

**Kae Dakin Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

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**Interviewer:** Evelyn Ganzglass  
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**Biographical Note**

Kae Dakin served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya from January 1965 to November 1966 in a variety of roles (Kenya I).

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Oral History Interview

with

Kae Dakin

January 8, 2016  
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:02] This is Evelyn Ganzglass. And I'm interviewing Kae Dakin, who served in Kenya I from 1965 to 1966. Evelyn Ganzglass served in Somalia IV from 1966 to 1968. And so with that little introduction, let me ask you about your experiences. We usually start by, why did you go into the Peace Corps?

DAKIN: [00:00:33] Why did I go into the Peace Corps? Okay. When I always wanted to go in the Peace Corps, when I was in college and I was at the University of Vermont, that's had an enormous number of Peace Corps volunteers. I wanted to go in the Peace Corps for two reasons. One selfish, one not so selfish. I wanted to in some way give back to my country on the one hand. On the other hand, I wanted to understand and see other cultures in the world. And I knew that I wasn't independently wealthy, so this was a great way to give back and to see different parts of the world.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:09] Were you married when you went in?

DAKIN: [00:01:12] Yes, we were. We were married.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:14] Talk a little bit about that as well.

DAKIN: [00:01:16] Yes. Well, I was very enthusiastic about the Peace Corps. And I convinced Don, who was in law school, that it would be a great idea to go into the Peace Corps. And he agreed to do it if we went after law school and before he started working at a law firm, which seems reasonable. And I was in a PhD program in clinical psychology, and I terminated at the master's level because we were waiting to get our assignment in the Peace Corps. So he went. We were accepted to go to Ethiopia at the time, and in Ethiopia he was going to be a lawyer, because they wanted lawyers, and I was going to be an English teacher. But Ethiopia changed their mind, as happens very frequently. And when we were given a choice of, since we weren't going to Ethiopia, which was a terrible disappointment to me because the training was in California and I would get to go there.

DAKIN: [00:02:11] We had a choice of India, which was about the 65th group. Kenya, which was the first group. And the other one I think was Malawi. So we picked Kenya because it was the first group. It was a land settlement project that, it was a project that was an agricultural project. And so hence it was really an all-male project. The project was really for farmers, although none of us, very few of us had been farmers. And there were three women in the group, me and two other spouses. We were scattered all over the country. We were nowhere near each other. And they really didn't know what to do with us there. You can imagine going to Kenya. It was just after Mau Mau and it had just become an independent country and Jomo Kenyatta was there, you know, yelling *Uhuru Harambee*. And so they didn't know what to do with us.

DAKIN: [00:03:09] So in my first, my first assignment was I was up on the Kinangop [Plateau], which is way above the Rift Valley. So it's quite high up. And that was an area that used to be all white farmland. It was

called the White Highlands, and there were several, lots of books written about this. It was, it was settled by the British after the different world wars, the second born. The first born always inherited in England. They inherited the farm. The second born may have gone to Kenya and gotten land that way. Anyway, the, right after independence, the Kenya government, with loans from HMG and others, bought up the farmland in the White Highlands. And then what they did was they distributed it on a ten year loan to, well, we lived in a Kikuyu country. That was all Kikuyu land.

DAKIN: [00:04:09] So to farmers and the farmers had to grow. They had approximately ten acre plots instead of thousands of acres, and they had to grow what were cash crops. They traditionally grew maize because that's what, that was the basis of their diet was maize. So what we had to introduce various crops to them, like pyrethrum. Pyrethrum is a daisy flower that's the basis of DDT. Yeah. So those pyrethrum. Don had a leek project. We had farmers growing leeks and then bringing them in a cooperative way down to the, to a factory down in the Rift Valley. But I was, they had no idea what to do with me because I couldn't do very well in a hoe. So they made me what you would call a clerk, which would be a secretary.

DAKIN: [00:05:04] I can remember the old typewriter. I mean, this is, you know, this is in the sixties. So these were very old typewriters. I never was very good at typing, never really liked to type, although I had had jobs doing that. And I did that for a little while. And then all of a sudden they decided to make me a dairy officer. Now, a dairy officer was a person who was, it was very hard for me, a white woman coming just after the colonial women, being a dairy officer. So I had to get the ex Mau Mau terrorists, you know, the Kenya farmers there to dip their cattle every week so there wouldn't be tick borne diseases that would kill the cattle. So we had to push all the cattle into this huge bath so that they were swimming in this bath. And then they get up and out at the other end, and it was.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:00] Where did you learn how to dip cattle? What did you know this from? From Vermont?

DAKIN: [00:06:04] No, I did go to the University of Vermont, but I was an English major and I had never had anything to do with cows except once I won a cow milking contest, which had to do with, I think that you had to fill a test tube full of milk and then you won the contest. So it wasn't like milking a cow. I learned it all. I learned all of that. And then I also, I also had to teach them how to artificially inseminate cows and castrate bulls, because the whole idea was we were trying to get rid of the local herds, the local farm, the local cows, because the local cows were not. They did not produce a lot of either milk or good beef. So we were introducing European herds by artificial insemination. And then we would castrate the local bulls, or I would teach them how to do it.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:59] So this was all through semen, not through importing cow, uh, bulls?

DAKIN: [00:07:04] No. Through semen that was imported.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:07] So imported.

DAKIN: [00:07:07] Yes. Yes. There may have been some, but not, not on our scheme, not on our schemes. It was importing semen from Europe, from England primarily.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:14] So milking a cow seems easier than castrating a bull.

DAKIN: [00:07:19] Yes, but, um.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:21] How did you manage that?

DAKIN: [00:07:23] Ah, well, I was taught at a farmers training center in Nakuru. I lived in a place called Naivasha, which is up on the Kinangop there, where all the farms were very, very high. But we all went to a farmers training center where they taught us how to do this, how to artificially inseminate cows and castrate bulls. So it wasn't, it wasn't a skill that I came with. I was one of those BA generalists. I basically, you know, had majored in English and could read Shakespeare.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:53] Which is a worthwhile thing in any case. You said you were the only woman in, in this part of the country at least. There were three all over.

DAKIN: [00:08:03] Right.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:04] Did you interact with the local women a lot or were you mostly working with the men?

DAKIN: [00:08:10] Well.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:11] Or did women take care of the cows, I mean?

DAKIN: [00:08:14] No. Well, that's a very good question. Women did not take care of the cows. Kikuyu women are definitely beasts of burden, were then and certainly, you know, it hasn't changed that much. And they were, they were the ones that you see pictured carrying huge loads of wood on their back with a strap across the forehead. So they couldn't do anything by themselves without asking the men. So I primarily worked with men, which was quite difficult for them to think about that, that I had anything I could teach them, because they had been, never had worked in a partnership with a white woman before. But we rode motorcycles and I rode a motorcycle. So that was a very different kind of thing too. So they could see that I was a different kind of person.

DAKIN: [00:09:00] The women, though, I did actually have, start home industries with women. This had nothing to do with my job on the settlement scheme. But in my, uh, my spare, my other time I did start home industries with women and I had a training course at a farmers center that was near where I lived up on the Kinangop. And I had, uh, we, I got the permission of about ten farmers to let their wives come to this farmers training center and stay overnight, which was a huge, huge, huge thing. I can't tell you how it happened, you know. I was lucky, I guess I was very lucky. And so I did not speak Kikuyu. I can speak a few words of Kikuyu, but I spoke Swahili. You know, Swahili was our language, and we would have a, I had another translator. So I

would be talking in Swahili. And this other nurse actually would translate the Swahili into Kikuyu.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:01] Hmm.

DAKIN: [00:10:01] And we did a lot of training on nutrition, for instance, on the nutrition of milk, of skim milk, because although they all, many of them had dairy cows, the creamery. Excuse me. Where they would deliver the milk, near where we were was a creamery, so that they only wanted cream at this creamery. They didn't take all the milk. So that they separated the cream out at the creamery and the farmers were just throwing out the skim milk because they had no idea the vitamin and nutritional value in skim milk. So that was, that was the kind of nutrition that we were teaching, that I was teaching them.

DAKIN: [00:10:41] And then I also taught them to do some home industries. Yes, we did weaving of something that has been, has been, uh, took off in the United States along. You know, this was how many years ago? This was almost 50 years ago. So about 40 years ago, a specific kind of woven basket called a *kiondo* took off and you could find them in Saks and fancy places like that. And the women carried all their vegetables in it. And actually, I was just today down at the African Art Museum, which where I haven't been for years, and I saw those very *kiondos* for sale in the museum. But the way they were selling them, they didn't have a strap. So you can't imagine how helpful a basket without a strap would be. But so I did work with women, um, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:36] And how did you, how did. So they produced these baskets. How did they market them?

DAKIN: [00:11:42] Well, we'd only market them. It was just very, very early on. So we just marketed them through the men and through the marketing co-op that the men had for their vegetables and their milk. We also did, uh, getting back to the women now, this is all coming back to me. We did the baskets, we did the nutrition, and we also did tie dyeing. Tie dyeing was not indigenous. It's not indigenous to East Africa. It's a West African kind of thing. Nigeria, primarily Nigeria. But it seemed like

a good idea and it was a good idea. It was something that we, that we got people to make cloth and then they made clothes. Very, very basic. Very simple.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:28] Did you have native dyes or did you bring in chemical dyes?

DAKIN: [00:12:31] I don't think, I think they were chemical dyes from Nairobi. I had friends who were artists in Nairobi, and I think that is primarily how we got our materials and how we sold our products. But it was, you know, this is a long time ago. So this was not big, huge products. One thing I remember, though, we were going to make placemats because I thought, you know, placemats. I was just young, you know, I had just been married, so I had no idea about anything. And we, so we got these placemats all set and we had, uh, let's see. They were woodblocks, woodblocks of women of four different tribes. So it was an outline of the Kikuyu woman carrying her wood like that, and the Luo woman carrying a baby down here. And I can't remember the others. And I was so proud of these placemats. They were so good looking. But, you know, I didn't know who would ever want to use them.

DAKIN: [00:13:27] And so I, one of the directors' wives said to me, Kae, you know, it's a really good idea, but nobody will buy them back in Washington because you have to iron them and nobody irons things. So I still have examples. I actually have used them myself upstairs, but we never did go to production of.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:47] And you have to iron them still?

DAKIN: [00:13:48] And you have to iron them still. And I still I don't like to iron any more than I did then.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:53] So I'd like to go back to the milk. What did Kikuyu children drink? They just didn't drink milk, or they drank whole milk before?

DAKIN: [00:14:05] They drank whole milk before the creamery. But the creamer had been there about ten years by the time we were there. It was run by a Dutch family. You know, it was, it was. They were hired



by the Kenyan government. But then they just drank milk. There weren't things like soft drinks and things like that then, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:24] But they drank milk. It just never occurred to them once the cream was taken off, that there was still?

DAKIN: [00:14:30] It was just no good. So they kept some of the milk for the kids to drink. But they wanted to make money because they needed the money to buy seeds and that kind of thing.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:39] Oh, sure. Sure, sure.

DAKIN: [00:14:41] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:41] So you did that for two, for the whole two years?

DAKIN: [00:14:44] No, we didn't do that for the whole two years because we had been there, um. We had been there about, uh, one year. One year when we went to climb Kilimanjaro and we went for a visit with a whole bunch of guys. I was the only woman, of course, and we climbed Kilimanjaro. Then we went to Lamu, which is an island off of Kenya, and then we came back. And when we got back, our director told us that we had to move immediately because we had been accused of being CIA agents. Now, I understand that, you know that evidently.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:22] You were not the only one.

DAKIN: [00:15:23] That was fairly common. Yes, that evidently was I wouldn't say common, but we were not the only ones, not, not in our group, but around the world. There were people. So we, uh, so we moved from this small town called Njabini to a town up north, still in the same area, still up in the white highlands, to a place at the time was called Thomsons Falls. Now it has a Kikuyu name, Nyahururu, which is Nyahu-ru-ru.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:53] We'll do that later.

DAKIN: [00:15:55] Right, right, right. Yes. So that's, uh, yeah. So we were in two different places, and then my first child was born there. Yeah, Sean was born in Kenya, in Nairobi. So we then lived in Nairobi for about three months before we left, before we finished our tour of duty.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:13] And, well, that seems like another whole story. What, now I'd like to explore that a little bit as well. But when you were in Thomsons Falls, did you do the same kind of work as you did before?

DAKIN: [00:16:26] Yes, basically did the same. Yes. Basically did the same kind of work. Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:32] Also with a Kikuyu population?

DAKIN: [00:16:35] Kikuyu, yes. Kikuyu is the largest tribe. Kenyatta is a Kikuyu, was a Kikuyu. And, um, Thomsons Falls is also a Kikuyu area. That whole area there below the Aberdare Mountains is all a Kikuyu area.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:51] Do you have any memories of Kikuyu customs or unique characteristics that?

DAKIN: [00:16:58] Well, how strong the women were, carrying all of that wood on their backs. That is for sure. Uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:05] And were they open to Peace Corps volunteers? Were they friendly or suspicious of you? Men or women.

DAKIN: [00:17:16] Suspicious of us? Well, obviously, we were accused of being CIA agents, but that I'm not sure we had to do with being suspicious. That was a political kind of thing because there was a great presence of Russians and Chinese in East Africa at that time. You know, they were trying to sow the seeds of communism in that.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:34] So who do you think accused you? Do you think it was?

DAKIN: [00:17:37] I know, I think I'm quite sure, it was, it was a settlement officer. You know, there were these settlement schemes had

settlement officers and some of them were, most of them were Kenyan and some of them were Peace Corps or European. European. And I think it was one particular guy who wasn't too happy to have us there and he was a little bit worried about his job and had studied in Russia and, um, you know, just didn't want to have any U.S. people around.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:07] Well, I find this very interesting that you had a child in, in Kenya. When we were in the Peace Corps, we were led to believe that if you got pregnant, you were out of country. So I guess that was not the case in Kenya at the time.

DAKIN: [00:18:25] It wasn't the case in Kenya. It was certainly not, uh, encouraged. It was not encouraged at all. But we had a director who was very. We were going, it was almost at the end of our, our stay there, as our service there. And Bob Poole was a terrific guy. He was the director of the Peace Corps there. And he said, yes, we could have a child there. And there was actually another couple who had a child before we did in the teaching group, not in our, not in our group, but in the teaching group.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:00] Yeah.

DAKIN: [00:19:01] So I was, you know, I was upcountry. I was way upcountry in a house that had no electricity, no running water. And I went to, I found out that I was pregnant in the town of Thomsons Falls. It was the second town. And I thought I was pregnant. I went to the doctor there. There was a doctor who was actually a German doctor. He probably was an escape, you know, a Nazi, escaped Nazi. But, you know, at the time, how did I know? And it was a teeny little office that was maybe as big as from the window there to the fireplace. And the door was, the door to the street, which was a dirt street, was just a piece of cloth, heavy piece of cloth.

DAKIN: [00:19:50] And, you know, that's where I went to the doctor until I think I had had, yes, I had a couple of appointments with a doctor in Nairobi who was actually a flying doctor and Doctors Without Borders. And he was American.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:09] So what is a flying doctor?

DAKIN: [00:20:10] Well, it was the same as doctors. It was at that time that doctors would go when there was an emergency in a small town.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:17] And fly from Nairobi?

DAKIN: [00:20:19] Fly from Nairobi. Yes. He was, I'm not sure if it was he was a missionary or not. He had his own practice and then he was also a flying doctor. So he was my, he was my doctor and he was the doctor who delivered. I came into Nairobi. We moved from upcountry where we had all been riding motorcycles, and that was it on dirt roads. And we moved into Nairobi about a month before Sean was due, and he came about two weeks early, so as a very small baby, so lucky that we moved into town because it would have been not a good thing to be way upcountry on those dirt roads. There was no hospital or clinic or anything. The closest was in Nairobi, which was several hours away.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:06] Yeah. So everything worked out?

DAKIN: [00:21:08] And everything, yeah, everything. Everything worked out. I can't say it was the easiest time of my life, but everything worked out. I can remember one interesting something that you might be interested in is that I'm an only child, so I don't know anything about boys. I only know about girls. But my husband was insistent that, that if it's a boy, he'd be circumcised. And the British do not circumcise their kids. So. The doctor, yeah. Because then we had not only our regular doctor, but we had a specialist because it was a bit of a difficult birth and, uh, but he was actually from South Africa and he was an ob gyn, but so neither one of them were very enthusiastic about circumcising this baby.

DAKIN: [00:21:58] So it didn't happen like it did here where you just go [clicks] right in the hospital. I had to wait for several weeks because the baby was very small and they weren't very excited. So finally, finally one of the doctors came to the house and circumcised him. But I remember

that very clearly because the same thing happened. My third child was born in London, in London, and the same thing happened with Brett, the same thing because, you know, there we were in a British hospital. Nobody wanted to circumcise the baby, but it happened in the hospital at that time. Yeah. And I lived in a house, so I lived in a house. We had moved into Nairobi and we lived in a house that was actually owned by a, a couple who he, he was Kenyan as European, but he had been born there and his wife was a nurse.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:49] Ah.

DAKIN: [00:22:49] So that was very nice for me as a, as a new mother, knowing absolutely nothing about babies or anything. She was terrific.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:00] What did your parents think about all of that?

DAKIN: [00:23:04] Well, you know, in those days.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:07] I can imagine my mother would have been over there immediately.

DAKIN: [00:23:10] Oh, no, no, no. They just, well, they thought it was good, good, good. They sent me a telegram and, uh, I have still have the telegram. And they didn't come over. They didn't. I didn't invite them over, but they just didn't even think about it. They were in circumstances where they couldn't come over at that time because they had bought a motor inn in their retirement years, which was a crazy thing to do, but it really tied them down and, um. They were very happy to meet the baby when he was came back to the States.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:45] But being upcountry and being pregnant, they were calm about all of that?

DAKIN: [00:23:50] And my parents are from Boston, they're from New England, and they just, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:55] Stiff upper lip.

DAKIN: [00:23:57] Stiff upper lip. Yes, yes. So I had no Lamaze classes, no group of people. I had nobody. I had no idea. You know, I was just so young and so innocent and didn't have all of these advertisements around about how you had to have special plugs so your kid wouldn't get his finger caught in the, in the socket there. I mean, nothing. It was just me. There was one other.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:23] You didn't have electricity, so there was no. Oh, I guess in Nairobi.

DAKIN: [00:24:26] In Nairobi we did. Yeah, we had electricity in Nairobi. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:31] So let me ask you about, we'll circle back to some other things. Let me ask you about Nairobi. And I asked that because my husband and I came from Somalia to Nairobi and we're just overwhelmed by the traffic and the sophistication of Nairobi after having been in Somalia for, I guess, at that point a year. What was your impression of Nairobi coming from up, coming upcountry to Nairobi?

DAKIN: [00:24:59] Oh, yeah. Well, you know, upcountry was dirt roads and one *duka*, one small shop. So Nairobi was like heaven. We had once, one, uh, pair and they weren't a pair. Anyway, they just happened to live together. Two volunteers who lived in Nairobi. And I tell you, they had more guests, as you can imagine, everybody sleeping on their floor. Everybody loved Nairobi. The new Stanley Hotel, the Thorn Tree, where you could get a real hamburger. The Norfolk Hotel where they walked through with a little blackboard on a stick that had your name, ringing a bell, saying, you know, Mr. Dakin, Mr. Dakin, phone for you. Maybe there was a phone. I can't remember. We certainly didn't have phones.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:49] So it was very impressive.

DAKIN: [00:25:50] Oh, my God.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:52] And was it very British at that point?

DAKIN: [00:25:54] Oh, totally. Totally British. Yeah. And Indian. Lots of Indians. Yeah, lots of Indians. I had, one of my daughters-in-law is an Indian. Daughter-in-laws, yeah, whichever it is. Yeah. So but I remember, I'm thinking about this now, that on Sundays you would go, if you were driving around Nairobi, all the parks were filled with Indian families having picnics. They looked so, you know, they all looked so beautiful. Oh, it was, uh, when we moved there, we were very struck. We came from, we lived in Manhattan, we lived in New York, and then we trained in Wisconsin, of all the crazy places to train, in the winter. But when we got there, we, I'll never forget going, doing our first grocery shop before we went upcountry in a big truck. And, um, it was the whole, the whole class system, the whole racial divide was so clear at the grocery store because all the shoppers were white, all of the cashiers were Indian, and all the baggers were Black.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:00] I remember that well.

DAKIN: [00:27:01] Do you? Yeah. I, we were just like, how in the world? And I would just never forget that. That was our first shop that we did there. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:11] And that, were there Indians upcountry as well? Or really only in the city?

DAKIN: [00:27:16] You know, there were Indians up country but not, not in the places where we lived. They were too small, because there weren't any stores that were. Maybe in Thomsons Falls that might have been an Indian family, but certainly not in Njabini, our first place. No, because there weren't any stores. There were no businesses to run. But in the, in the cities uptown, upcountry, like Nakuru or Naivasha, there were definitely Indians, for sure. Yeah. Yeah. Then when we moved, we moved after Libya. I'm sorry. You know what it was. But we were in Kenya, we. At one point, after a few years later, we moved to London and lived in London for 11 years. And it was quite fascinating how many Indians had moved from Kenya and Uganda, more Uganda,

to London. So it was like our whole past. And then there were people who had been in the colonial service and had been district officers.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:17] And those were the Indians that had British passports?

DAKIN: [00:28:20] That's right. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:21] But a lot of the Kenyans and Ugandans didn't.

DAKIN: [00:28:24] I know. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:25] So that's another whole East African story that many people don't know. You mentioned you were in training in Wisconsin. What was that like?

DAKIN: [00:28:36] We were in training in Wisconsin.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:38] What was your training like?

DAKIN: [00:28:40] Well, first of all, it was Wisconsin in the winter, you know, we're going to Equatorial Africa. So. But our training was.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:46] But you were in college in Vermont, so it shouldn't have been that cold.

DAKIN: [00:28:51] No, but I had to get my mother to send my raccoon coat to me for, in, uh, in Wisconsin. Okay. So we had three months of training. And the training was every day, half a day, six days a week, we had language. Swahili. And we studied Swahili with Kenyans, with Swahili speakers. So that was half the day, every day. And the afternoon half, we had lectures on Kenya and on the history of Kenya and on colonization. And so we had special guests that came in from around. And those big departments at Wisconsin, I'm quite sure. Did you go to the University of Wisconsin?

GANZGLASS: [00:29:32] No, we were at Teachers College in New York.



DAKIN: [00:29:34] Oh, you lucky thing. No, not. Teachers College is great. But yeah, I just didn't know if you went there. But I think they have a big Africa department at Wisconsin then. But we were in Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, and then we did go to Madison so the guys could learn to build latrines. Now, we didn't learn to build latrines, the three of us. It was interesting because the three women were put up, put together with a social worker in Madison. While the guys learned to build latrines and learned everything about agriculture, we learned about poverty. It was very interesting. I'm not quite sure why they did that. I'll never forget it, going with a social worker around to the families that she was supporting and learning how difficult it was to have big families and be poor. And I'm not sure it had a direct, it affected us. But whether it had a direct translation to the work in Kenya, I don't know about that.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:31] Well, the notion was there were large families that were poor, but you can't translate Wisconsin poverty to Kenyan poverty.

DAKIN: [00:30:40] No. So our, our training was great. I mean, I think one of the best. Somebody was just asking me, oh yeah, we were. Okay. Asked me what a big, our cultural memory was. So this is one of my memories. I first got, when we first got there, we were on a bus, of course.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:00] And this is in Kenya?

DAKIN: [00:31:02] In Kenya, excuse me. When we first, we arrived on New Year's Day 1965 at the airport and we all sang the Kenyan national anthem, which we all still know. But we were on a bus to go out to where we were staying, which might have been a farmers training center. I can't quite remember. And we stopped the bus. And I had gotten the highest marks in Swahili. And, you know, I'm thinking, you know, I am so good. I can understand anybody in Swahili. And so we stopped on the side of the road, and here's this Kikuyu woman. I only know because she had wood on her back. And she started to talk to me. I couldn't understand one single word that she said, because what we had learned was what is called *safi* Swahili, you know, conjugated.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:44] Yeah.

DAKIN: [00:31:44] You know, [speaks Swahili]. That translated to Latin or French, you know, *je, tu, vous*.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:54] Mm hmm.

DAKIN: [00:31:54] And she spoke what is called kitchen Swahili, which has no conjugation, just use the base of the, of the verbs. So I realized that I wasn't really so smart as I was. And really I hadn't learned much about the culture, just the language. And you can't know the language without the culture.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:09] So two questions from that. How did you end up learning kitchen Swahili?

DAKIN: [00:32:15] Oh, just by speaking it.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:15] Is it easier to go backwards?

DAKIN: [00:32:16] Oh, yeah. It's so easy to go backwards.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:18] It's simpler. Once you know how to conjugate, it's easier to just speak in infinitives.

DAKIN: [00:32:23] Right. And just speak. Yeah, right. That is the word, yes, speaking in infinitives.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:26] But is the accent, I mean, is it a different dialect or is Swahili basically Swahili?

DAKIN: [00:32:32] Yes. Swahili is a combination of Arabic and Bantu languages, which you probably know, and it was written down by missionaries. So it was pretty, it is pretty much phonetic. It's spoken as it's written. So there isn't much of a, I don't know, but I could always understand everybody and people could hopefully understand me.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:50] You just said something really interesting. You can't understand the culture unless you understand the language.

DAKIN: [00:32:57] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:57] But you had all this cultural training in Wisconsin.

DAKIN: [00:33:01] But it wasn't really cultural training. It was history. It was history of the colonies, history of agriculture, economic history. And it wasn't really that much history of the people, except maybe Mau Mau, which of course, that's not really so much about individuals. That's much more a global concept.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:21] Should Peace Corps have done more cultural training? Could they have?

DAKIN: [00:33:25] I doubt it. You know, a lot of things you just learn on the ground.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:29] Well, after we were in Peace Corps.

DAKIN: [00:33:31] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:32] They moved a lot of the training overseas.

DAKIN: [00:33:34] Right.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:35] So maybe that was really part of the movement to move you into the culture.

DAKIN: [00:33:41] Yeah. Yeah. That would be the only way to do it, really, because how are you going to run into a Kikuyu woman carrying wood in Milwaukee?

GANZGLASS: [00:33:51] Do you have any other interesting anecdotes about training or any thoughts about the effectiveness of the training?

DAKIN: [00:34:00] Well, the Swahili was great training. I just, you know, I had to completely change. I think that the, all of the philosophical and the history, uh, it gave us a great background to understand something that, things that we really needed to understand. Because it was a British colony for a long time, as you well know, and there was still a lot of colonial people living there, colonials living there, lord and lady, this little lady that. And we worked with them. We had to work with them. And of course, they came from a very different kind of background than we did. And at the time, uh, this is in the sixties, you know, everybody was kind of against the colonists and the colonies and all the bad things that they did. But we. And you couldn't really understand much about them other than that until you worked with them and you realized that they, they came from a different background. They came from a different, um, point of view.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:03] So you had two kinds of cultural experiences.

DAKIN: [00:35:07] Oh yes, at least.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:07] British colonialists as well as Kikuyu.

DAKIN: [00:35:10] Yeah. Yes, absolutely. Yes. And then there were, of course, other expats that lived, not near where we lived. There were only missionaries. Missionaries lived in Njabini and then also in Thomsons Falls, there were missionaries, and that was a completely different culture.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:30] Talk a little bit about those.

DAKIN: [00:35:31] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:32] What country were they from?

DAKIN: [00:35:35] Uh, U.S. And one group was Catholic and they were all priests and they were a lot of fun. They played a lot of cards and we lived way out, way out in the country. They lived near in the town. It

wasn't a big town, but there were more than three buildings together, you know. So, um, Don was telling me he remembered that one of them made great apple pie. I didn't remember that part. But he remembers that. The Baptist missionaries were, uh, not quite so much fun. They were great to talk to, great to be with, uh, but not quite so much fun.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:22] Yeah.

DAKIN: [00:36:22] They were definitely from the South. Then there were of course, there were as I said, there were all the expats that might not have had farms but had moved out there for one reason or another so.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:32] Like the German doctor.

DAKIN: [00:36:34] Like the German doctor. And actually our house, our first house in Njabini had been owned by a German engineer who was, who had come out to Kenya to be an engineer and fix all the machinery. Interesting, you know. Very interesting. He had a very interesting. His house was very interesting in that he had all the pipes, the hot water pipes, ran through all of the fireplaces. It was very cold. Up on the Kinangop was very cold. We had, always had our sheepskin coats on and on our, when we were riding our motorcycles, because it was, it's very high and very cold, 7,000 feet, very high. But so there were different kinds of people from different countries who came out and for different reasons. It just, yeah.

DAKIN: [00:37:22] So there were a lot of different cultures that we had to mix with, you know, the lords and the ladies, the doctors, the flying doctors, the Kikuyu women. Yeah, the Kikuyu women and the men. And the Kikuyu men, who many of them that worked sort of in the same level as we did. They were settlement officers. They weren't living with their families at all. And I think that still happens now, that they get a job and they can't move their families, but they take their job with the government. That still happens quite a bit, at least in Kenya and I think maybe in other African countries. Yeah. So that they're like home once a year, even though their family's in Kenya.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:07] Then they have their own little community?

DAKIN: [00:38:09] Oh yeah, they have their own little community. Yeah. Well, one thing or another, another group that we learned a lot about, I would say, were the Indian, the Indian community. And there were Indians certainly who lived there. And we, when we would have a big party and we were kind of, since I was a woman and the other two women lived far away, we were kind of the parents of the group and we still are kind of the parents of the group. Uh. I can remember people coming, especially Indians. And I know this now because my daughter-in-law, one of my daughters-in-law, is Indian, that they would bring all their friends. So, you know, you would think you were having X number of people at a big party and you would have X number of people plus. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:55] Well, you, you knew how to cook, which also helped.

DAKIN: [00:38:58] Yes. And I had a house boy, we had a house. We all had house boys, because otherwise we just couldn't have done any of our other work.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:05] Do you have fond memories of your houseboy? We had a house boyessa. We had a woman.

DAKIN: [00:39:10] Oh.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:11] I have fond memories of her. What was your guy like?

DAKIN: [00:39:17] Well, I can tell you about two of them. I think we only had two. One in one place and one in the other. Okay. I remember Mwongi. Mwongi was our first houseboy and, um, he was a very nice guy and, um, did very well. And we all had a good time together. And then one day I asked, and he used to go to the store to buy things, you know, just down to the shop. And one day I gave him ten shillings to buy something and he never came back. He took the ten shillings and ran.

Isn't that funny? Poor guy. He was obviously needing the money and wanting to get away.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:57] But you would think that working for you produced more than ten shillings, right?

DAKIN: [00:40:02] You think so, yes, you would think so. But you never know.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:06] Just disappeared?

DAKIN: [00:40:07] Just disappeared. Just disappeared and never came back. And we, after he left, we found out that, we had liquor there. I don't know why, but I guess maybe some of the settlers drank liquor, and we discovered that he had been watering down the liquor.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:23] And drinking it himself?

DAKIN: [00:40:25] And drinking it himself. You know, how can you know all these things?

GANZGLASS: [00:40:30] So that's number one. Now I can't wait to hear about number two.

DAKIN: [00:40:33] Well, number two, uh, we thought he was really great and he was there. And when we left, I recommended him highly to this British family that lived way up north in the, I mean, we lived in, out in the boonies. But these people lived way out in the boonies. And when I came back, the first time I think I came back, which was a couple of years later, I learned that, no, they didn't like him at all. And they had let him go, that he didn't do a good enough job.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:08] Hmm.

DAKIN: [00:41:10] You know, sometimes. At that time anyway, I used to think and I still do think that, you know, we have an apartment back here that's downstairs and back here so that we. [inaudible] No, no, I don't think so. Um. That, you know, Americans at that time were not nearly

as exacting as the Brits were. And I was probably not that exacting because I was just, you know, a young person, pregnant, happy to have somebody to help with carrying the water and doing basic, basic cooking. So. So I don't have, no, my memories are not, they're not not fond, but they're not necessarily fond memories. Those were the only two house boys that we had.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:56] Ah. So looking back at all of this, what do you think you accomplished in Kenya from a personal level? What did you get the exotic experience you were looking for? Learning about different cultures?

DAKIN: [00:42:10] Yes. Oh, yes. I mean, I think.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:13] What did it, what did it do for you? And then I'll ask, what did it do for the country? Or individuals.

DAKIN: [00:42:18] I think for me, it certainly helped me, obviously, to understand a lot more about the world. As I had, I came from Boston, I lived in Boston. I went to school in Vermont. I, you know, I'd barely been west of New York I think maybe at the most. And, um, so it opened my eyes to different circumstances that people live in around the world. I think it made me a more flexible, certainly a more flexible person obviously. You know, if you have to wait for days for a bus, you don't get quite so excited if the Metro is a minute late, you just feel you have to let other people know. So certainly I gained a great understanding of the world. We lived overseas twice after that because we really enjoyed living overseas and we still do enjoy traveling. But I wouldn't want to be away from grandchildren, so that's why I wouldn't want to live overseas.

DAKIN: [00:43:18] Um. So what do I think I did for the country? Well, I don't know that I did that much for the, you know, I can't be bold and say, well, I certainly helped women to understand that they could do more than carry wood, that they were capable of so many different things. I certainly can say that I probably, yeah, that I certainly helped the nutrition with the milk and the cream. Uh.



DAKIN: [00:43:43] And I, I, when I was pregnant, the women were much more, uh, felt much closer to me when I was pregnant. And another story I told the other night was about, uh, this is real cultural experience, that when Sean was born, he was very small. He was like 5 pounds. So I was in the back seat of a Land Rover and we were stopped at a, at a store, at a *duka*, on the main road coming up from Nairobi. And I was there in the back seat with this, you know, little teeny baby, and the window was open and along came three Maasai women. And we didn't live in Maasai country, but they live in the Rift Valley. And they came down along and they were, you know, oohing and ahing at the baby, and each one of them spit on the baby.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:30] Good luck, right.

DAKIN: [00:44:30] Good luck. And I was completely horrified. Kikuyu women didn't do that. I was like, oh my God. But, you know, I did my whole smiling thing. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. You know, we learned how to behave in different cultural.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:44] And it worked. See, it worked.

DAKIN: [00:44:45] It did work. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. So, uh, yeah. I mean, I do think that we, and we also helped Kenyans to know that there are different ways of looking at Americans. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:03] Did people talk to you about the Vietnam War at all? Was, were you a?

DAKIN: [00:45:09] The other members of the group did.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:11] Well.

DAKIN: [00:45:12] All the time.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:13] But expats or Kenyans?

DAKIN: [00:45:18] You know, they didn't. Right. So that is not my memory.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:23] Huh.

DAKIN: [00:45:23] Certainly other expats did, because it was right in the middle of the Vietnam War, as you probably had that, you might have had that experience also. But no, I don't remember that. But we.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:34] So you didn't have to communicate an American point of view or contrary to American point of view?

DAKIN: [00:45:41] No. Certainly when I lived in England, I did. But that was way after the Vietnam War but it was, you know, Iran and all that. Yes. Oh, yeah. Yeah. No, no. The only had to do it with expats. But, you know, we were so far out of it, we didn't have, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:57] They didn't know?

DAKIN: [00:45:58] They didn't know. We used to get a Time magazine like once a week, one of us, and we would pass it around months late. And then we'd get together somehow, someplace, going somewhere together, and we'd have big discussions about the domino theory. And who was going to fall next. And Dien Bien Phu and, oh my God. On and on and on and on. So it certainly did really interest me in the world. My parents were very politically, uh, involved locally and very interested in politics, but I never got that interested until I went overseas.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:34] Mm hmm. I just lost the other question. So have you stayed in touch with Kenya at all or with other Peace Corps volunteers?

DAKIN: [00:46:43] Oh, yeah. We've been back to Kenya only once. We went back with our kids when, our two older kids, when they were young, ten and seven I think. We have not been back since. We were all going to go back last year because there was a, was the 50th anniversary. But Peace Corps pulled out and, you know, so we did not go back and, uh, no, we haven't been back since. We lived over in Europe and

we've been to lots of other places and we still would like to go back to Kenya.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:15] Are you in touch with former Peace Corps volunteers?

DAKIN: [00:47:18] Oh, yes. You know, as I said, we are sort of the hub and we've had ourselves personally three different reunions at our house, McLean and here. We lived overseas for 14 years in Libya and England from '76 to '87, basically. No, that was in England, from '70 basically to '87. And then, um, but so since we've been back here, we have made an effort to get everybody together. And we see people like Mike Davidson and, uh, Dan Ritchie. I don't know if you know Dan Ritchie, he lives here. So Mike, Dan, me, Don, and Jim Connell. That's all. There are five of us who live here in this area, in this area. And then we stay in touch with Bill Sterling, who is out in Aspen. We're going to go, be seeing him soon. And Arthur Levy, who's in London now.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:13] All former volunteers in Kenya I?

DAKIN: [00:48:15] All in our group. All Kenya I. Yeah, only Kenya I. I mean, we know other Peace Corps volunteers too, but I thought you were asking about Kenya I.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:23] No, I was asking about Kenya I.

DAKIN: [00:48:25] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:25] And has the Kenya group, I mean socially you've gotten together, but have you been involved with Kenya?

DAKIN: [00:48:33] Not me.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:34] With charity work?

DAKIN: [00:48:35] No.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:35] Or development work since then? Have others?

DAKIN: [00:48:39] Well, some people. I've been, you know, I've been in nonprofits and run nonprofits, but they haven't been. I've been in international nonprofits but haven't been a head of them and have not done any traveling for that kind of work. Just for that kind of work. Oh, let's see. I think one person has a scholarship. But, uh. Yeah, I have. I have. Yes, I did. Yeah, yeah. I did some strategic planning for a group just last year, you know, pro bono.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:12] Involved in Kenya?

DAKIN: [00:49:13] Yeah, involved in Kenya. Yes. Involved in heart transplants in little kids in Kenya. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:18] Interesting.

DAKIN: [00:49:18] And so I've been involved in raising money for them. Um. It's hard for me to remember all the different times I've been involved.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:24] That's, that's fine.

DAKIN: [00:49:25] But yeah, absolutely. You know, the Kenya embassy is right around the corner here. So we feel close to Kenya, although we don't stop in and talk to them. We did have a reunion there. That was fun. And we do keep in touch with all of the people who will keep us in touch with us. It's only about one or two people who don't want to keep in touch. Every group has, I don't know how many people you had in your group. We had 35.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:46] We had, uh.

DAKIN: [00:49:46] There were 35.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:47] Something like that.

DAKIN: [00:49:48] I see. Yeah, they were pretty small groups.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:50] They were small, small groups. We've kind of merged all of the Somalia groups because they weren't so many of them.

DAKIN: [00:49:57] Right, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:58] So we've gotten to know other people from other groups as well. But there were many more in Kenya than in Somalia.

DAKIN: [00:50:04] Yes. We know other Kenya volunteers too. We do. And we've sort of kept up with them. Yes, absolutely. We've been very involved in a, um, a documentary that's being made about Kenya. It's called The Towering Task. I think you might maybe might have mentioned it.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:20] Yes.

DAKIN: [00:50:21] We're helping the producer. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:23] Are there any things that you want to say that I didn't ask you?

DAKIN: [00:50:29] Let me see. Well, it certainly was, I mean, it's so banal to say this, but it definitely was a life changing experience. There's no question about it. It was a way I wanted to have my life change because I wanted to understand better how people lived in various countries around the world. And I wanted to be exposed to all of that and I wanted to be able to travel.

DAKIN: [00:50:51] Now, I think that the fact that we were in the Peace Corps certainly changed our family's life as well, obviously, because then we lived overseas after that. We came back here, then we lived in Libya, and then we lived in England. So that the kids, our three children, have an international outlook. All of them do, although none of them were in the Peace Corps. They all did some kind of volunteer work, two of them in Japan, one of them here in the States, after college. They all, and actually everybody is, they all are. It's very interesting. All the three

kids are in either government or nonprofit. And their wives, yeah, one is a doctor and one's a lawyer, but they're all in service work, which is interesting. Some kind of service.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:42] So it goes on from one generation to the next.

DAKIN: [00:51:45] Well, I don't know, maybe.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:47] Well, it's not appropriate for this interview, but at the same thing happened in our family.

DAKIN: [00:51:53] In your family too. Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:54] Most definitely.

DAKIN: [00:51:54] Yes. Yes. So, um.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:56] Well, I thank you. This has been a really good interview.

DAKIN: [00:51:59] Well, thank you. I hope that I've given you the kinds of things that you want.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:03] Oh, definitely. And it'll be archived and other people can access it.

DAKIN: [00:52:07] Yes. Good. That's good.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:09] Thank you.

DAKIN: [00:52:10] Thank you very much.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:10] Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]