the event of any serious medical issues, we'd have to go to Tehran. And I don't remember any of us having anything serious.

WIGGUM: [00:16:13] So the usual stomach stuff when you first got there and got through that.

WOOD: [00:16:18] Got through that and used to that. Yeah.

WIGGUM: [00:16:19] Did you travel while you were in the Peace Corps?

WOOD: [00:16:25] Traveled both in country and outside the country. Yeah. We got down to the south to Isfahan and Shiraz. We went east to Herat and went over into Afghanistan. During the break between year one and year two we traveled to Jordan and Egypt, we as a group of guys, range from four or five.

WIGGUM: [00:16:58] Did you feel like you made friends with Iranians?

WOOD: [00:17:03] I think so. I think so.

WIGGUM: [00:17:05] Can you talk about some of the people you made friends with?

WOOD: [00:17:08] Well, the colleagues in the office, we made friends with a lot of the kids that were around and wanted to learn English. We made friends with shopkeepers. We were known in restaurants.

WIGGUM: [00:17:24] So you felt like you were part of the community?

WOOD: Oh absolutely.

WIGGUM: Which is nice. And how big was the town you were in?

WOOD: [00:17:35] I think the town must have been less than 20,000 people and it wasn't big. At that point, Iran was only a country of 20 million people. You know, Tehran had a population of about two million.

WIGGUM: [00:17:55] Religiously what was it like for you? Like now there's the sort of struggle between Sunnis and Shias and certainly the Muslim versus Christian stuff that that happens now, at least here and probably there, too. Was there any of that when you were there?

WOOD: [00:18:13] Well, most of Iran was and still is Shia. And there are, you know, smaller sects. And we found out, you know, people would tell us later that there was discrimination. But for the most part, you didn't see that. Religion, of course, was a part of the daily life. And people prayed and, you know, there were some customs regarding women and they had to be covered. But I never got the feeling that by being a Christian of a Christian background, that I was in any way discriminated against. We would have some religious discussion with the Iranians, but that was more not an effort to convert, but just to explain and discuss.

WIGGUM: [00:19:06] Did you ever go to mosque?

WOOD: [00:19:11] Visited mosques. I don't remember ever going through a service, a religious service. I wasn't going to religious services back at home either, so.

WIGGUM: [00:19:22] So it wasn't any different.

WOOD: Yeah.

WIGGUM: How did you eat there?

WOOD: [00:19:31] In other words, sparsely?

WIGGUM: [00:19:34] Did you cook your meals, did was it?

WOOD: [00:19:37] We had some we had some meals cooked. We had a housekeeper that cooked some of our meals. We would go out to restaurants. Iranians have a really nice cuisine. It's very, it's not particularly spicy, but I remember never having had yogurt before. I think

this is really pretty good. Rice and bread, like there would be, you know, *chenjeh* kabobs, which is beef that's been grilled, various stews or *koreshs* mixed with rice.

WIGGUM: [00:20:22] So it sounds like you didn't do a lot of your own cooking.

WOOD: That's correct.

WIGGUM: You didn't have to go out to market and pick up stuff and trying to figure out what the ingredients were and all those things. So that's a pretty, pretty luxurious living.

WOOD: [00:20:39] It was very luxurious, that is correct.

WIGGUM: [00:20:40] Yeah, how is your apartment?

WOOD: [00:20:46] Well, we had an apartment to begin with, let me try to think. There was a kitchen area. A couple of bedrooms, a living room, not totally different from what we would see in an apartment here. The bathroom, most or all, always different. We had to learn to use that. For the most part, the water was potable. We didn't have to worry about drinking water out of it, didn't boil water.

WIGGUM: [00:21:23] Yeah, now did Peace Corps find the apartment, did the engineering firm find the apartment? Do you know how you ended up there?

WOOD: [00:21:30] The Peace Corps found the apartment.

WIGGUM: [00:21:31] So for you, the Peace Corps found the apartment, great. And they I assume they paid for everything. And you had a monthly stipend?

WOOD: [00:21:40] We had a monthly stipend. And I don't remember if we paid rent or not. I think probably the Peace Corps paid for the apartment. We would

have personal expenses that would cover food and transportation and clothing.

WIGGUM: [00:21:56] And did you date at all when you were over there?

WOOD: [00:21:59] We socialized with some of the women volunteers. It would be really, it was unheard of to socialize with Iranian women. It's not done. And the only exception I remember with our group was that one of the agricultural volunteers was in a village and ended up marrying an Armenian woman. Yeah, but I don't think that there were any. I don't remember any examples of Americans dating or socializing with Iranian men or women.

WIGGUM: [00:22:38] Were you allowed? Were you allowed to talk to Iranian women?

WOOD: [00:22:46] That was not, that was not a problem going beyond a social situation.

WIGGUM: [00:22:50] Yeah. What was your biggest challenge in going through all of this?

WOOD: [00:23:06] Well, you always have to, it was difficult to relax. We were in a different environment and two years when you just started is an awfully long time and, you know, and we would miss certain things that, certain freedoms that we would have back in the United States, we didn't have in Iran.

WIGGUM: [00:23:26] Like what? Like dating the women?

WOOD: Yeah, well, yes.

WIGGUM: To speak of one.

WOOD: [00:23:39] We didn't, there were there was seven of us. We didn't always understand what was being broadcast in Farsi, but we could watch the

movies. Again, traveling around the country was a nice form of sort of doing something.

WIGGUM: [00:24:01] So was it. It sounds like what you're saying is it wasn't as, um, sort of stimulating. You were used to having more entertainment options, being able to let your hair down and not have to worry that there was a whole community watching you.

WOOD: [00:24:24] Yes, yes, we were always on display in a certain sense. You were the first Americans that a lot of these people had ever seen.

WIGGUM: [00:24:30] Well, then that reminds me of goal number two of Peace Corps, which is to let the world know what Americans are really like as opposed to what they see in the movies and TV. Um, did you have any experiences around that, did people have different expectations from maybe having seen an American movie?

WOOD: [00:24:51] Probably the biggest expectation on the Iranians' part was that we would dress very formally. All the officers and the engineers in the office would always be out in a suit and tie. And we'd dress pretty much like you see me now, with your Levi's and casual shirts, maybe boots. And so I think that was probably strange for a lot of Iranians to see us in that respect.

WIGGUM: [00:25:22] How did you travel? You said you traveled around the country. What was the transportation system like?

WOOD: [00:25:31] There're city to city taxis called *keres*. And you go to Tehran, their place in one of the circles where you could get a cab and it would load up with as many people as they could take and then it would go over the mountains and drop us off in another circle in Tehran. There was a train that went along the north coast. We took that to Gorgan, one of one of our trips. We had to volunteer there, Barkley Moore, that stayed on for six years. I think he set a record for the amount of time that at least an American Peace Corps volunteer in Iran was there. And he got libraries

established, got schools established, and we would look at a paragon of the Peace Corps volunteer. It must have been Barkley.

WIGGUM: [00:26:29] Yeah, nice. Did your family ever come over to visit?

WOOD: They did not.

WIGGUM: Did other people's family, I mean, did you kind of miss not having your family?

WOOD: [00:26:40] Yes, I think there were a few volunteers who got visits from their parents.

WIGGUM: [00:26:46] They still wanted you back in Seattle?

WOOD: I think so.

WIGGUM: How long did it take to write a letter and get a response back? What was the communication like with you and your family?

WOOD: [00:26:58] Well, I don't remember ever talking on the phone. Of course, we didn't have Skype. A letter would take, oh it must take ten days to two weeks each way, so it might be a month between for letters to go back and forth. Packages may or may not ever happen.

WIGGUM: [00:27:22] Was there anything that happened at home while you were there that that kind of upset you, that you weren't there or did things go pretty smoothly at home and this was like two years at college?

WOOD: [00:27:35] I was probably at that point pretty oblivious of what was going on in terms of my sisters' life. I have two younger sisters, and so that wasn't a big deal. So, no, I don't think that there was anything there that made me feel like I should be back in Seattle.

WIGGUM: [00:27:51] Ok, so you're there for two years and you do your job and it's time to go home now. What were your feelings when it when it got to be time to come back?

WOOD: [00:28:01] Well, both of maybe the excitement to move on to do something else. Also a certain reluctance to go, because in assessing the whole two years, it was really a positive experience.

WIGGUM: [00:28:18] In what way?

WOOD: [00:28:20] Again, being able to see, to get inside of the culture that you just can't do as a tourist. And again, this is me looking back at the experience. To be able to live there and more or less be accepted as just part of the society. And I think I probably felt that somewhat at the time.

WIGGUM: [00:28:44] Did you miss call to prayer? I always like that rhythm of the day, you know.

WOOD: Right, yeah.

WIGGUM: It was always you always kind of had your ear out listening for that that nice rhythm that came out. It was always so pretty. And what was it like coming home?

WOOD: [00:29:01] Well, there were five of us that flew to Beirut and bought motorcycles and we traveled through Lebanon and we went over into Syria and up the eastern coast of the Mediterranean through Turkey, crossed over into Greece. I met my youngest sister in Athens and we on the motorcycle, traveled through Europe and ended up bringing the motorcycle back.

WIGGUM: [00:29:33] So it sounds like Peace Corps really fed your adventurous spirit. And the young man who never left the States decided to see a lot of the world.

WOOD: Yeah, saw quite a bit.

WIGGUM: And then you flew home.

WOOD: Yes.

WIGGUM: What was it like coming back to the States?

WOOD: [00:29:53] Well, I had been offered a Peace Corps assignment in Micronesia to extend for a couple of years. And in 1966, they were not offering draft deferments. And I didn't particularly want to go to Vietnam, and so I got into a graduate program at the University of Washington with a specialty in Middle Eastern science, and managed to return to Lebanon for a year to do kind of postgraduate work. And then another year, a fellowship to study Arabic at American University in Cairo. So I really, I think I was affected by the region in many ways, it was so different and so rooted in history where we think that three hundred years is old or we're going back all over that region thousands of years. To be able to actually need to go to the, as we're doing a road, and to see structures that date back to heaven only knows when.

WIGGUM: [00:31:17] Yeah, it's pretty cool. So did you stay in Middle East and work?

WOOD: [00:31:24] Well, pretty much so for a while. After coming back from Egypt, at that point, two young boys came along and at some point I felt like I had to get a job and Boeing was looking to develop a business in the Middle East. So I got on as a, joined Boeing is doing marketing and business development work.

WIGGUM: [00:31:52] And they were probably delighted with your all your Middle East.

WOOD: I hope so.

WIGGUM: Yeah. And somewhere along that route, if two boys came along, there must have been a wife.

WOOD: [00:32:00] Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, that's right. Yes. When I was still in graduate school, I got married. And when my wife and I went to Lebanon, we came back with the first son and we went to Egypt and came back with, had two more boys. So we have a family of three boys.

WIGGUM: [00:32:21] Nice. Well, how do you feel like Peace Corps impacted your life? What do you think, in all kinds of ways, that you got out of Peace Corps?

WOOD: [00:32:38] Well, it certainly expanded my view physically of what the world looks like and it caused me to appreciate that there are different cultures that are important. They're important to the whole mix, of the global mix, and we got countless, whenever we travel in the Middle East to Iran or Lebanon or Egypt, the people would say, you know, we like you as Americans. We don't like your foreign policy. And I think it's that's reassuring in a way but it's also a challenge, I think, to come back as a volunteer and to reassess what we need as Americans. How are we, are we behaving as global citizens? And do we fall short in that respect?

WIGGUM: [00:33:40] Yeah. So that's something that's now just been part of your life, is that evaluation?

WOOD: Yes.

WIGGUM: Have you ever been back to Iran? Did you ever get a chance to go back?

WOOD: [00:33:52] One quick trip back in conjunction with some Boeing work I was doing in Saudi Arabia. So stayed briefly over the weekend in Tehran. But I have not been back to Sari. It would be something I like to do, but I think it would be difficult.

WIGGUM: [00:34:11] Yeah, at this time.

WOOD: [00:34:13] I know that Rick Steves has been, you know, the travel guy that has been sponsoring trips to Iran, which is.

WIGGUM: [00:34:20] Now?

WOOD: Now. Yeah.

WIGGUM: Oh, that surprises me. That surprises me. But you never can put anything over on Rick Steves. He can manage all kinds of stuff. Yeah. It'd be interesting to go back. What did you feel like when all the revolution was happening and the hostages were happening? And I mean, you must have had a personal feeling of personal connection with all the changes that were convulsing the country.

WOOD: [00:34:50] For me, it came as a complete surprise. And, yeah, you know, I didn't sense the roots of the revolution when I was there. That was, you know, several years later, but still.

WIGGUM: [00:35:05] It was like only like eight or, you know, it wasn't all that many years later.

WOOD: [00:35:10] The revolution in the mid '70s. And like, I was there in the 60s, so yeah. Looking back on it, though. The shah of Iran, there was a constitutional monarchy in place when we were there. He was supported first by the British and then by the Americans, and a lot of that had to do with containing Russia and sharing our oil supply. I think, I'm not surprised that a lot of Iranians felt that their independence was being encroached on. But still, it was terrible to think that to be such an integral part of a country and find that the revolution occurred, probably a lot of our friends and people even that did not survive the revolution. Oh, we've got Iranian friends today that go back and forth and you talk about the other difficulties there. I don't think that currently we're treating Iran with very much respect or appreciation.

WIGGUM: [00:36:33] No kidding.

WOOD: [00:36:35] I don't know how I can say that.

WIGGUM: [00:36:38] Yeah, well, you can't, that's impossible these days to say things gently about that. The third goal of Peace Corps is educating Americans about other countries. Have you felt like you've had a chance to do that? Do people are people interested in your experience? Were they interested when you came back?

WOOD: [00:37:01] Oh absolutely. Absolutely. I think for most of America, Iran was just a mystery and probably still is to a large extent. In graduate school, there was, I was friends with a Peace Corps volunteer from Pakistan, and I know we were taking a class of Middle Eastern studies and our professor had a radio program and he and this other guy and I were on together and talking about Iran and trying to explain what was going on.

WIGGUM: [00:37:37] Cool. Very nice. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to share?

WOOD: [00:37:40] I think you've gone over a lot. I think you got through the whole lot.

WIGGUM: [00:37:46] Well, it was a delight. And thank you for coming down and sharing with me.

WOOD: [00:37:50] Thank you again.

[END OF INTERVIEW]