

Bonnie Jean Campbell Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Bonnie Jean Campbell served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Azerbaijan from 2008 to 2010 in a community economic development project.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Bonnie Jean Campbell

August 24, 2018

Shawnee on Delaware, Pennsylvania

By Patricia Wand

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

WAND: [00:00:00] Today is August 24, 2018, and this is Patricia Wand. I am interviewing Bonnie Jean Campbell, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Azerbaijan. She served from September 2008 to December 2010 and served in the project of, what project was it?

CAMPBELL: [00:00:35] Community economic development.

WAND: [00:00:37] Thank you very much. Thank you, Bonnie, for for agreeing to be interviewed today and for participating in this oral history project. So why don't you start by telling us what you were doing the year before you joined Peace Corps?

CAMPBELL: [00:01:00] I joined Peace Corps as a senior volunteer, so I was in my late 50s. And the year before I was working, I have had a consulting business teaching computer skills to library patrons. And also I was an

executive director of the County Medical Society and in charge of continuing medical education and there found their charitable foundation. So I was single. My children grown grandchildren in their teenage years and I was working very hard at being a consultant to the medical staff and also the library world.

WAND: [00:01:42] So you joined the Peace Corps then later in your career?

CAMPBELL: [00:01:46] Yes, actually, to add a point when perhaps I was feeling a little stagnant, I'd been doing the same thing for 25 going on 30 years. I am trained as a master's degree librarian and I was a medical librarian at a hospital and that led to the medical society activities in my career and felt like I was maybe going to be in Port Huron, Michigan, for the rest of my life. And then I started thinking about what else I could do and on a whim, a very much a whim, talking with my son and my daughter, who are both also in information technology and librarianship about jobs that were available in Seattle and other places. And my son said, well, mom, you should apply for those jobs. You're qualified for them, not more than we are. And I said, oh, I think I'll be in Port Huron. And unless I do something crazy, like joined the Peace Corps, which I had never thought about, I was. Yeah, you know, when I finished high school, early marriage, university, graduate school and work and never even I knew about the Peace Corps and and understood how important it was, but never was in my horizons. So he left the room and I kind of cocked my head and said, Huh, I could do that. I have you know, I was at a point where I could do something crazy and leave. And quite frankly, if it hadn't been for the Peace Corps application being available on the Internet and on the Web site, easy to access. I read all the materials and I immediately started filling out the information I needed to start that process. That application process didn't tell a soul. Not a friend, not a daughter, not a son. No one until I was invited, I just didn't think they would take me. I was 58 years old, faithful and 57 years old and had no idea that, you know, that I would be offered an opportunity to travel and to, you know, go someplace crazy and wild. And so that's how it happened.

WAND: [00:03:55] How long did you wait then between the time you sent out?

CAMPBELL: [00:04:00] I started the application, that discussion with my son was probably in February of 2008. I made my application. And by the end of May well, mid-May, I knew I was in the pike for being invited, originally invited to Central Asia. And then I think there was because of age and stuff, they then called me and asked me if I would accept a position in Azerbaijan. And I had posted a world map on the wall during that, you know, during the application time. And I said, Yeah, but where do I look in the world? I have no idea where Azerbaijan is. And I was really willing to go anywhere. I wanted, you know, something more than more than exotic in Azerbaijan met that. I wish that it was wonderful. So then I gathered my family together and told them at that point that they thought I was going to tell them I was dying of some dread disease or I had met somebody and I was going to move out of the home. But then I told them I was going away for twenty seven months to a country that obviously they had never heard of before. My daughter cried and then she was happy for me. My daughter in law was extremely excited because she then told the story how she had wanted to join the Peace Corps when she graduated from college but didn't get to me on her life didn't take her that way.

CAMPBELL: [00:05:17] And and so, yeah, everybody was very supportive. But yeah, that's how it happened. And so that was June and and we left for our service on oh, I think it was September 8th or early September. So it was not a long wait. You know, we of course, all the medical and everything that everyone talks about that kind of takes a long time, had to have some extra tests because I was older and a little bit heavier. So that was things that I had to kind of work through the process with. But no, no. And at no time was I thinking that I wouldn't be accepted all the way. Right. I went to Chicago, to Chicago, the university, probably University of Chicago. I can't remember now. I took my two older grandkids who were at that time and seventh and eighth grade with me. And we stood up and I said, you know, that I was nominated and

they were very taken by their crazy grandmother that was going to go off to to a country they'd never heard of either.

WAND: [00:06:14] But now they've all heard of it.

CAMPBELL: [00:06:16] Oh, and they think I'm. Yeah, they think I'm pretty special.

WAND: [00:06:19] Right. You're a pretty cool grandmother. So let's before we talk about Peace Corp, say tell us a little bit about your growing up time and where you grew up and and so that we get an idea of your personal background.

CAMPBELL: [00:06:36] Ok, I, I grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, which is a lot of people considered a small town, but a community of 35, 40,000, very beautiful community. I grew up in the same house with my mother and father and two sibs. I was the youngest. I'm my bachelor's degree is in music, history and literature. So I was a musician all the way through. I started piano lessons when I was four, and the music was very much a part of my life all the way through my education and my adult life. So when I you know, when I went, I decided to go to college, I went to Michigan State University, to music school there, I married the fellow that I had dated in high school. So we started our married life at 19 and had our family soon after that Vietnam War was on. He was one of the fellows that pulled a very high number in the lottery. So we kind of felt that he was going to be able to finish his education without having to go and serve in the peace and the Vietnam War. He went on to grad school, to law school.

WAND: [00:07:48] Did you also continue studying during the time they did having children?

CAMPBELL: [00:07:51] I did. I finished my well, when he started law school, I had three almost. I had just had two terms. We were in quarters at MSU at that time. I only had two terms left and my degree and we moved back to Port Huron. My parents helped us with our place to live and his

parents helped us with a place to live when we needed it. And and he commuted to Detroit. And then I wanted to be a librarian. I wanted to be music librarian. And music library programs are not there's only a few in each state. And so I did my Masters at Detroit and Wayne at Wayne State University. So I commuted there as I worked and raised the kids along with him commuting to Wayne State Law School. It was a crazy time. And when we both finished, we ended up living in Port Huron. It was just the opportunities were there and family background and know assistance. So we raised our children and four year on in and they both live in Port Huron now. And my daughter is the head of the library in Port Huron. So we got librarians everywhere. And I ended up with a job at the local hospital, a health sciences librarian. And that's not a medical records person. That's a library with books and journals and did research and became very involved in the National Library Medicine Online Research, the Medline program trained in Washington, DC on it. At that time, you had to go there to become access to midline and then taught at Wayne State University's library school as an adjunct faculty in computers and automation. Because I had worked as a computer operator for the at the college at one point in town. So.

WAND: [00:09:31] And what where were you a health science library?

CAMPBELL: In Port Huron.

WAND: What is what is the medical school or the public library?

CAMPBELL: [00:09:39] Hospital, small hospital in a hospital at that time, the Accrediting Association, Joint Commission on Accreditation for Hospitals. So that would have been in 19, I started it in 1978, required a hospital to have either a librarian on staff for research or a contract with a librarian in this small hospital in Port Huron was part of a large one of the first large systems of Mercy health system. And so they hired me a few hours a week and then more hours a week. And I eventually took over continuing medical education for the physicians,

licensure, you know, making the programs, not teaching, but, you know, doing that coordination and sort of built a really, I always thought a designer career because I could do really neat stuff there.

WAND: [00:10:25] And and were you using computers in the early on science library in '78 when you joined?

CAMPBELL: [00:10:33] I went to the National Library Medicine to train for existing deadline. At that time, only librarians could because we dialed directly into the National Library of Medicine computers for Medline, which is the index medicus online. And that was in '82 or '83. And yes, I was then online with a Texas instrument 700, you know, paper all over the place, not a not a computer terminal. So yes, I was doing research for physicians in the community hospital. So not, not, not a teaching hospital. We were a community hospital. So they would come to me with, you know, I've got a patient upstairs that is diabetic and is pregnant and what do I need to you know, what articles support the treatment. I'm looking for a new procedure or that's what that's what I did, along with having books and journals on the shelf and

WAND: [00:11:27] Doing research?

CAMPBELL: [00:11:28] Research for the nurses, helping them with their education administration, with making decisions. So, yeah, it was a great, a great career.

WAND: [00:11:34] Right. And you worked there in the same in the same hospital?

CAMPBELL: [00:11:38] For twenty years. And then, you know, health care changed a lot. And during those twenty years and the rules and regulations for hospitals having librarians were removed. So things kind of changed. And I left the hospital and opened my own consulting business and I had

WAND: [00:12:00] And when was that? What what year did you?

CAMPBELL: [00:12:05] 1998. And my clients my main clients were the medical the professional medical society for the county, and I organized three hospitals to go together and fund the continuing medical education outside of the hospital, which was good because the physicians needed to choose their own educational needs, not have it influenced by the hospital administration and and then the library. I had a contract with the library to teach computer skills to adults, and that's the one that I ended up doing the most, and especially after I came back from my Peace Corps sometime in Azerbaijan, then that's the only contract that I maintain. The other ones I passed on to somebody else when I went into Peace Corps. So, yeah.

WAND: [00:12:56] So that sounds like a great preparation of skills to take to a country that was just ready to go with them. So let's let's do that. Let's talk now about you. You you got us through your swearing in, if you will. Then what about leaving and saying goodbye to your family and.

CAMPBELL: [00:13:22] Yeah, that's that's a hard time. I'm sure everybody has. You know, it's a busy time. I didn't have to divest myself of my home. I had I owned a home because my son and his wife and two grand boys had moved in with me a few years before that decision. And so they took over the house and the costs of the house and and, you know, so I that was all taken care of. So I know a lot of people have trouble. You know, I have a challenge with that. What to do with their house and what to do with their things. Seemed like everybody in their brother wanted to, you know, have a going away dinner. I eat a lot of food, but it still was a lot of putting things together. And I wasn't sad to go. I was very excited. I'll have to admit, the hardest part of leaving was telling my wonderful four year old Labrador retriever goodbye because he I knew he wouldn't understand that I wasn't coming home for twenty seven months, you know. But other than that, it was not. It was of course, a whirlwind of things to do. But I didn't have to close down my life quite as much as maybe other people that.

WAND: [00:14:30] So was your Labrador retriever still alive when you came home?

CAMPBELL: [00:14:34] He was and he was wild crazy. I mean, he would actually when I talked to the family from Azerbaijan, my son would call home every couple of months and we'd have a little chat. My dog Jack would bark when he heard me. So I don't know whether it was just because everybody was excited, because we had made this connection on the phone or not. But anyway.

WAND: [00:14:54] Yes, right.

CAMPBELL: [00:14:56] But that was probably the hardest thing. How do you tell your dog you're leaving for two years?

WAND: [00:14:59] So is he still alive?

CAMPBELL: No.

WAND: So all right. So you you were getting ready to leave lots of dinners and then where did you leave from?

CAMPBELL: [00:15:13] We our group met in Philadelphia. OK, for the I don't know what day and a half it was, of course stressful packing all those things into your big backpacks and so forth that we needed to go. And it was you know, we were told about conservative dress. And I think the Azerbaijani women thought we were all missionaries or something because we all had dark skirts. So went down to our ankles. And they certainly didn't dress like that in Azerbaijan. They were pretty modern dressing, you know, and especially the younger girls. And the the Days Inn in Philadelphia were great. I had a roommate that I connected up with. And we you know, we she was a young woman and we really enjoyed each other during that time and then ended up rooming

together when we got to Baku for our first three days in Azerbaijan, too. So I always kind of had a special spot in my heart for her.

WAND: [00:16:08] So you were three, three days in Philadelphia?

CAMPBELL: [00:16:11] I think we probably were. I had to where I flew out of an in Michigan. You know, they ask you where is your home airport? And I prefer the smaller airport in Flint, Michigan, which is in the center of Michigan. So they flew me out of there, which wasn't very convenient because I had to go to Atlanta and then back up to Philadelphia. So I left Flint like at four a.m. or five a.m. and didn't get to Philadelphia to five p.m. And they didn't have any coffee in the conference room. I was like, I'm an adult. I need some coffee now. Yeah, I've been on a plane for the last twelve hours, so we laughed about that because that was so. Yeah. So we had roundtable discussions and the usual get to know each other, you know, all those kinds of games that you play when you're in a group that you know. And then we also I still have the envelope that they gave me at the end. Of my service, of I wrote something about myself personally and what I had hoped to accomplish and Peace Corps. Now don't ask me what I wrote because I don't remember exactly, but it was, you know, something very lofty and, you know, doing things, important things and stuff. But that was fun to get at the end.

WAND: [00:17:28] So you mean you wrote this?

CAMPBELL: [00:17:30] Inevitably, they gave it all. They gave us all an envelope. We put our name on the outside and we wrote just to ourselves, like, this is what we know. This is what I want to accomplish at the Philadelphia training and the one I cost. When I closed my service, they gave that back to me.

WAND: [00:17:43] How interesting.

CAMPBELL: [00:17:44] So that was kind of neat. Yeah. For me it was anyway.

WAND: [00:17:47] Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you spent a few days in Philadelphia and then they. And how many were you there?

CAMPBELL: [00:17:59] I think our group started off at 63 and about I'll say fourteen or fifteen of us were senior volunteers 50 years or older. There were a couple to married couples that were in their probably 30s and then the rest were the, you know, recent grads or 20 something graduate student age. So so our senior group was really good. And when we got to Baku, they kind of placed us in our training clusters. There was a group of us that were all seniors together, not all the seniors that were in our cluster because we because of our sectors. But we always felt lucky that we were together in a training session together. We weren't competing against the younger people with the language challenges of Azerbaijani, which is a pretty tough language, and and supported each other and understood each other's needs and so forth.

WAND: [00:18:54] So you said you were 50/50?

CAMPBELL: [00:18:56] Well, I think there were 14 or 14 or 15. A couple of the volunteers left during that time, but. Yeah, so it was a good group and we have stayed. I'm here today with one of my Azerbaijani friends.

WAND: [00:19:12] Yes, we're doing our interview during the Peace Corps Connect conference in Shawnee on Delaware, in Pennsylvania in 2018. So for that reason, you're with one of your friends. That's wonderful that you both can attend this and continue to be stimulated and motivated about Peace Corps values. So there were a good portion then of you almost. What is that? Almost a quarter of you were senior.

CAMPBELL: [00:19:47] Yeah, yeah. Probably not quite but we were and I was is a good place for senior volunteers because of the it's a post-Soviet country, the respect of education and the respect of the experience and age. We we had the benefit of that, of that. I think they they

understood that. We knew what we were about, you know. Right. And I know organizations.

WAND: [00:20:10] And you were in you said economic community

CAMPBELL: [00:20:15] Community economic development. So there were, so we did our our 11 weeks of training. Well, we were three, three days in Baku and then they piled us in marshrutka and dropped us off at our host families for 11 weeks.

WAND: [00:20:29] Um, and what were those, was the training in Baku?

CAMPBELL: [00:20:33] Just three days of kind of welcoming training, almost a continuation of what we did in Philadelphia group stuff, some of the some of the immediate culture and cultural things that we needed to pay attention to how to use a squat toilet and those kinds of things that they knew we were all going to face once we got to the host family. So it was in a hotel that we were at Baku and then they split us up and sent us off to our villages or the or the not our site villages, but our training, training, training locations. And I was placed in a we would call it in the United States, a suburb of Sumqayit, which is about the third largest city in Azerbaijan in a compound with a family that had had a Peace Corps volunteer previously. So it wasn't their first one, not very much English in the in the county, in the family, and lived with them for 11 weeks until I was placed in my permanent assignment.

WAND: [00:21:35] And speaking of of language, what was the language that you were learning?

CAMPBELL: [00:21:43] Azerbaijani. Azerbaijani is a Turkish based language, very grammatical. And I will admit that I struggled very much with it and once I was placed in my home, in my, in my sight, it became very evident that the people I was working with, which were young people and in vocational training, they wanted to speak English. They didn't

want me to struggle too much with the language. So I didn't do really great with it, but I got by.

WAND: [00:22:18] Yeah, you learned enough.

CAMPBELL: [00:22:20] Yeah, much enough to certainly get around. Yes. But not to carry on a business conversation or anything. I was not in some of our group did. They were very, very good at it.

WAND: [00:22:30] Yeah, not me, so tell us what you what kinds of things you did during training both the activities and the content of how you look, what you return?

CAMPBELL: [00:22:44] Well, we did have 11 weeks of training and for every every day we had all morning, sometimes I would say five hours of language intensive language instruction. And that language instruction also included, of course, some cultural things. And we would go to the market as a group. And once we got a little bit of language and in our language and cultural training, person would take us and we would have to order things and buy fruit and those life skill things. And then the second half of the day we met with our sector because our cluster, our training cluster, which was two, three, four, six or seven people had for four of us were four or five of us. Now, I'd have to think were community economic development and two were youth development. And they were in there because they were spouses of of of the others. So they were kind of we split up our sector training and we would go and learn activities that would help us with community economic development, with grants, with the business end of strategic planning, and also how businesses operated and organizations operated in Azerbaijan. In our language training, we did all kinds of fun things. You know, we made posters, we did skits. We we struggled. We competed, you know, and we did a heck of a lot of walking because in Azerbaijan, you either took a very crowded minibus, marshrutka, or you walked. And we we chose to walk a lot, so.

WAND: [00:24:24] Yeah, so you you found your way around. Was it a very large city that you were in?

CAMPBELL: [00:24:31] Not for training because I was in the suburbs, so, so know I probably had to walk a mile and a half or so to the school that we used for training. No, of course, there were all kinds of all kinds of cultural shock, you know, trash cows wandering around. My friend and I, Margaret was here with me. We we still laugh about getting lost, trying to because it was almost like a rabbit trail to get back to where we were living from a school was very confusing with all the high walls and so forth. And we walked right through a funeral tent one night because they had they had put the tent across the whole road and we didn't realize it. And then when we got into the tent, we thought, oh, where are we? You know? So yeah, but we did a lot of and we followed as senior volunteers. We followed the rules, which made our lives much smoother than some of the you know, admittedly, the younger people that didn't necessarily follow the rules. We weren't to be after dark and we weren't, you know, right in the front seat of the cars. And there was a lot of those kinds of things that we were real rule followers because we were seniors. And did, you know.

WAND: [00:25:40] It wasn't worth.

CAMPBELL: [00:25:41] It wasn't. And, you know, that was just the way it was. And also, you know, some of the cultural things, we didn't push against them. We tried to integrate. I wanted to be not there and be in an American compound. I wanted to be a part of the Azerbaijani culture. So. Retarded that part.

WAND: [00:25:59] Yeah, right. Did you enjoy training?

CAMPBELL: [00:26:03] Yeah. I mean, I struggled so much with the language, the language class, and there were a variety of reasons. That was probably, you know, the hardest part with the rest of it. Yeah, I did, yeah. I mean, I was glad when it was over and we all got our

assignments and, you know, that exciting part of knowing where you're going to go in the country and and so forth. And in the end, the kind of the cultural change that you have in front of your eyes when you first get to a country started to fall away and everything wasn't so, so strange or so. Oh, my goodness, look at that. Kind of got better, better acclimated and was ready, ready for service one when we swore in in December of 2008.

WAND: [00:26:50] So you didn't actually swear in

CAMPBELL: Until December 2008.

WAND: Until you finished. And did most of the trainees survive through the whole 11 weeks?

CAMPBELL: [00:27:00] Our group did. We were unusual that way. We were told me as far as the expected percentage of people dropping out. I think during training we had I don't know whether we had anyone drop out during training, but we did have one senior volunteer left for health reasons. And we had maybe a couple of the young people, but we only had four or five of the whole group through the whole two and a half years actually.

WAND: [00:27:29] Leave. Leave early. Leave early. Right. Yeah.

CAMPBELL: [00:27:32] So, yeah. And some of the volunteers didn't go home during the whole time. I, I pushed the button at one point and went home at Christmas after, after the first year. And after I did that I wished I hadn't, it kind of interrupted my rhythm of my volunteer activities. I was doing the projects I was working on and I if I did it again, I wouldn't I wouldn't go home in the middle of it.

WAND: [00:27:58] Yeah, I did. Did you do any other. Well, we'll get back to that. And again, let's talk about what happened after training. Where were you assigned?

CAMPBELL: [00:28:10] I was assigned. So we our training was in Sumqayit, which is on the Caspian Sea, not too far from Baku, the capital, which is a total another world of cosmopolitan society and beautiful homes and so forth. Sumqayit was more of an industrial town.

WAND: [00:28:24] North of

CAMPBELL: [00:28:25] North. Yeah. Going up the Caspian north chemical plants that were defunct from the Soviet time. Now, I think being used again, a reputation of, you know, of some of the conflict with the Armenians during the, um, the Armenian Azerbaijani border conflict that

WAND: [00:28:45] Which continues, doesn't it?

CAMPBELL: [00:28:46] Which continues today. They still are shooting at each other over the border and still still in and just disagreement about the border. So from there, my assignment was in Ganja, which is in the west for the west end of the country, almost a Georgia border, maybe about an hour from the Georgia border. And Ganja is the second largest city in Azerbaijan. And it is a university town, an old old city. And there were five of us that were assigned there because it's a city of, um, I'll say three hundred fifty thousand people. Largest city I had ever lived in. I was placed with a woman that was a widow from the Azerbaijani Armenian conflict. And but her daughter was one of our our language cultural trainers. So she had English. And I lived in one of the nine story Soviet cement block apartment complexes that had several in our in our area that were so we probably had eighteen hundred families living in this big complex of big apartments.

WAND: [00:30:03] Do you want to tell us a little bit about that apartment? What marked it in your mind as being Soviet era?

CAMPBELL: [00:30:15] Well well, it looks like every other Soviet cement block, you know, apartment building, the exterior of the buildings were cemented

in an American's judgment, not finished, not painted, not really cared for. I think the answer to that was when the Soviet Union dissolved the people that were responsible for trash, for the water, for the electricity, for the pumps and everything that everybody had those jobs that kind of disappeared. There was a little bit of chaos. So a lot of broken concrete stairwells without lights, open stairwells without railings, you know, windows not there. The water tanks were 1950 era underground water tanks. So the water smelled like worms or fish. And, you know, so we bought our water from the water man. But once I entered the door, once I went through the door and a lot of the apartments, not all of them, but my apartment, once I went through the door, it was very much like an apartment that you would find in any housing development. Probably better. Cleaner is fixed up, as nice as she could have. I think having a Peace Corps volunteer live with her. I lived with my host mom the whole time. I did not get an apartment. I wanted to integrate. I didn't want to have an apartment where I would go in and close the door and have an American room. So I had a I had a really good relationship with my host mom, who did not speak English. And she cooked and was and was a nurse, so she worked out of the home, too, and I made friends with all the women in the building, that was good because the nurse and nurse host mom was kind of the central focus of all the young moms. They would come to her. She was kind of the house mom for everybody. So that was a great experience. Wonderful woman, you know.

WAND: [00:32:13] Are you still in touch with her?

CAMPBELL: [00:32:17] Yes. And I've been back to Azerbaijan since the last couple of years for her daughter's wedding. So, yeah, yeah, she's a great woman. But her apartment, I guess the thing about her apartment was a couple of things. Those a lot of those also those Soviet cement block apartment buildings of balconies. And on them, the women spent a lot of time looking out those balconies and figuring out what was going on in the neighborhood. There was no hankie panky. The kids knew that they were being seen. They were safe. Kids played in the yard. It was I

always felt like it was the 1950s in in the United States. Everybody had a place. Everybody there was no homelessness in my city of Ganja. It would be an embarrassment to the family because community and family was very important to the culture. So the balcony was an important spot where you would eat out there, you would hang your laundry off of the balcony and in my host mom had remodeled the bathroom. So I had a regular Western bathroom with a shower and a toilet that flushed hot water maybe once or twice a week. So water was always, you know, sometimes it wouldn't come out of the pumps and you wouldn't it wouldn't have water, but but very comfortable. Sometimes I would shake my head and say, is this the Peace Corps? I'm in this, you know, this big city and this I could have been in a village, but I was in a big city with a very comfortable living. However, we did not have central heat. And Azerbaijan has winters very similar to my home countries, home state of Michigan. And there were many times I would leave home to go to my volunteer spot, which was also a cement block with, you know, five five layers of shirts and tights and in long johns and and winter boots and a heavy, heavy L.L. Bean coat and stay in them all day long because you were sitting in a cement block building.

WAND: [00:34:20] But did you get cold underneath all those layers or were you able to?

CAMPBELL: [00:34:24] Oh, yeah, sure. Are you and you would come home and you might get under your your huge Peace Corps sleeping bag that they gave us on in the bed and just sort of stay under there for the rest of the evening because it was cold but not, you know, not terrible, you know. Yeah, yeah. At first it was probably terrible, but then it became just your life.

WAND: [00:34:42] Yeah. Right, you coped. So what about your work? What did you do on a daily basis?

CAMPBELL: [00:34:49] Yeah. I was assigned to a NGO vocational training center, so I had nothing to do with the government school system. And I would compare it to our United States tech centers that a lot of the schools have. It was targeted at 14 year olds through. Well, it could have gone past the adult, but usually once the Azerbaijanis were married, they weren't doing the school thing. So I'd say twenty six year olds, when we had twenty six year olds, the school taught computer skills, English, German, sewing, knitting, cosmetology, welding, accounting. What else? Well, cosmetology was a big one. So the students came, they paid a tuition and about 25 percent of our students were IDP's from that Armenian and internally displaced people from the Armenian Azerbaijani conflict. Because Ganja was one place where a lot of the people that were expelled from Armenia that were Azerbaijanis came either home to their families area and Ganja. And we were close, close enough to the border sort of that we had a huge IDP population there. Yet even though that was 20 years or more after the original conflict when they were when they separated and Azerbaijan's and Armenians to go back to their country, too. So it was a lot of IDP's I. I think I've heard that there were probably 100,000 IDPs living yet in Azerbaijan as IDPs.

WAND: [00:36:29] And they would have been had previously lived close

CAMPBELL: [00:36:35] On the Azerbaijan and Armenia border. They were in Armenia.

WAND: [00:36:38] Well, but then but then because of the struggle, they were displaced.

CAMPBELL: [00:36:42] There's a section that's a peace part of the land Azerbaijanis land that Azerbaijani say belongs to them and it's inside their their country. It's Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenians occupied it. That's what the Azerbaijanis would say. And so the Azerbaijanis that were living on that land were expelled from the Armenians that were in other parts because they had lived together up until that point and were

expelled back to their country. So the Armenian country has the same kind of IDP problem, I think, too. And the IDPs in Azerbaijan really felt, feel and still feel that they won't get to go back to their land. You know, they had and their status remains kind of in flux because they have that belief and they also have some benefits as as an IDP, you know, they have some help with their housing and their, you know, their gas bills and some of their education. Is that so we our organization, the NGO that I volunteered at the IDPs, didn't have to pay tuition to go there so they could learn those technical skills for free. The other students that came and they came a lot for the English, all the other students would come a lot for the English classes. So we're taught there. And they were taught by Azerbaijani young, young Azerbaijani teachers that were trying to learn English from old Russian textbooks. And so that was one of the things that we did. We tried to upgrade their, you know, their skills.

WAND: [00:38:19] Right, so that this was a private school?

CAMPBELL: [00:38:23] Then it was started by the Seventh Day Adventists at the time that the that the country was formed and they had finished their mission mission, two of that kind. They were still in the country doing some ecological things and planting trees and stuff. But pretty much the school was turned over to a local NGO before I got there.

WAND: [00:38:44] So the Seventh Day Adventist work went early after that.

CAMPBELL: [00:38:47] Early there, they were the first in there.

WAND: [00:38:48] Breakup of the Soviet Union. They were right. And they established first and there some of these be professional training schools. OK, so how many Peace Corps volunteers were assigned to that school?

CAMPBELL: Just me.

WAND: Were you the only one?

CAMPBELL: [00:39:06] One, and there had been one or maybe two before me and there was one that followed me. But then the school was dissolved for a variety of reasons. On the NGO situation I was watching kind of changed politically. The government was not as receptive to foreign funded NGOs and a lot of reporting things in the school, kind of, I think, and I think the Seventh Day Avenue sold the buildings, so I just went away.

WAND: [00:39:36] Oh, yeah. So you see how many students were there?

CAMPBELL: [00:39:39] When I was four hundred bid 400 students, you know, not full time. You know, they weren't all day students. They were like a training center. So they would come in for their specific classes. But a lot of them took you know, they would we had tailoring. They would come in and the girls would learn how, you know, how to dressmaking make their patterns right. And a lot of times the teachers would work for two or three months without pay because the funds were that was one thing that that I hope I helped them with because I was a strategic planner for Girl Scouts and for the medical society and they didn't know how to budget. You know, they would get money, they would spend it, they didn't know how to project. They didn't know how to match their tuition prices to their need or what they needed. And the teachers had never been asked to give their input. You know, you've got kind of that Soviet mind of, you know, I'm told what to do. And it's not my job to. Decide. So with the help of a translator, because I couldn't do that by myself, we did focus groups and they were so excited to be able to input what they thought would make the school better because had never been asked that in, some of the teachers had been there for a long time and were very, very dedicated to what they were doing, but never felt like they were part of felt that they could tell management what what they what they needed.

WAND: [00:40:58] And what to make. So then you were assigned there to work and as a teacher, not as a teacher, but as an administrator?

CAMPBELL: [00:41:05] As a as a management development type position, I guess we would say, from the United States. So I helped with structuring a budget even and even showing the assistant director how to use a spreadsheet and how to project did a little marketing things. That's when I found out you just can't change logos and names and stuff in a country. And, you know, that was that was a learning experience for me. You know, I get great ideas and can't move them forward until you get all the permissions and so forth. And we did as part of my Peace Corps, volunteering things, I helped my counterpart, my Azerbaijani counterpart at the school, write a grant for you to. It was USAID and it was the U.N. Habitat Grant to train IDP's and also a portion of their students to do computer repair so that then they could go back to their villages or their communities or their IDP communities and open up a little computer repair shops. And we got a grant, of course, like all Peace Corps volunteers run into the money came in November, and I closed my service in December. So I never got to experience the end of it. I mean, I didn't do the third year that a lot of people do because I really felt I needed to get home and be with my family. But I think I'm not sure how it all worked out.

WAND: [00:42:42] Was there a volunteer who came after you?

CAMPBELL: [00:42:45] There was. And I don't know whether. I don't know. You know, it was one of those things that just sort of slipped through the cracks with me. And I didn't I think I was afraid to ask because I was afraid that it fell apart and I'm not sure. So I was I felt that

WAND: [00:42:58] And what was the grant supposed to do?

CAMPBELL: [00:43:00] It was supposed to train 40 of our students. Half of them IDP's and half regular students to how to do computer repair. We had a really good computer repair program there and a teacher and two

teachers already that we're doing it. And they were supposed to do that. And then junior achievement was supposed to be a part of the grant was to bring junior achievement from Baku, which they didn't have in Ganja, but they had to teach these kids how to run a business or do that business part and then help them with tools and equipment to start a computer repair shop. So we were all excited. We played first and didn't get accepted. And then we wrote the grant again and met the guidelines better with our plan. And I think they, you know, that was one. And then the other was to teach observation. We did at the grant that the Peace Corps allows for this for the Peace Corps volunteers right now.

WAND: [00:43:58] Peace Corps partnership.

CAMPBELL: [00:44:01] It was a partnership thing. Yeah. We were to teach Azerbaijani our students to touch type on the computers. We had lots of computers for them to work on. They were old computers, but our computer repair guy kept them all going and we had a little computer lab with ten computers on it. And we got to help them select some software that I used in the United States. You know, Miss Mavis Beacon, which is a great software for touch typing, and even though most of them couldn't speak English, they were successful at doing the exercises. And of course, Azerbaijani has extra characters in their alphabet on and vowels. But we didn't bother with that, just got them doing that. And we had some of the students get up to forty words per minute. So that was great. They'd never done touch typing ever. None of the students had so.

WAND: [00:44:51] So some of it was new.

CAMPBELL: [00:44:54] And the concept of independent learning too, because they came into the lab, signed in, we had a little lab assistant that we had a little bit of money from the grant to give that person a little bit of a stipend and signed them in and got them started. And they had to sign in for their hours and they had to do that independently. And some of

them didn't understand that. Of course, you know, they thought because there wasn't a class, they didn't have to show up. And then they were upset because they didn't get the certificate. But that worked out. That was, you know, so there were lots of good things.

WAND: [00:45:25] Lots of cross-cultural things that you encountered. Right. So what about travel in the in the while you were in the country or nearby while you were assigned there?

CAMPBELL: [00:45:42] You know, Azerbaijan is about the size of Maine or maybe the size of Michigan. So it's not a gigantic country and actually has a, you know, a lot of busses and so forth that you can go to our rules where we were supposed to travel until we've been at our host at our our site for a couple of months. So as soon as that time got out, which was probably April of 2009, the senior volunteers decided that we were going to get together in Georgia, which is the neighboring country the Republic of Georgia, and it wasn't that far. So we all made our arrangements and found a hotel and went there and realized right away that what crazy people we were. We've been struggling with this new language, a new culture for all these months. And then we went to a country that had everything in the Georgian Hobbit language and we couldn't figure out where this stops were on the subway. We couldn't figure out which direction to go. And we laughed at ourselves, but we had a good time. So that was our theme that we traveled. That was the first out of country travel. And some of us went to Georgia several times because it was an easy, nice, you know, just an interesting place to go.

WAND: [00:46:50] And it was easy for you to get back and forth, back

CAMPBELL: [00:46:52] And forth across the border as long as we had our, you know, our peace because our Peace Corps posts there. So we had to do that permission thing with the Peace Corps post in Georgia, in ours, to travel in country. Anything that we needed to do officially, we had to go to Baku. It was probably it was a good six hours on the bus or

seven hours on the bus to get to Baku because the roads were under construction and not because it was so far there were trains. I personally didn't go to Baku only when I absolutely was required to because it was just a big city and it wasn't it wasn't what I wanted to necessarily do. And I helped on a lot of projects of other Peace Corps volunteers, especially the youth development was there, you know, their Fourth of July activities at a park or taught my dancing to a bunch of girls in a in a very isolated community for one of the Peace Corps volunteers or did some things with another group that was doing grants and needed somebody to judge the grants. You know, there are the presentations of the grants. So other than coming home, I didn't travel anywhere else during my time.

WAND: [00:48:03] Did you did Peace Corps ask you to have a secondary project besides your primary assignment?

CAMPBELL: [00:48:10] No, I think we were my understanding, and especially as a rule following senior volunteer was I was I was on twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. And I filled my time. My the my expectation of myself was, first of all, well, I didn't know what I was going to be doing at this vocational training center. And my language skills weren't great. So I went to work every day at eight o'clock and stayed until four thirty. And they actually were very they stayed they worked some work six days a week. They were at the school was very they were very dedicated, the teachers. So some days I would go and I just worked on whatever I try to drum up ideas for grants and and improvements. But I also worked with other volunteer projects, like I taught speech to the Democratic speech process, class, English language clubs. We all did.

WAND: [00:49:12] You know, so these were in your own school? Not necessarily.

CAMPBELL: [00:49:16] Not necessarily that we were a big city and there were at most times there were five to seven volunteers at one time. And Ganja the city was huge. So you wouldn't see each other sometimes. But

there was always something going on that we could join into or somebody would say, oh, there we worked. I worked in a helping a school that was with deaf kids. It wasn't something I saw it out. Somebody, you know, would say, oh, there's, you know, somebody there that needs help with their computers or they they need help with writing a grant or whatever. So, you know.

WAND: [00:49:47] Yeah. Get busy. You helped. Yeah. And so the interesting question here, how did you communicate with other volunteers?

CAMPBELL: [00:49:57] We had we were provided cell phones as part of our our our tools that we had. So one of the first things we did when we got to the machine was to buy cell phones and but we had to pay for our own SIM, our own contours. He recalled our time, our own minutes by the cell phones was a real trick because you couldn't buy a cell phone unless you had an Azerbaijani ID card. And of course, we didn't have one. So our LCFs our language and cultural trainers had to go with us by the phones and so forth. So that was, you know, just some of their requirements. So we were able to text back and forth with each other, Internet was available when we first got there, but it was not, you know, was dial up Internet if you had it. My school had just one dial up line when we got there. But after a bit, they were able to get better Internet.

WAND: [00:50:51] Better, meaning better signals. But it was still landline?

CAMPBELL: [00:50:56] Still a landline, like it was still landline, but faster.

WAND: [00:51:00] Wi-Fi wasn't there?

CAMPBELL: [00:51:02] No, no. I don't think our phones even would have done Wi-Fi. They were flip phones. You know, but it improved because they had they eventually you would see the the the cowboys with the sheep on their cell phones. So, you know, so it was there, you know, they hit them, right. Yeah. Eventually.

WAND: [00:51:22] Yeah, right. They had the micro wave connection.

CAMPBELL: [00:51:26] So volunteer to volunteer we texted a lot. You know, if we were together and we were leaving some place, we weren't supposed to be out after dark. So if one person was going one way to go to their house on the other and I was going another way, we always check back with each other again. That was the senior volunteer following the rules. You know, did you get home OK back home? Especially the I felt I had a house mom at home, so I had somebody at my house. But yeah, those volunteers that were living in an apartment building by themselves, you know, I kind of always thought, you know, there's nobody to check on you. So, yeah. But safety wise, I felt very, very safe. And I was I was I'm sure there was crime there, but

WAND: [00:52:08] I didn't really feel like were there any any safety or security issues that came up for any of the volunteers?

CAMPBELL: [00:52:15] Oh, yeah. A lot of the young girls were were hassled and heckled and, you know, and we were you know, we were tall, blond, you know, some of them. Yeah. Yeah. And so there was a perception that a lot of those girls were maybe Russian. And because if you weren't Azerbaijani, then you were probably Russian. And the reputation of single Russian women, maybe wasn't as well as the other as good Azerbaijani girls. So there was some, you know, heckling that way. And if you asked some of the other ones, there'd be some, you know, stone throwing maybe by the kids. You know, just things that I always said to my group. I was like, you know, we're we're like, we have peacock feathers on and red tights. So we're always visible and they're, you know, they can't figure us out. So they so, you know, yell at us or throw stones at us. But I you know, I never personally felt like I was in any kind of a threat or anything.

WAND: [00:53:10] Right. Yeah, right.

CAMPBELL: [00:53:13] They probably thought it was strange because I had hiking boots and backpacks and and cargo pants, you know, matter of fact, when I left, I gave out most of my my clothes that I brought with me. I gave them to a women's center that was learning how to cook and sell their cooking stuff. And the volunteer that was there, I was a Peace Corps volunteer, told me that the next day everybody came back to the center dressed as Bonnie, which was fun.

WAND: [00:53:40] Yeah, right. Well, that sounds like my my next question was what your sense was of your impact on this at this school and that's related to them wearing your clothes as a tribute to you and some pride.

CAMPBELL: [00:54:00] I kind of decided early on. I mean, we're I see my Peace Corps volunteer in the band being a Peace Corps volunteer, at least in the country. I was seen as being like an independent contractor. I had to decide what was important to me and important to the community and then figure out how to do it. And no one was telling me how to go about that. And I realized that I wasn't going to be able to change the world. There wasn't time. And and that wasn't maybe even what was what I was there for. So I had sort of had a couple objectives and I felt like I had done those. One was I mean, had made friends with a young girl that had left during the Nagorno-Karabakh family. It is, you know, run during that time. And she was living in my building. So she had been raised in Russia. Azerbaijani sent back to the mission to Ganja to finish your high school because her parents didn't want her in Russia anymore. And there's, you know, some stigma to some of the stigma of the Azerbaijani girls in Russia, in Russian.

WAND: [00:55:05] And so her parents, her

CAMPBELL: [00:55:07] Parents were still in Russia. She was sent to she and her sister were sent to Georgia to, ah, their grandmother to finish high school because it was dangerous for them. The parents felt it was dangerous, unsafe for them to remain in Russia, and they wanted

them. So when she finished high school, while I was there in danger, she couldn't get into the university. She very smart. She had gone to all of the Peace Corps things, learning English. We talked, you know, worked hard on it. But she couldn't get into the university because she couldn't pass the Russian language test. She spoke Azerbaijani, but she you know, she raised Russian and so she had to go back to Russia to go to school. But but that was her goal was to get into the university. And I felt like I had helped her at least get, you know, confidence to be able to do that and learn. And she teaches English now in Russia. So she's got an English degree. So that was important. And then there was the assistant director of the school really wanted to improve, and he was helped with that grant for the computer repair. And he got to go as part of that grant to Katmandu for the U.N. Habitat conference was for all different countries to this kind of preconference. And he was like when he was not going to do it, I said, you have to go. No, you go as a half. No, I said, so. I would love to go to Katmandu. Everybody wants to go to Kathmandu. But you go he'd never traveled out of the country because he was 28 or 29. So he had to expedite a passport and he was successful at doing that. And he fell in love with traveling. I think, you know, he just he was it was a wonderful experience for him. So that was I felt really good about that. And I make sure he moved on with his life because of that.

WAND: [00:56:52] Right. So you you can think of at least two people at least to be alive him directly. Now their lives are directly impacted.

CAMPBELL: [00:57:00] And the women in my building, there were probably seven or eight women that were my age, you know, very hard working women. And the cultural thing that I think I shared with them is their perception of American families, whether we kick our kids out at 18, you know, they go out to college, they get an apartment that we don't care about our our families, you know, because that's what they see in the movies and that's what they hear. And they were surprised to find out from me that I share a home with my with my son and his family and his wife and his and my grandkids that I talk to them regularly, that

I was, you know, involved in their lives, even though I was a long ways away. So that was a cultural thing that I think I brought to them. The their perception of American life was very much that, you know, we don't care about our families and we don't keep together and we don't because they don't, you know, their communities and their villages are still very, very close knit. And they don't make decisions unless the family makes those decisions together, the traditional family, anyway.

WAND: [00:58:09] Yeah, yeah, interesting the perceptions, yeah, that are there.

CAMPBELL: [00:58:15] The other one was I had an English language group of older, older kids. Twenty four. Twenty five, you know, that age, not the teenagers. And we watched movies and talked about the movies and they wanted me to tell them about my kids. And I told them, you know, at that time both my children were young, we were young, married, had gone to college. And I told them all about that. And they were surprised that they had gotten married and had been married for two or three years and hadn't had any children because the cultural part of Azerbaijan, as you marry and you have family as soon as possible, that's why you get married. And I got all the way done and I and they were just sort of sitting there staring at me. I said, what is it that I've missed? You know, what haven't I told you? And they wanted me to tell them about the promiscuous ness of our teenagers and our young people in the United States, because that's what they see in the movies jumping in. We called it jumping in and out of each other's beds. I said, is that what you want me to tell you about it? So that wasn't my experience and that's not the experience of my children. But, yes, that happens, you know, but that's how they thought everybody acted. Yeah. Yeah. And everybody drinks Coca-Cola for breakfast, too. Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, media and the movies that they had access to, that's what they showed them. Yeah. So I think as Peace Corps volunteers, we certainly showed them the human side of who we were.

WAND: [00:59:38] Really are and different a different side of American life. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you know, you're in your second year and feeling much more comfortable, I'm sure, about your life there. Is there anything you want to reflect about about that before we talk about your leaving?

CAMPBELL: [01:00:01] And yeah, there's something that happened in now. I hope I'm right because you know how things get to be a blur. Obama was inaugurated in 2009, right? Yeah, January 28th. OK, we had a girls camp, the GLOW camp. I know there's other countries.

WAND: [01:00:20] Camp GLOW.

CAMPBELL: [01:00:22] A big meeting. And I think the the men were there also. There was a lot of us that went to a town called Zagatala, which is in the north of Azerbaijan and gathered to work on that. Maybe it was our excuse to go, I don't know for some of them, but we had a lot of people, a lot of us were there and it was inauguration time.

WAND: [01:00:41] And that was for you went there for Camp GLOW.

CAMPBELL: [01:00:43] Well, to plan to plan for Camp GLOW and for ABLE the boys camp, Camp ABLE I think it was called. That was the reason for going. But it was the inauguration time. And I meant I never really thought up to that point, even after I've been on what it really meant to be an American and to feel that patriotic thump that I'm an American. So we're in this hotel. It just was it was cold. It was February in Zagatala is north in the mountain, know cold snow. And somebody downloaded his inauguration address on to a boombox. And we had no chairs. We were in this basement of this hotel sitting on the floor. I'll probably 50 of us or so and listening to the squeaky squawky inauguration address, you know, and there were, you know, people of all walks of political life in the United States. But, of course, Peace Corps volunteers were, you know, mostly liberal people. But and after that got done, we've spontaneously stood up and saying The Star-

Spangled Banner and there wasn't a dry eye in that room. And that was like I was like, oh, my God, I know what it means to love your country and to be proud of what has happened. And so that was, you know, that was a real real for me. That was a real OK, I know who I am now. Um, yeah. So that was a Peace Corps experience. I mean, that's a experience I wouldn't have had anywhere else in the world or at any other point in time in my life.

WAND: [01:02:15] Right.

CAMPBELL: [01:02:16] So it was cool. And we had all had to have voted absentee ballot because we were, you know, already in Azerbaijan in September of the fall. So that was a pretty cool.

WAND: [01:02:27] That's right. That was right after you did. So you left in September. The campaign was going on.

CAMPBELL: [01:02:34] Yeah. And we get you know, and all we got was Russian and Georgian television. I mean, we didn't you really didn't know what was going on, you know, unless, you know, unless you got it from home or worked really hard at it. Yeah. Yeah. So it was you know, we were kind of or at least for me it was that was a void time for me as far as news and what was happening. I mean, I knew he won, but but the inauguration was. Yeah, it was pretty cool. All those kids, all of us, you know.

WAND: [01:02:59] And so how did you get news of America then?

CAMPBELL: [01:03:05] Well, eventually for me, eventually the school got an. Access to Internet and enough minutes to get on it that I would I would check, but not like we do here now with, you know, looking every moment of the time of what's going on.

WAND: [01:03:17] So too expensive to do it?

CAMPBELL: [01:03:19] In the you know, the TV that we had in my house was was all foreign language. You know, it's all Russian, pretty much Russian. Occasionally we would see a news report from the United States. You know, there was a hurricane in Florida at the time when I was there. And I don't know how many people ask me if my family was OK. You know, I'm from Michigan. So it's like, yeah, it's OK. The hurricane doesn't come all the way to Michigan, but it was hard for them to understand that.

WAND: [01:03:46] Yeah, yeah. Just like you didn't know where your vision is. They don't know. They're just Florida and Michigan. Right. That's good. That's great. OK, so if you're ready to move along, she's been coming time to leave. What was what is how did you experience that?

CAMPBELL: [01:04:14] And I'm part of getting ready to leave was I was really ready to leave. And then, of course, there's the sad part of realizing that I'm going to leave, you know, so just like you would if you were leaving any friends and anything that you loved, I, I, I really loved my life there. I, I could have stayed there and, you know, lived my life there. Probably the thing that caught me the most was going to a part of their wedding, their wedding, which is called a toy in Azerbaijani process is there's always a there's a women's party, not a bridal party, more of a pre wedding, almost like the girls wedding where the girl's family comes together. And I remember there was a girl in our building that was getting married. And I went with my host mom, who, again, you know, we didn't talk a lot other than, you know, I need to iron clothes, I need to shower those kinds of things. And we went together and and the women danced in a big circle together, you know, with the traditional dances, which I truly enjoyed. And I looked over at Gulnara, my host mom, and realized I'm never going to I might not ever see her again. And she was crying and I was crying. We were, you know, dancing at this this wedding dance. So that was, you know, that was one of my last days in Ganja. And then I spent my last two weeks in Baku doing all the medical things and the close of service and so forth before I left. But I stayed my full time. I didn't close service until it was the day we

were supposed to. Some of the other people went home a little bit early, not terribly early, but, you know, a month earlier, just because they didn't want to send us all out of the country at one time, just for a little joysticks and so forth.

WAND: [01:06:01] But you. Yeah. So then you came home?

CAMPBELL: [01:06:07] And within a month I thought I should have stayed, not because of my it happened happen. But I you know, my, my, my my impetus to come home was my grandchildren were in junior high. I was going to you know, I was going missing that I'd promised my kids I would be home. But after thirty days at home, everything was the same. And I, you know, I had to start working again, of course. And but at home, the probably the biggest thing was I no longer was walking everywhere. I went down, you know, for the downtown for hearing from my home is probably three and a half miles. No big deal. And Azerbaijan did that daily. I went there to see where my son was teaching at the community college at that time, went to see his room. And he was going to he handed me his car keys, says I'll just walk home. And she. Oh, you can't walk home. Yeah, I can. I'm just going to walk home. And there was nobody on the streets, you know, whereas in the house or on the sidewalks were full of people walking places. And, you know, certainly there were lots of cars, too, but people went where they wanted to go by walking. And I walked all the way home. I had. Where is everybody? They're all gone. So and all the other cultural things that kind of jump out at you, you realize and talking about Azerbaijan at length and boring people, I'm sure you know, and I still do. I mean, it's still pops into my life and my conversation a lot more. So.

WAND: [01:07:33] Yeah. So you can you still use it to to for good memories and also to educate.

CAMPBELL: [01:07:42] Yeah, I do, you know. The grandkids will be talking about something I always say, oh you know, they're talking about well we

were eating. Eggplant the other day, you know, mom made the the my daughter in law made eggplant and I said, oh, that's badimcan. And so, you know, we kind of they kind of looked at me. Well, that's what you know, that's what eggplants called in Azerbaijan, badimcan, you know. So it's was like and it's funny how those words pop out of you, you 10 years. And I and I didn't speak the language well, but those things will. Come up, you know.

WAND: [01:08:14] Yes. Right. Yeah. So it's been actually in eight years since you've been back.

CAMPBELL: [01:08:18] Yes. Eight years since I left.

WAND: [01:08:19] Yeah. And you went back to work for some time. Are you still working?

CAMPBELL: [01:08:24] No, I officially retired last November, so I was still I was still teaching those computer skills classes to the library system. Three hundred classes a year up until last November. And then I made the decision to be done. I thought, I'm sixty seven years old. I've done my 45 years and I sold my home. To my son, he bought a small RV conversion van and I'm homeless. That's my home. And I'm traveling around the United States right now and trying to find something to be passionate about.

WAND: [01:09:00] And so would you have done that if you had not been in the Peace Corps do you think?

CAMPBELL: [01:09:07] No, I usually say the Peace Corps was the best thing I ever did other than having my family and my grandkids. That really opened my eyes. I certainly had traveled as a married woman. I traveled, we camped, we done lots of wonderful things. But I would never have ventured. I mean, we I invented Germany because we hosted I had hosted five young German professionals over the years in my home. So I always had those connections. But to step out and do that, I don't

think I would have had those skills. And my friends say, you know, you're the only person we know that would be would we consider taking the Greyhound bus from Sarasota to to Naples instead of renting a car or having somebody pick you up? Yeah, well, public transportation.

WAND: [01:09:53] Why not?

CAMPBELL: [01:09:53] I know an import here and there is no public transportation. So, you know, that was something that, you know, not not like a big city person would have had that familiarity. So, you know, if I hadn't had the Peace Corps, I would I am sure I wouldn't be as independent as I am and feels confident to do that as a you know, as a senior.

WAND: [01:10:14] So so and so you you that feels like it's more confidence that it's you've got it from the Peace Corps experience. Yeah.

CAMPBELL: [01:10:22] Know, I mean, yeah, I think I'm comfortable with doing things outside of my comfort zone. Maybe that's it. And not being anxious about. Whether it's going to turn out OK, and I certainly have been in situations where, you know, I wondered when I was in Azerbaijan two years ago for the wedding when I got to Baku from on the bumbling, bumbling Russian bus. It was on forever and ever to get there with the benzene burning in the in the engine. And I got to the airport, I found out that the the Lufthansa pilots were on strike in Germany and I could get to Germany, but I couldn't get back to the United States until the next day after that screwed up all my connections with my family to pick me up and everything. And and I just, you know, worked through it and stayed in Germany for another week and went home a week later. So I would never have done those kinds of things before. I had done those that kind of travel. Yeah. In confidence to do it right.

WAND: [01:11:18] You just do it calmly.

CAMPBELL: [01:11:19] Yep. Just figured it out and you know, that was it. Yeah. So you wash out your clothes and go on.

WAND: [01:11:25] That sounds wonderful. So is there anything else that you want to reflect on before we close our conversation?

CAMPBELL: [01:11:42] I don't think so. I think we've got the highlights. Yeah, I think so.

WAND: [01:11:47] Yeah, well, this has been a great a great story and congratulations on the courage you've shown to take that step to join the Peace Corps.

CAMPBELL: [01:11:58] Might do it again.

WAND: [01:11:59] It's not too late.

CAMPBELL: [01:12:01] I know. I know. You know, I've got a few other things I'm thinking of doing, but I keep my eye on the response all the time, looking for something that would be, you know, of interest and my skills. Right. But yeah. Yeah. I don't think I'm ready for a mud hut in Africa.

WAND: [01:12:16] But you never know. You never know. I know.

CAMPBELL: [01:12:20] I know. Right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]