

Lonna Dole Harkrader Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Lonna Dole Harkrader
Interviewer: Robert T. K. Scully
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Biographical Note

Lonna Dole Harkrader served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia from 1968 to 1969 as an English teacher, and in Ghana from 1969 to 1970 as a French teacher.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Lonna Dole Harkrader

November 11, 2019
Durham, North Carolina

By Robert T. K. Scully

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

SCULLY: [00:00:01] And I think we're on so. This is Robert Scully, and I am interviewing Lonna Dole Harkrader at her home in Durham, North Carolina. The date is November 11th, 2019. And Lonna was a Peace Corps volunteer, initially in Ethiopia, beginning in June 1968 and at the end of her first year, she transferred to Ghana and concluded her Peace Corps service in July, was it 1971?

HARKRADER: [00:00:41] '70.

SCULLY: [00:00:41] 1970. And with that, Lonna, why don't you just share your story with us?

HARKRADER: [00:00:47] OK.

SCULLY: [00:00:49] And maybe talk about what motivated you to join the Peace Corps? A little background. And then what happened when you were in Peace Corps?

HARKRADER: [00:00:56] OK, well, I had a boyfriend who wanted to go into the Peace Corps to keep from being drafted, but also he was a social justice minded guy. He was interested in medicine. And he wanted to go, and so we thought at the time he was, we were going to get married and so I decided I should go with him. So I signed up and thinking that we were going to be a couple. And we got to Ethiopia, and it was an amazing, really different culture than anything I could ever imagine. And I just loved the food and the people were beautiful and, you know, eating out of a common bladder when you sat down with Ethiopians.

SCULLY: [00:01:43] Injera?

HARKRADER: [00:01:45] Injera is so delicious. And I had no experience eating spicy food, and I have sinuses that just would run and run, and there were no napkins to mop up the sinus drainage. Luckily, I had bought a lot of cotton turtlenecks to take because I wanted to be very culturally appropriate, and Ethiopian women are very covered up. So I would just use my sleeve as my Kleenex. And in any case, I had went to the. We were trained in St. Thomas Virgin Islands, which was sounds exotic, but it was on the far side of an island in what had been a penal colony. And so it was mainly getting used to being in a situation with all these folks I was going to be serving with. And doing the trainings and enjoying that, learning Amharic.

HARKRADER: [00:02:39] And as it turned out, I didn't go to Amhara speaking area of Ethiopia. I went to an Oromo speaking area where Amhara was not spoken. But I did enjoy learning the audio lingual method, and it helped me learn how to be a teacher of a second language who was using the audio lingual method. So then, you know, our group got on a plane and we went to went to Ethiopia. And on the way, well before we got on the plane, actually in New York, a girl's boyfriend called in with a bomb threat. And so we didn't end up being able to leave right away. And we were told that if you didn't want to get on the plane, wanted to wait until

another plane, you could. Or you could just go until after they checked the plane out. Everybody got on the plane except the two psychiatrists that had been assigned to our group, who came later.

HARKRADER: [00:03:36] But in any case, we got to Ethiopia and there was a gigantic number of people waiting for something to happen at the airport. All these Ethiopians were, thousands awaiting at the airport. We thought, I wonder who's arriving? An important group is the, you know, dignitary or something. Well, it turned out that our plane was the biggest plane that had ever landed in the Addis Ababa airport, and they were waiting to see it land. And so we were the notables that they were waiting to see. And that was, um, they had just, I think, paved the airport. It wasn't a regular airport for very, hadn't been for very long before that. But anyway, we got there and we were transferred pretty quickly to our sites for teacher practice teaching. And I was in Ambo, which was just great and trained, you know, got to get in front of a bunch of kids and learn how to teach. And that's always a surprise that you can do that, you know, without any training. But they were very patient and kind, and I enjoyed their positive attitudes.

HARKRADER: [00:04:40] And then my boyfriend and I were assigned to a town that was west of there, far west of there. It was 14 hours, in fact, on the bus from Addis Ababa to my town. And that's a long ways. And especially when you're on a bus and the bus driver keeps playing the same Ethiopian music over and over, which kind of drove me crazy, literally. You know, it's so unusual and I didn't appreciate it. But having to hear the same one over and over made it even worse. But in any case, we got out there. And we look, my boyfriend and I looked around town for housing because we wanted to live near each other and we found a house that was under construction and we asked the owner of it. When I say house, I mean a mud structure made out of mud with a tin roof. Nothing, there's nothing fancy in my town.

HARKRADER: [00:05:37] And he said he would build it faster if we could give him the rent from the rest of the year or give most of the rent. So we did, and he finished it pretty quickly. In the meantime, my boyfriend went to live with another Peace Corps, a guy who lived in town. And I went to live,

since I'm a single woman, I went to live at the hotel where they had a couple of little rooms behind the hotel. And I stayed there until the house was finished and the women that worked in the hotel was so sweet to me. They were so, so welcoming and helped me settle in and feel just happy and comfortable and just to be became sort of, they sort of looked after me basically. And I noticed that my students were there in the morning when I would get up and leave my little room and I was thought, oh, isn't that nice there? They're concerned about me too.

HARKRADER: [00:06:36] Well, it turned out it was a brothel. Those little rooms were reserved for prostitutes, and so that kind of was an interesting, um, interesting choice I had made about where to live. And nobody had thought to tell me what it was, what these little rooms were, but they were the only place I could have stayed anyway. So when my house was finished and we had a, the owner had an event to celebrate it with dancing and food. And you know, it was a big deal to finish this building, which was a duplex. He had put a little fence around it too. I had invited these people to come, these women that were my friends, to come to the event. And then somewhere along the way, somebody told me that they were prostitutes and that would not be appreciated. So I realized I have a lot of learning to do here. This cross-cultural stuff is demanding and you never know how are you going to impress people. You have to be sensitive and open minded as well.

HARKRADER: [00:07:41] And so anyway, that was my first real significant faux pas in Ethiopia, but I don't know that they were really too many others that were, that I knew about anyway. And the sad thing for me was that the Oromo people I was teaching were like the bottom of the barrel. As far as hierarchy and among Ethiopian tribes, the Amhara were at the top and the Oromo were pretty much at the bottom. And I was distressed that the kids I was teaching, and I had three classes with 60 kids in each class. Now, if you know anything about learning a second language, that is an impossible task. So I had to resign myself to the fact that it was an impossible task and that the kids that were sitting in the front who were very motivated and, you know, alive and answered, you know, they were determined to learn English.

HARKRADER: [00:08:42] That was pretty much what I was going to be able to accomplish. Trying to teach to the kids at the back of the mudroom school room was not. I couldn't even see them. They were all squished together in little benches. So in any case, that was distressful to me to be doing something not at all like what I thought was going to have a positive impact on the country. And but I did learn. I learned about teaching and one morning I had a very sad. I was waiting for the school day to start and they have a flag raising ceremony and everybody was gathered around as usual. And the person who was the, um, coming to be the principal who was not the real principal, he was a teacher, a principal in training. He called one of the students to the front.

HARKRADER: [00:09:42] And the student had done something bad and all this was in Amharic and I didn't understand what it was, but he started beating him on his foot and his foot was a club foot and it just broke my heart. It just broke my heart. And I collapsed to the ground and I'm not sure honestly what else happened that morning, but I did get to class and nobody talked to me about it. The principal never approached me about it. But in any case, that was kind of the thing I had to get used to was corporal punishment was very common, and I, of course, had no experience with it. So what happened while I was in Gimbi, I was in Gimbi, I don't believe I mentioned that. Gimbi, Welega Province, which is if you keep going on the road which ended in my town, you would get to the Sudan in not very long period of time.

HARKRADER: [00:10:35] So in any case, the university service, which was created by the educational system in Ethiopia, sent teachers between their junior and senior years of college out to the rural areas to teach. It was the companion to Peace Corps. And there were three of them in our town and they were so much fun. And they were from three different tribes in Ethiopia. And we all got to be friends, you know, we all, you know, hung out, did stuff together and then we invited them to our home. And it was special to have the opportunity to meet Ethiopians who were, who could speak English for one thing and who were very dynamic and exciting people.

HARKRADER: [00:11:31] And so they told us sometime around Christmas that the year the university service they were part of was going to be discontinued for the next following year. And the reason they supposed it was going to be discontinued was that their entity, their university service groups, were politicizing the students in the rural, the high school students in the rural areas. And the government was concerned about that because Haile Selassie was still the emperor, and he was very watchful and guarding of his hegemony. And I had not come to Peace Corps to replace qualified people. I had come to be there as a stopgap until they were qualified and could do whatever I was going to be assigned to do. And so I was appalled. I just said, this is not at all correct.

HARKRADER: [00:12:29] And because, you know, when you have an emperor who's one of the last empires in the world, you think it's about time something happened to change. You know, it's a good thing. Didn't turn out to be a good thing for very long, but anyway, once it happened. But in any case, I organized along with some other guys, four guys, a conference to happen the following spring break in an area not, a beautiful area with a salt, uh, mineral baths. It was a vacation spot. And I reserved some rooms and organized the conference to get Peace Corps volunteers to come and talk about this situation with university service and whether, what we were going to do. Whether we were going to leave in protest, whether we were going to write to the incoming Peace Corps volunteers and tell them this is not where you, you don't want to be here. This is, they're doing stuff here and explain what we, our point of view.

HARKRADER: [00:13:31] And the Peace Corps director heard about this conference and asked me to come to Addis to speak to him. And I said, well, I'll come, but I'm not taking the 14 hour bus ride. You can send me a plane ticket. So he did and all this. My town has no electricity. I had running water, which was a blessing, but no electricity, no telephone, no telegraph. But somehow I got this message that he wanted to see me. And somehow I got back to him. I had to, I think I had a one hour bus ride to the nearest town that did have a telegram service. And said I would come and told him, yes, I would be there, I would if you gave

me a plane ticket, which I didn't have. So I got on the plane and I was the only person on this plane. It was a DC-3.

HARKRADER: [00:14:28] Now anybody that knows anything about DC-3s. They have these canvas seats that are not seats, they're just strapped along the edge of the plane. They are no seats. And in the middle were about a hundred goats and sheep all tied down in the middle. And they were not happy. And they were going from the rural areas into Addis to prepare for the holidays, the spring Easter holiday. So here was me sitting on one of these canvas straps and all these sheep and the airplane pilot. We flew and I was really glad I didn't get sick because I'm motion sickness. But it was fine. And I talked to the director and what have you. And so we did have our confidence and the director who said, well, when he got there, he. Even though he had told me when I met with him that he thought we had a just complaint and our protest was valid. He got there and he said what I wasn't expecting him to say. He said to the volunteers, you know, you made a two-year commitment, you need to fulfill that commitment.

HARKRADER: [00:15:34] So I was real disappointed. I was really disappointed. But in any case, finished teaching, went on. And somewhere in there, somewhere in there, I got a terrible pain in my side and I couldn't walk and I managed to get myself on a rocky road. There were a few little teeny taxis that could take people around town. I managed to find one of those to take me to the clinic in town. And the clinic wasn't actually in town. It was on the edge of the outskirts of town, and it was run by some American Seventh Day Adventist missionaries. So I got there and that was it for health service in town, in this town. That was it. There was nothing else, no public health service at all. So I told them I was in terrible pain and he took, you know, tested my blood and said, well, you might have up an appendix that's troublesome. Go home and come back tomorrow.

HARKRADER: [00:16:34] And I said, I can't go home again. I'll never make it back. I mean, it's just too hard to go on a bumpy road. So I spent the night and the next morning he decided to take my appendix out. And somehow I just thought everything was going to be OK. He told me he'd seen

thousands of these. Well, it turned out he was a anesthesiologist and he had never taken anybody's appendix out. He'd been there when people, doctors were doing this. So I didn't know that, of course, until later. But I was, I put my faith in him and he did it and I was, you know, had a great big, ugly scar. But who cared? I was not in a pain. And the Peace Corps I heard was very upset when they heard this and sent the doctor out in the helicopter. And she probably arrived while I was still in the clinic. She'd heard I had been operated on. My appendix had been removed with a rusty razor blade.

HARKRADER: [00:17:35] So in any case, life went on and the conference took place and I went back and started teaching, finished the school year and was in Kenya. A bunch of us and rented a little VW camper and we were going to the game parks and all that. And somewhere towards the end of our game park excursion, we heard somebody told us that the Peace Corps wanted us to come back and they were going to offer to send us to Ghana if we wanted to do that. Well, we all thought that was really promising, and we hightailed it back to Addis and heard what they had to say. And then my boyfriend and I rushed out to our towns and picked up all our stuff. And it was pretty traumatic for all of us because we had developed relationships that we didn't have time to really explain to people too much about what was happening, especially the three students we'd hired to work for us.

HARKRADER: [00:18:34] Because in Ethiopia, it's common to hire people, you know, just to come, and they all need money to support themselves and, you know, buy food. And if they've come in from a rural, really far rural area and can't walk to the school, they need to live in town. So we had three of these that we were supporting, and it was really hard to leave them, especially since we had no money to give them. And we got on a plane and went to Ghana. And I tell you what, Ethiopian Airlines flew us there and treated us right. And I still remember being on that plane. And I ended up being the only one, one of the five of us who stayed in Ghana. The other guys went home and joined VISTA, and my boyfriend went to medical school. But I quickly developed a big affection for Ghana. Ghana is full of beautiful, really dark black people who have a vivacious demeanor about them.

HARKRADER: [00:19:36] And it was, they were getting ready to have elections in Ghana. They'd had Nkrumah for a long time, military government. This was 1979 [1969] and they were, women on the busses were expounding about who they wanted, you know, standing up. And I just thought, this is amazing that women are standing up and saying what they believe to everybody. And I just said, oh my gosh, this is so amazing. And then one of my jobs was to find where I wanted to go to serve because Peace Corps training had already finished in Ghana and everybody knew where they were going and they were. I just had to find a place, so I went to two places that I didn't like for one reason or another. In the Peace Corps director said, well, there's this other town. I think you would really like it. It's a small little town and you don't have really time to go and check it out before the school year starts. But I think you're going to really like it.

HARKRADER: [00:20:36] So I went and did love it. I loved it. And I lived on the first floor of a two-story building. There was one other Peace Corps volunteer. She and I shared this house, the first floor of this two bedroom house. The headmaster was on the top floor with his family. So we had a family, you know, with kids to, you know, to interact with, and they were lovely people. And, you know, so there was all the whole thing about pounding the fufu in the courtyard, you know, woom woom woom. The whole scene was just like real life. It was like real life in Ghana. And it just thrilled me to be there. And I loved the beautiful clothing the women wore, so colorful and gorgeous. And I was assigned to teach French, which is what I wanted to do to begin with. Because I was a French major in college and had spent a year living in France and I felt like that would be a good skill for me.

HARKRADER: [00:21:37] But to be sent to a rural, not a rural, a very small, yes, rural school to teach French. It just, it was so exciting because Ghana is surrounded by French speaking countries, and these kids knew right away they wanted to learn French. They were motivated. They knew it wasn't going to necessarily help them with their studies, but it was going to help them speak a language that would allow them to help their parents trade with all these countries, all these people around

them, because West Africans are very famous for trading. I mean, they really get into it. So I taught the audio lingual method and they loved it and I loved it. And, you know, within days they were speaking French. I mean, they were learning dialogues and vocabulary and speaking to each other. They didn't know how to write and they didn't know how to read. But that was not what you taught them in the first year. You taught them how to speak.

HARKRADER: [00:22:35] So all the dialogues had to do with West African scenes. So they felt right away comfortable with what they were learning. And I could hear them, even though they didn't know I was around, I could hear them practicing the dialogs with one another, and it just was great. And I loved the other teachers. They were just a faculty, but maybe there were seven or something like that, or eight of us in this school. All of them Ghanaian, except for my roommate. And you know, they would have fun. They would go off and we'd go together on field trips, the teachers would. And it was really fun. I really liked it. Plus, I loved the food, Ghanaian food. I loved it as much as the Ethiopian food. So as I might have mentioned, this was a small boarding school. These kids lived there, which was not uncommon in Ghana for there to be boarding schools.

HARKRADER: [00:23:33] So then in 1970, I returned home. And I met my boyfriend in Europe on the way home and he told me he had met somebody who he was going to marry. And I, of course, was broken hearted, really broken hearted and my heart was broke to smithereens. But that's part of life. And so I got home and I took a course in low and moderate income housing that I had learned about through Peace Corps. And it, uh, I wanted to address the whole, especially after being in Ethiopia and Ghana and seeing that poor housing, I wanted to address that issue in my own country. And so I learned to be a consultant and I was hired by a county, Montgomery County, to be there. And I was working with developers and nonprofits to help them find a way to find land and build these things. So that's what I did.

HARKRADER: [00:24:28] And then I was lucky to meet my husband at the home of a friend of his, and I was there with just, I was there too, because I

wanted to say hi to his friend. And it turned out he'd been in the Peace Corps too. He'd been in Tunisia. And we just started talking. We'd just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. And, you know, Peace Corps volunteers have always a lot to talk about. And so in any case, we ended up living together shortly thereafter and I was working in Montgomery County and he was working in Washington. And at some point about a year and a half after we had lived in Washington, we decided that that wasn't the life we wanted for ourselves and that we were going to explore the rest or just explore what we might want to do.

HARKRADER: [00:25:28] And we knew housing was going to have something to do with it. So we got married and moved to Durham, North Carolina, after having checked a lot of places out. We like Durham because there are a lot of black people here. There was a very big blue collar community working in the factories that both the civil, I mean the textile factories and the tobacco factories, and we liked that. We like the fact that Duke University was a school or college that would attract a lot of interesting activities that we could be involved in. Including good movies, that they had a movie every week that was interesting, different than what you'd see at the regular movie theaters. So we liked living here a lot and we met over the course of living here, a number of Ethiopians and Eritreans, and we were surprised at how many there were here.

HARKRADER: [00:26:37] And every year somebody in Chapel Hill who'd been in the Foreign Service in Ethiopia would have a Meskel celebration, and that's the harvest celebration in Ethiopia that is celebrated throughout the country. And so they would have one and everybody would come and bring a dish and we'd have a big potluck. And there were always lots of Ethiopians and Eritreans there, and we always got there at the very beginning because we wanted to meet people before there was a crush of people and introduce ourselves around them. And one of the first years I was at this, I introduced myself to somebody and it turned out he had been a practice teacher in the same town, same school where I had taught. This is improbable, totally improbable. Neither one of us could believe it. And we didn't recognize each other. So even though we thought we might have been there about the same time, the Ethiopian calendar is different than the Gregorian calendar, and we

weren't sure. We didn't think we'd been there at the same time. I certainly didn't recognize him. He didn't recognize me.

HARKRADER: [00:27:37] But I asked him. I said, how did you? How did you get to come to the United States? Because this is a mystery to me, how people do this. And he said, well, I met some Quakers. And I had this experience when I was teaching at the school that I told them about, and the experience was that I was beating a young boy on his foot and he had a club foot. And I was disciplining him for something he had done that was really bad. But the Peace Corps volunteer that was there was very upset and had fallen to the ground. And I realized this was something that I was doing that my culture told me was OK, but this woman from the United States thought was horrible. And I listened to him tell this story. And I said, well, that Peace Corps volunteer was me. And neither one of us, you know, it's just a dynamic experience to have somebody confess like that.

HARKRADER: [00:28:42] And but the Quakers had been so impressed with his conversion. He had converted from what he had been to wanting to be peace loving and realizing that started with him. And so he came here and they gave him a scholarship to Guilford College. Amazing.

SCULLY: [00:29:00] Great.

HARKRADER: [00:29:01] Amazing. But so I was glad to have met him and astounded to have met him. And I'm grateful that he had told me that story, because that's a confession you wouldn't necessarily share. Embarrassed, ashamed about. So I've had experiences, you know, along the way that have been, and I'm sure all of us have, but things happen that you can't believe. And one of them was at the 50th Peace Corps anniversary celebration in Washington, where I was with the everybody who'd been in Peace Corps all those years. And we all went out to dinner in Falls Church one of the nights for Ethiopian food. And we were, you know, really having a carousing time sharing stories and what have you and some Ethiopians came into the room. We all looked at them and they said, well, we just wanted to say hi and congratulations. And we taught Amharic in the Virgin Islands in 1968,

in St. Thomas Virgin Islands. And we all looked, gosh, these are our teachers. These are our language teachers. How did they get here? You know, and oh, this is just amazing. So those are just the kind of experience that has happened over the years. I just, I just am amazed and grateful to have had all these experiences abroad.

HARKRADER: [00:30:42] And one of the things my husband did and I did when, um, there was the Contra war that was waged during the 1980s. The U.S. funded the counter-revolutionaries who didn't like Daniel, didn't like Daniel Ortega taking over their country from Somoza, and they went and waged war. And we, our government, you know, Ronald Reagan and everybody, they sent them money to fund this war. And that was just not acceptable to us. And we got organized in Durham to oppose the Contra war, and I organized busses to take people to D.C. to visit our Congress people, and we visited them here locally as well. And we went to the State Department even to talk to them and said, this is not acceptable. This is the absolute opposite of what Americans ought to be doing in the world. And you don't know anything about what's going on. Ethiopia [Nicaragua] is this little country of three and a half million people, half of whom are 15 years of age and younger. You can't believe that we need to fight them and do this war.

SCULLY: [00:31:50] In Nicaragua.

HARKRADER: [00:31:51] Yeah, in Nicaragua.

SCULLY: [00:31:53] Yes.

HARKRADER: [00:31:53] Yeah. So all of this group of church people and Richard and I decided to start a relationship. We wanted to. They said after all this protesting that they wanted to meet Nicaraguan people. So we went down in 1993, and an organization called Witness for Peace found us a rural county that was full of very dynamic, entrepreneurial, well, at least committed, people committed to social justice. So we went to that town. And it's actually a big rural county. So we went around and visited areas way outside the little town as well and just had a fabulous feeling that this is what we needed. What we needed to do was to get

involved and form a partnership of support and building ties of peace and friendship with these people. And so we did.

HARKRADER: [00:32:51] And it's still going today. We're into our 27th year of this relationship. And it's been an amazing experience for many people who have gone down to visit, as well as the local people who have been able to come to us and say, you know, we want to build latrines in our community, but we have no money to buy the materials, but we have the interest. We have, people want to use latrines. We want to protect the water source. We want to do what's environmentally correct, but we don't have any money. And then we would raise the money and buy the materials and take them to them and they'd build the latrines. There's a lot of effort made to verify that the latrines had gotten made, built. And we did a lot of that so that we didn't have people just, you know, reselling the stuff. That was a concern that we knew about from our experience in Peace Corps, that this kind of thing can happen.

HARKRADER: [00:33:45] So then, you know, some community wanted a school, that their kids were too far from the next closest school and they wanted a little primary school so their kids could actually get to school because right then they weren't able. There was a river in the way and the kids couldn't cross the river in the winter when it was raining and stuff like that. So then we raised money for a school and then we raised money for more schools. And we did the model. We developed this model where instead of us going down, which was so common at the time, and doing building schools or building a health clinic, we said to the community, if you can provide the land and the labor, we will give you the materials to build the school plus the contractor. And that was it. That's what we did for, we're still doing it. And many schools, dozens of schools have been built and some remodeled with our funds. And it's, they're small concrete block, two classroom schools. Perfectly fabulous for local needs.

HARKRADER: [00:34:42] They don't need a fancier kind of school that was built by the government with, you know, it costs three times that amount. And plus the really exciting thing was that they got to feel empowered. And they

would come to us and say, you know, our community came together to build this school. We had no idea we could do this. When you suggested to us, we were very doubtful that we could come together as a community united to do this. And we have and we're very proud. And we know we can do other things as well in the future. And that happened with everything we did. We helped the community get money to build a water system, gravity fed. The same thing. People come to us with tears in their eyes on the inauguration day, said we had no idea we could do this. So it's something we're still continuing to do and find lots of ways.

HARKRADER: [00:35:31] We support a program for handicapped kids and handicapped kids in Catholic culture have been considered to be unworthy, that God has punished you. And so a lot of times these kids were never allowed outside their homes. They were kept secluded in their homes and never allowed out and couldn't walk or, you know, have much going on for them. And one of the women in town who had a Spanish husband who had died and left her a bunch of money, not money, but his pension. She was entitled to his pension. She wanted to build a program, a center for handicapped children. We helped, and we're still helping. We're actually their only support now because other people have fallen away. But it's a wonderful thing to see a child who can't walk, learn to walk, run, and then some of them even get to go to public schools because they're capable of going to public school.

HARKRADER: [00:36:28] Their mother might have to come in and change their diaper during the day sometime, but they're, you know, intellectually capable of being integrated in the public school system. The first time ever this has happened in Ethiopia, in um Nicaragua, was our school. And that came about because physical therapists had gone down and said, you know, in our back home in North America, we send kids like this to school.

SCULLY: [00:36:50] Mainstreaming.

HARKRADER: [00:36:51] They don't get, yeah, we mainstream them. We don't. They're perfectly able to go to school and kids can learn to accept

them. And that's part of education too, learn that not everybody is born the same. And so that's a project we still do. And so we do schools and we've also done a project to help rural families who cook with wood. Actually, everybody mostly in the rural areas cooks with wood. And to build a cook stove that's very, very environmentally safe and correct. And it's designed by Nicaraguan engineer and people just love it. And it's amazing. It uses just a small amount of wood, and it's great. So I'm really grateful to this project because it's given me, my life meaning. You know, you come home from Peace Corps and you feel so much passion and so much anger as well at how the U.S. spends our money so much on military when we could be doing so many other good things with it.

HARKRADER: [00:37:52] And so it's given me a way to be feel really like I'm contributing. And you know that saying, you can't do everything the world needs, but the world needs everything you can do. It's a beautiful saying that I keep in my heart and I'm grateful to Nicaraguans for being very outgoing and friendly. So my final experience that I've had was just a few months ago when we were in South Africa and we were on a ferry going to Nelson Mandela's prison.

SCULLY: [00:38:32] Robbins Island.

HARKRADER: [00:38:33] Robben Island. Yeah. And so we're on the ferry and lots of people, lots of ferries going. Lots of ferries. They've got this very well organized so that everybody goes and you don't bump into people when you're there. Everybody's routed different ways around the island and then going into the prison and talking to a former prisoner who tells you the story of the prisoner and his experience and, you know, shows you Nelson Mandela's place where he, his prison cell. And Richard comes up to me and says, you've got to meet these guys, come on. See these people, we got to meet them. So I went over and introduced myself and they were Ethiopians who had come. They were young. They were probably 28, 30 years old. They had come to Cape Town to be trained or go to a training workshop for people who worked in banks. So we start talking. And they're from my town, Gimbi, Welega.

HARKRADER: [00:39:35] Well, you know, I have felt so despairing when I was there that anybody from Gimbi would ever get out to do something in the world different than what their lives were. And here they are working, living in Addis, working at a bank. And they said there are all kinds of educational opportunities now. When you were there, that was just the university. If you didn't get in the university, if you didn't pass that exam at the end of high school and get into the university, that was it. There was nothing else left for you. But now there are all kinds of training schools and special things going on all over. So, you know, I just feel I feel grateful to have met them because they could clear up this very sad impression I had of people who were living in rural areas wherever they are in the world. How they're so neglected, disrespected. So the Peace Corps, for me, was a fabulous journey, and I'm grateful for it every day.

SCULLY: [00:40:41] Well, I really appreciate your sharing your story for the oral history project. And I guess the next step is to, well, what comes next? Where do you see yourself going henceforth?

HARKRADER: [00:40:54] I'm 73 almost anyway, and I'm loving being a grandparent and I love this work we're doing in Nicaragua. What we did in Nicaragua was to build because we could see that there was no economic development. It was very frustrating for my husband and me. There was no chance, you know, after the Contra war was over, there was just, nobody was investing in Nicaragua. People were still very wary of Nicaragua. Nicaragua is a small population country with a lot of land mass, a lot of agriculture land, you know, for doing all kinds of things, and they weren't doing because they had no capital. So we decided, this might sound like a harebrained idea, but it turned out to be a very positive experience for local people and for us, was to build an eco-lodge.

HARKRADER: [00:41:42] First, we had to buy some land up in the mountains. The local people didn't really understand at all what an eco-lodge was. They didn't understand what tourists were. They didn't know the word tourists. They'd never seen one. They didn't know that somebody could come to Nicaragua just to meet them and to be part of, you know, go to

a restaurant and hang out. They erased the people that were coming to Nicaragua to help them do something. They didn't think of themselves as being worthy enough for people from the richest country on Earth to come and visit with them. And I said, well, I think it's possible. I think you're special and you don't maybe know it yet. But so we built this eco lodge and darn if people didn't come and have a blast. They not only had a blast, they were crying when they left. Many of them crying.

HARKRADER: [00:42:29] They loved the people they'd met, and they were overwhelmed with, overwhelmed with gratitude that they had had the opportunity to come and see what the United States is about and that they knew about the Contra war and that our country's government had great suspicions about these people that whose homes they had stayed in. And they were just, you know, appalled and also elated that they had gotten to meet them and develop the knowledge about Nicaragua that they wouldn't have had otherwise.

SCULLY: [00:43:00] Is it near your partner town, San Ramón?

HARKRADER: [00:43:03] It's in the county, San Ramón, in the mountains. Yeah. And then it turned out to, we grew coffee there. It had been the coffee, but it was abandoned, an abandoned coffee farm. And up in the mountains, really hard to get to. I mean, really challenging. Over the years, the roads have gotten better, but there's still dirt roads. But we've developed so many relationships, and the people that come don't have any problem developing relationships either. They kind of piggyback on the families that they who had stayed with. You know, the local family just accepted the new family that had come, the new couple, because we put people two to a home. Sit down at the table, the visitors not speaking Spanish, the Spanish people not speaking English, and somehow develop relationships that are warm and friendly and touching, heartbreaking when you have to leave.

HARKRADER: [00:43:58] So this is something that I would like to see keep going. I thought for a while I would try to help other countries, other people in other places do the same, but I never got around to it. And it's, other

peoples are doing, other areas are doing more eco-tourism than before, so that's basically the way we did it, was to bring people there to experience it and spend their money buying crafts or having activities. Because during the week you're there, you're being entertained by people who make paper by hand. And can you imagine? We had to go to some place and these women have made lives for themselves by making paper by hand and then making objects out of it. Notebooks or cards or whatever. And we come and buy it, and then they have an income. So that's the kind of thing we're still doing. And I hope to still do it there.

HARKRADER: [00:44:54] A couple of groups going this coming year. And Richard and I'll be down there for about a month. So between, you know, that interest in Nicaragua and the local, you know, both local and national politics is something I'm very passionate about. I'm part of a group that helps people get registered to vote, a nonprofit group that was started in Durham maybe six or seven years ago, and I help. I go out and do that.

SCULLY: [00:45:22] You've interfaced with the local returned Peace Corps volunteer association as well.

HARKRADER: [00:45:27] Yeah, I'm part of the North Carolina Peace Corps Association, yeah. I am. It's a really good organization, it's very strong. Vibrant group.

SCULLY: [00:45:35] A lot of young people.

HARKRADER: [00:45:37] A lot of young people now, yeah, young people. Who knows why they weren't coming before, but they sure are coming now to join this organization. To take charge of it, which is for us old timers, just a blessing.

SCULLY: [00:45:48] It is, yes.

HARKRADER: [00:45:50] You see something you love.

SCULLY: [00:45:51] Encouraging. Yeah. Well, thank you for this interview.

HARKRADER: [00:45:57] You're welcome.

SCULLY: [00:45:59] We'll get this one going and.

HARKRADER: [00:46:01] OK, great. So nice to meet you.

SCULLY: [00:46:04] Yeah, same here. Make sure this goes off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]