

Sara Feldman Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Sara Feldman
Interviewer: Robert T. K. Scully
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Biographical Note

Sara Feldman served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1979 to 1981 on a community development project, and in Georgia from 2014 to 2016 on an individual organization development project.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Sara Feldman

September 21, 2019
Durham, North Carolina

By Robert T. K. Scully

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

SCULLY: [00:00:00] Started. It is starting. Well, let me see. Testing 1, 2, 3. This is Robert Scully, returned Peace Corps volunteer from Kenya, Kenya number one. The date is September 21, 2019. And I'm interviewing for the Peace Corps oral history project Sara Feldman of Durham, North Carolina, who served twice, first in Micronesia in 1977 through up until 1981.

FELDMAN: [00:00:38] Um, you said 1927.

SCULLY: [00:00:40] Oh, did I? Sorry. My, my seven looks like a two. Sorry.

FELDMAN: [00:00:44] 1979.

FELDMAN: [00:00:45] 1979 to 1981. And her work in Micronesia was community development. And then her second stint was in Georgia in June, on June 20 starting 2014 through June 2016 and her project in Georgia was IOD,

a form of organizational development. And with that, I'm going to let Sara begin her, her oral account. Sara.

FELDMAN: [00:01:16] Hi. So, um, well, I guess I'll start with maybe what inspired me to join the Peace Corps.

SCULLY: [00:01:27] Good.

FELDMAN: [00:01:27] The first time. So that was a pretty typical situation. I went right from college. Um, I think in my mind, I always wanted to join the Peace Corps. You know, I'm a baby boomer, and when I was growing up, um, Peace Corps got formed when I was, I think maybe a pre-teen. And it was always in my mind. I had a strong desire to travel. My mother was in the International Red Cross and had lived for many years in India and Europe, and traveled all over the world. She was a very adventurous woman and I think I just inherited that from her. Unlike my brother and sister, who never go anywhere or do anything that involves international travel other than very comfortable tourist trips, you know? They just didn't get that, that spirit from her. They got other things, but not that.

FELDMAN: [00:02:24] And um, but I got that. And I always knew that Peace Corps was what I wanted to do, because I felt that it would allow me to travel and to see other places in a way that would really, um, allow me to understand the culture, to live among the people and not just only be a tourist, which when I was younger, was more important to me than it is now. And, and at the same time, hopefully, my goal was to also help people, to use some of my knowledge to help people. Of course, I didn't have much knowledge back then, but I thought I did so as a typical young person. Um, so it was just always a goal.

FELDMAN: [00:03:12] And it's funny because I don't remember that much about the application process, the medical process that everyone complains about. I don't know, I don't even remember it. I just, I remember getting references, you know, recommendations from college professors. But, and I remember when the letter came. In those days, it came in an, in a big envelope, I think it was green or blue. It was a color. And, and so, you know, it was like very, very exciting. And when, when it arrived, I

actually didn't know, I didn't know where Micronesia was. I had expressed a preference for Asia.

SCULLY: [00:03:52] Uh huh.

FELDMAN: [00:03:53] Which we were allowed to do at that time. [coughs] Excuse me. And Micronesia apparently counted as Asia. So, um, I looked it up on the map, I'm like, oh God. And, you know, started educating myself. And, uh, I remember I had lunch with a guy named Eric Metzger who had been Peace Corps in Micronesia in Yap, as a matter of fact, where I was going. And, uh, also, um, had been back there several times. And I forget how I connected with him, but somehow I did, and we had lunch and he gave me some hard realities about outer islands, and he showed me some photos. He was a photographer. [coughs] I'm sorry. I have a cold.

SCULLY: [00:04:53] That's fine.

FELDMAN: [00:04:54] I'm getting over a cold.

SCULLY: [00:04:55] That's fine.

FELDMAN: [00:04:56] So, um, he, he showed me some photographs, and I remember one very vividly. It was of a girl, and she was wearing what's called a *teor*, which is the traditional skirt that all the women wear there. And she was topless because women are topless in the outer islands. And she was, it was kind of a dark photo and she was crouched on a log. There was a lot of shade. In retrospect, I think she's probably in a taro patch. And, um, I remember looking at that photo and thinking, what am I getting into? I mean, it looked so far away, so different, you know, so foreign. I mean, it just, I almost didn't do it at that point.

SCULLY: [00:05:47] Hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:05:47] I came really close. I don't think that was his, his intent, but I do, I do remember being, you know, really thinking, well, what am I doing? Am I up to this, you know? Um, but I guess I decided I was, so off

I went. And, um, I remember I went to San Francisco for staging, and we had, we got all of our inoculations there. I had a very sore arm. And then we had kind of an extensive, more extensive than usual training. First we went to the Philippines and, um, oh yeah, the vivid memory, being a Los Angeles girl, of getting off the plane in Manila and you know, the smell, the tropical smell. It's, it's like part dirt, part frangipani. It's like, it's a very distinct smell. And it's very hot and humid.

FELDMAN: [00:06:49] Of course, I got off the plane and I'm like, well, not in L.A. anymore, that's for sure. We went out on the street and it was this insane cacophony of like, the jitneys. Have you been? In the Philippines, they have their very funny taxis or kind of like converted motorcycles, but they're all decorated. And there were jitneys everywhere and horns honking everywhere, people screaming. So it was a big. It was, it was a little culture shock arriving. And we went to San Fernando, which is about four hours north of, uh, Manila. And we were with, uh, it wasn't. No, I guess it was just us. You know what, I'm sorry. I can't remember whether it was just us or whether there were some other Peace Corps volunteers going to different places with us.

FELDMAN: [00:07:44] I, I, yes, it was because I was roommates with the girl who definitely didn't go to Micronesia. So yeah, there were other people. There were other volunteers there, and it was like a farm. And we were learning all animal husbandry things. So I'm one of the few urban L.A. women who's actually killed chickens and castrated pigs. Not that I ever did that in Micronesia, but I did learn how. And we, yeah, we learned a lot of animal stuff. So we were there like six weeks or something. And then we went to Pohnpei, which is another island group in Micronesia, and it's a real island. It's got like, uh, um, I wouldn't exactly call them mountains, but big hills. And, uh, it's, you know, it's not like a flat, like a coral atoll. And so it's very jungle-ly, very green, very dense.

FELDMAN: [00:08:40] And, um, we were there, I don't think we were there that long, like maybe three weeks or something. But we learned a lot of food stuff, like how to dry things and how to preserve things and that kind of stuff. That was a very interesting training. And some of the customs of Pohnpei, like they have a certain drink, the name of which is escaping

me, but it's like very gray and kind of ropey, made from a plant. And it gives you little hallucinations. That was interesting.

SCULLY: [00:09:14] It wasn't a kava type?

FELDMAN: [00:09:15] No, it wasn't kava. It's called something else. Sorry, I don't remember, but anyone who's been to Pohnpei will know. Everybody knows there, yeah. And so it's pretty potent for a drink.

SCULLY: [00:09:27] Hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:09:27] I mean, you know, it's not like LSD. It's not like you get transported to a different reality, but it's definitely got some hallucinogenic, uh, um, properties. Um, it's disgusting though. It's like, it's like, it's like drinking slime. Um, so yeah, I tried that. That was it. And I got introduced to, um, chewing betel nut.

SCULLY: [00:09:51] Oh, gosh, yes.

FELDMAN: [00:09:52] So got red teeth. And, um, there were a lot of ruins from the war, of Japanese bunkers and stuff. Yeah, it was super interesting. And then we went to Yap, and I was on the, on the island of, the main island of Yap has several different parts. I was, we were in a part called Gagil, which I, if I recall correctly, was, the, would be the east end. But I have a terrible sense of direction, so I can't swear to that. Um, stayed with families, unlike the other places. And, you know, it was more the traditional Peace Corps training model. We had language class, culture class, um, some teaching methodology type classes.

FELDMAN: [00:10:42] Um, so I stayed with a family that I was very fond of. Um, the mother was named Phnom Penh, which means a woman in Yapese, really imaginative name there. And, um, yeah, they had kids. I had my own little hut and, you know, started to really adjust to the, uh, to the, to the life on the islands. Got to, started to get, you know, a taste of what I was in for.

SCULLY: [00:11:13] When you say hut, is this a?

FELDMAN: [00:11:15] I mean hut.

SCULLY: [00:11:16] Thatched roof type.

FELDMAN: [00:11:17] Yep.

SCULLY: [00:11:18] Uh huh.

FELDMAN: [00:11:18] It was up, it was raised off the ground a little bit. It was very small. They built it just for me on their compound. Um, and, uh, it was, uh. Yeah, it was a total hut just made from thatch. Yeah. A very vivid memories of Yap, particularly of the, you know, the hibiscus.

SCULLY: [00:11:38] Yes.

FELDMAN: [00:11:38] Millions of hibiscus. So beautiful. And, you know, it was like the beaches and the people. Um, I got, um, strep throat and I got very sick. And there was a nurse and a former ecologist, they're like in their 40s, who were there, who unfortunately couldn't handle it and ended up leaving before swearing in, which was a real loss to the island, I'll tell you. But they just, especially the woman, she just, she just couldn't. It was too rough for her.

SCULLY: [00:12:10] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:12:11] Um, but.

SCULLY: [00:12:12] But you, you felt like you could handle it at that point?

FELDMAN: [00:12:15] Yeah. It was okay. Yeah. Yeah, I mean it wasn't an outer island yet. I'm getting there, but I'm not there yet. Now, but uh. Yeah, I felt okay. And, um. Um, so they had to ice me down because I had such a high fever, but I recovered pretty quickly.

FELDMAN: [00:12:38] And, um, my program was community development, so this was pretty interesting I thought. Um, Micronesia was a trust territory at

that time, a U.S. trust territory. Um, it had been very active in World War II. Most islands had Japanese planes crashed on their beaches. Uh, some islands, including the one I ultimately went to, Lamotrek, had Japanese blood children there, descended down a couple generations. Um, you know, it is quite noticeable because the way the island people look is not at all Asian. It's more, it's like they look like people from Fiji or Tahiti. They're kind of big, kind of heavy, like very round and round eyes mostly. And, you know, so a kid who has Japanese blood looks markedly different. There wasn't much prejudice against them though, not really.

FELDMAN: [00:13:41] Um, so, uh, but, but after the war, it became a U.S. trust territory. And it was scheduled at that time, 1979, to be within the next few years becoming part of the Federated States of Micronesia, like they were basically becoming independent. And so the project I was involved in, you know, that I was assigned to, was to try and help the outer islands gain some sense, some ability to generate income, because a lot of stuff came from the U.S. government. Thread for weaving. Um, lots of different kinds of food, sugar, flour, stuff like that. Um, you know, Spam. Spam was very popular. Um, uh, diesel for running the shortwave radio, which was, you know, like a real lifeline for them, to the, to find out the weather and if there was a medical emergency, etcetera.

FELDMAN: [00:14:46] Although at that time there was no doctor on Yap. That's why losing the nurse and the pharmacologist was such a shame. But, um, so the idea was to form, like, committees on the islands and to try and collaborate with the people to figure out ways to generate income. That was the assignment. So that they could buy this stuff because it wasn't going to come free anymore, or to get rid of the need to have that stuff. So like for instance, switching from, uh, from diesel powered shortwave radios to solar powered because those, those diesel drums, they were like all over the island. It was environmentally very bad. And also if you ran out of diesel, then you were incommunicado, and that would never happen with the solar powered one.

FELDMAN: [00:15:48] So there were all sorts of different things we were supposed to do. I think it was quite ambitious, and I have to say, honestly, I didn't

really, I don't think I really succeeded very well. I did a lot better job my second time around than my first time around. But, uh, you know, once we swore in, um, we lost a lot of people out of our group. We lost the nurse and the pharmacologist. Um, we lost a couple, like, 3 or 4 boys who were just like, you know, I don't know how else to put this. They were like, like, kind of farm boys, and they were like frat boys, I guess we would call them now. And they just drank all the time and got drunk and did bad things and got into fights and they got sent home. They were just, they couldn't, they couldn't handle themselves. Yeah, out.

FELDMAN: [00:16:43] So, um, we ended up being a group of, I think like maybe, uh, maybe like there were 6 or 7 of us, maybe eight. And, uh, two of us stayed on Yap and the rest of us went to outer island. So there was a boat called a Micro Dawn, which we often referred to as the Micro Delay. And it went out to the outer islands and it went like every 3 to 4 months. So once you're on your island, that was it. There was no helicopters, no planes, no nothing. And so as a result, we have very advanced medical kits. Um, um, I understand the Peace Corps has pulled out of Micronesia just recently, but I think they stopped sending people to outer islands some time ago because, you know, it's just really dangerous actually if something happens to you. But be that as it may.

SCULLY: [00:17:41] Mostly health related?

FELDMAN: [00:17:42] Yeah. Yeah. I mean, they can, they if somebody was really, really sick they would send the boat. But it takes the boat, if you're on the furthest island out, it's going to take him at least four days, 4 or 5 days to get there, even just steaming top speed. I mean, it's a lot of ocean. It's a big boat. So it, you know, it's a ship. So anyway, off we went. We went on the ship and we, this was a regular run. So it stopped at every island. So Ulithi, Fais, Woleai, a couple others. And ultimately it got, and dropped one of us off at each one. Um, so ultimately I got dropped off at Lamotrek, which is the second furthest out. It's actually closer to Truk [now called Chuuk] than it is to Yap, but technically it's in Yap State. So, um, I was on Lamotrek the first year, and then the second year I was on Satawal, which is the furthest out.

SCULLY: [00:18:49] What is that one?

FELDMAN: [00:18:49] Satawal.

SCULLY: [00:18:50] Satawal.

FELDMAN: [00:18:51] Uh, S-A-T-A-W-A-L.

SCULLY: [00:18:55] And that's a more remote location?

FELDMAN: [00:18:57] It's just, they're all remote. I wouldn't say one is any more remote than the other. They're all, except Ulithi had a small airstrip and a very small plane could land there. It was the closest to Yap, and they didn't even take volunteers, at least not for the years I was there. And then Woleai was about in the middle, and it was the biggest island. Um. Uh, Maura. Good lord. I, I, her last name is slipping my mind, but she ended up being the country director of, uh, of Georgia, and it'll come to me in a minute. I mean, she works for Peace Corps now. She's special advisor to the director.

SCULLY: [00:19:45] Was she in Georgia when you did your tour?

FELDMAN: [00:19:47] Yes, at the beginning. And we knew each other. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia, and she was on Woleai. We often talked about Micronesia together. Um, so anyway, um. So yeah, I don't remember what month I went, but it was like four months training, maybe more. It was an unusually long training and, um, I would say it was very good on teaching techniques, like animal husbandry or food things. I mean, all with the idea that, you know, and then we, and then there were lessons on like economic or financial things, how to set up a co-op, for instance. Um, so I think in that way it was very successful.

FELDMAN: [00:20:42] In terms of language and culture, um, not so much. I just, it feels to me like when I got to my island, like I didn't speak a word. I mean, I'm sure that isn't true, but I mean, on Yap proper, the main island, um, they speak a completely different language, Yapese. It's nothing like the language of our island. So I didn't have any chance to,

like, live among outer island people and practice. Um, and, I don't know, it felt like I didn't.

SCULLY: [00:21:17] So the language in training was considerably different from what you found?

FELDMAN: [00:21:21] Well, the language of the place I lived. They did give us lessons, but oddly enough, I have almost no memory. I mean, it is like 40 years ago, you can't remember everything. But I have almost no memory of language training. I do remember all this other stuff though, so I don't think. I think they felt like you'll learn the language when you get there. And in fact, that is exactly what happened.

SCULLY: [00:21:49] You were dealing with a vernacular subset of whatever the main language was.

FELDMAN: [00:21:54] Yeah, on the whole Lamotrek. And you know what? It wasn't, it's not a super difficult language, unlike Georgian. It's got three tenses. It wasn't very complicated, and it wasn't that hard to learn. So I got assigned to a family. It was a pretty big family compound with a lot of kids. And there was one girl. She was about 16 or 17, maybe? Maybe a little younger. Maybe she was 15 or 16. You know, nobody exactly knows their age, so it's a little hard to say. She was a young teenager. And she used to like come, I had my own little hut again on the family compound, and, um, um, she would come every night and, like, try and teach me their language.

FELDMAN: [00:22:42] And I have a memory. One time she was, she wanted to teach me the word for the back of the island. And so there was the front of the island and the back of the island, the island being an atoll. So there's a lagoon side and an ocean side. And I just couldn't get it. She kept trying and I just couldn't get it. And finally she like slams down the book and says to me, the back, the back! Pretty much. She spoke some English. I don't know exactly where she learned it from. Maybe a prior volunteer, because there had been volunteers there before. So it's pretty funny. I didn't turn it off by slamming the table, did I? She's so funny. She

just threw down the book. The back! So I was pretty, pretty friendly with her.

FELDMAN: [00:23:31] And the then there was an older, uh, an older girl, a member of the family, who was married, and her husband used to drive me crazy, he was always demanding things he always wanted. Can you give me a knife? Can you give me this? Can you give me that? And I was like, not only like, you know, did I not want to, I actually couldn't, I mean, you know, I didn't I personally didn't have money to buy that kind of stuff. It would be so expensive to buy and have shipped. So, yeah. And then there used to be on the island, sometimes there would be, you know, like big, for lack of a better word, parties where the men drank a lot of fermented coconut milk and he would get drunk and he would like come to my hut at night and I would have to like boot him out. This was very common behavior, but it was very rude of him to do it to a Peace Corps volunteer.

FELDMAN: [00:24:28] I don't think there was ever any kind of sexual violence on these islands. It was just unheard of. But there was a lot of trying, you know what I'm saying? Really a lot. And for such a small island, it seems to me like they had three main topics. They talked about children. They talked about work because of course the women worked really a lot, and the men, eh, not so much. And they talked about sex. They had all sorts of words for it. It was a whole vocabulary. Um.

SCULLY: [00:25:01] Both men and women together?

FELDMAN: [00:25:02] No.

SCULLY: [00:25:03] So it was very separate.

FELDMAN: [00:25:04] Very separate. Yeah. No, no. There was, um, yeah, a big separation between. It's not like men and women never spoke to each other. Families lived together and men and women spoke. But there were lots and lots of rules, which I think were mainly to prevent incest. I mean, not direct like father and daughter, everyone knows whoever, but going out to cousins. So like women have to, like couldn't be higher than

men. So if a man was sitting on the ground, you had to like, bend when you went by him if he was related to you. And so of course, I didn't know who was related to me, so I had to do it for everybody. Oh my God, so, so crazy. And, you know, all sorts of different rules about like, who you could speak to, how you could speak to them, whether you could walk in front of them. And, you know, it was all around not marrying your cousin.

SCULLY: [00:26:04] Did you learn any of these rules in training, or was this something you had to pick up on?

FELDMAN: [00:26:08] No, I don't think so. I think I picked it up on site. I really, that's my memory anyway.

SCULLY: [00:26:13] Learn the rules quickly if you want to.

FELDMAN: [00:26:14] Yeah, well, nobody really expected me to follow the rules, to be honest.

SCULLY: [00:26:18] Foreign woman.

FELDMAN: [00:26:19] Yeah, they knew. And they had Peace Corps volunteers before.

SCULLY: [00:26:24] Ah, uh huh.

FELDMAN: [00:26:24] Sure, all these outer islands had had volunteers before. So I don't think there was, but I had an advantage, I should mention. There was a Peace Corps volunteer for the first maybe six months or so that I was on the island. There was somebody there. She was finishing up her service. Her name was Kathy and she was from Urbana, Illinois. And all these years I forgot, I can see her face so clearly. I have forgotten her last name. And I just, like I would love to, like, find her on Facebook or something, but I can't remember her last name. And even if I knew it, she might have gotten married and changed her name. And Kathy, you know, there's no way to track her down. But she was a tall, skinny girl, and she taught me a lot of this. Yeah, I definitely had that advantage that I had somebody, you know, who spoke English. She had lived there for

almost two years and she's a very neurotic girl, but she, she could, um, really help me out.

FELDMAN: [00:27:27] And then she left after, I think, yeah, 5 or 6 months. And then I was there, obviously not by myself. There were other, I was the only foreigner there. And on Satawal the next year I was the only foreigner the whole time. So on Lamotrek, I thought overall the people weren't that friendly and supportive. Um, they had it kind of easy in certain ways. Had a great lagoon, so they had plenty of fish. And they had a water table. You couldn't drink it, but you could pump it and use it to like rinse the salt off or whatever. Um, and they had like really good taro patches. And so they had plenty to eat. They had, they had fantastic breadfruit.

FELDMAN: [00:28:22] I have very vivid memories of going to the back of the island where the breadfruit trees are, and the men will climb the trees and throw the breadfruit down. They're big, tall trees. And we would sometimes go, um, uh, crab hunting under for coconut crabs. And we would cook them with coconut milk and, uh, little peppers that grew on the island. It was really good and, uh, but the food overall was very monotonous. Taro, taro, taro. Broken up by some breadfruit, and fish when the men would go fishing. But the men didn't, sometimes didn't go fishing, you know, they were drinking or they were doing something else. And, you know, the women just worked so hard all the time and, you know, everything, you know, making the food, making the houses, the thatch for the houses, making the clothing, making everything. And they harvested the food, they cooked the food.

FELDMAN: [00:29:19] So at first they wouldn't let me do anything. They wouldn't let me handle a knife. They wouldn't let me grate coconut. They wouldn't let me do anything. They were like driving me crazy because I was so like bored, you know, and I was trying to do my job, but that's, it took really a lot of time. I wanted to, like, I needed to earn the trust of the people there before they would consent to.

SCULLY: [00:29:43] Mm hmm. Sure.

FELDMAN: [00:29:43] Like, look at this issue. So, um, you know, I just kept insisting and insisting and, you know, over, slowly over time, um, they let me do stuff. But then I remember once. So you use a big machete to, like, cut the coconuts. And it was very common to like you, you cut a green coconut, you cut a piece of the husk and use it, and then you cut open the coconut and there's liquid in there. Not, it's not like hardened into coconut like we think of it. It's like there's a gel lining the, the inside of the seed and liquid. So you drink the liquid. It's delicious. Really sweet, but not cloying. It's really good. And then you use that little piece of the husk that you cut off to like scoop out and eat the gel. It's really good.

FELDMAN: [00:30:38] So one time I cut my finger doing that really badly. And so yeah, they took my knife away from me after that and it took me a few months to get it back. I mean, they cut their fingers all the time, so I'm not the only one who did it. But, you know, they were like, oh, God, the volunteer like cut off her finger.

SCULLY: [00:30:56] Well, now, in terms of community development, did you have to work with men's groups exclusively?

FELDMAN: [00:31:01] Yes, yes, I had to work with the men.

SCULLY: [00:31:03] Not women's groups?

FELDMAN: [00:31:04] No.

SCULLY: [00:31:04] Ah.

FELDMAN: [00:31:05] No. You had, the men were the decision makers, supposedly. I mean, you don't really know. You know, there's like often heated discussions in the, in the, in the hut. But the men were, there was a whole structure. There were big houses on the beach. The men were, where the men were.

SCULLY: [00:31:23] The men's houses.

FELDMAN: [00:31:24] And I was given special dispensation to come in there and talk to them. Um, but generally there was, there was one night per year where the women could go in there. It was a big bacchanal. And, you know, that always resulted in men coming to my, to my hut, like. They used, they drank, um, fermented coconut.

SCULLY: [00:31:47] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:31:47] You know, it was very potent. Um, so, uh, it, you know, after about maybe 3 or 4 months, I felt well established enough to start approaching, like men in my family. I kept away from that one guy who was always demanding things. I gather his name started with S. I can still see his face, but Soloval or something like that anyway. Um.

SCULLY: [00:32:12] Did your family support you? Were they, were they encouraging of you and promote you in any way?

FELDMAN: [00:32:19] Um, not so much. I mean, this one girl, you know, the teenage girl, she was, she was helpful to me, but, um, mainly learning the language and kind of guiding me around. But there was one older guy. He was like, maybe in his 60s.

SCULLY: [00:32:33] In your family group?

FELDMAN: [00:32:35] He was extended family. He didn't live on the compound. He lived elsewhere. And he had been to the United States.

SCULLY: [00:32:41] Ah.

FELDMAN: [00:32:43] Um, I never figured out exactly how that happened, but it had something to do with a former Peace Corps volunteer I guess sponsored him or something. So, you know.

SCULLY: [00:32:52] He spoke English?

FELDMAN: [00:32:54] No, he didn't speak English, but, you know, he was like very helpful to me. He, he was the one I mainly kind of worked through and formed a friendly relationship with.

SCULLY: [00:33:05] Ah.

FELDMAN: [00:33:05] And eventually I moved off my family's compound to another house that was like along the road that was just my own house. I was still attached to them and I, uh, went to eat with them, you know, like every night. And it's not like I. But it was better for me not to live on the compound, mainly because of that guy.

SCULLY: [00:33:27] By moving off compound, did that, were you still associated with that family?

FELDMAN: [00:33:32] Yeah, that's what I'm saying. I still was. It was their house. But, you know, it wasn't right in the compound. That was a better. And he helped me with that. And he used to like come over and like he taught me how to make a fire, which really the women should have taught me but didn't. And, um, and we would talk about the United States. He would tell me all the things he saw. So, you know, like magic things and, uh, like, yeah, we became quite friendly. He, he was a very nice man. And, um, so he kind of helped me out. He set me up with other men and the chief on the island. Are we good with that? Right. And I formed a committee, which I still have a photo of them on the beach. It's pretty, pretty funny. And, um, um, we started, you know, like, working on things, ideas.

FELDMAN: [00:34:27] The main, one of the main ideas we worked on was to create a relationship with a store on the main island of Yap that sold handicrafts. Because there were people on the island who did really beautiful handicrafts. They used turtle shell and wood, and they made like jewelry and different little artifacts. And they also, one of the things that many outer islands are pretty famous for is they make model canoes, because they still make dugout canoes and they still know how to navigate by the stars.

SCULLY: [00:35:08] Was there a potential market for this type of thing?

FELDMAN: [00:35:10] Yeah, I mean, that was the idea is that there were tourists who came to Yap. They didn't generally. Yeah, they often came to snorkel. And they didn't go to outer island because nobody has the time to deal with that boat situation, but they were interested in learning about it. So that was one possible source of income. Another was, um, copra, which is dried coconut. You know, it's grated coconut that's been dried.

FELDMAN: [00:35:38] Another was also sometimes dried fish, but that was very, uh, unreliable because you never know. I mean, sometimes a huge, huge school of tuna, I mean, like thousands of tuna would swim through the reef into the, over the reef at high tide into the lagoon. And then everyone on the island, including the women, would, like, get out these giant nets that they had made and catch all the, not all, but you know, many of the tuna and there'd be like thousands of tunas flopping around on the beach and they would just let them die out of the water, and then they would cut them up and smoke them or dry them. Oh, the whole island stunk for like three weeks or a month, whoa! Cause everywhere you went, there was, you know, decaying tuna. But like, then there was so much that it was more than even the island needed at all. But the problem is, is you never know when, you know, a school of tuna like that will, will swim in.

SCULLY: [00:36:52] Ah, uh huh.

FELDMAN: [00:36:52] It's very iffy. So, but those were some of the ideas. And then another idea, which was not my idea or my guy's idea.

SCULLY: [00:37:00] So the smoked and preserved fish could be exported?

FELDMAN: [00:37:03] Exactly.

SCULLY: [00:37:03] But much of it remained there as a food supply?

FELDMAN: [00:37:06] Some of it. I mean, at the time I was there, all of it was their food supply. But it would get moldy eventually.

SCULLY: [00:37:12] Ah, I see.

FELDMAN: [00:37:12] I mean, it's humid and hot. So, you know, you just couldn't keep all that. They tried. So the idea was rather than ultimately having to throw it away, to export it. Exactly. But with the frequency of the ship and the unknown tuna appearance, that was very, very difficult. It, you know, it could be a little supplementary money, but it couldn't be a reliable, regular source of income, whereas copra and handicrafts could, a little bit. But none of it was big money. So there was also a thought that we should, like, get rid of the need for money as well.

FELDMAN: [00:37:54] Um, so one of the things, this was not my idea, but one of the things that was done through the Department of Community Development, which was the department that we in my group reported to, was to replace the diesel radios with solar radios. Wow, that worked great. No more diesel. Not, no need for it. And I mean, it's very sunny there all the time, even when there's a storm, it passes over in like two hours because there's no altitude, there's nothing to hold the clouds, so it just passes over.

SCULLY: [00:38:32] Did this require importation of a new technology?

FELDMAN: [00:38:35] Yes, but, yes it did. So it came on the boat. We set it up. It wasn't hard to set up at all. And it worked. I mean, it really worked well, even back then. It was just two panels, you know, and every radio was in a shock already. So the panels were mounted on top of the shock. Um.

SCULLY: [00:38:58] Was it a quick transition? Did people see the, the value?

FELDMAN: [00:39:01] Yeah, yeah, there was no resistance at all. People loved it. Nobody likes the diesel in the morning.

SCULLY: [00:39:08] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [00:39:09] You know? I mean, I think most of them thought it was magic. But, you know, they didn't mind. It was like benign magic, not bad magic.

They were all Catholic. I mean, they're, they're, the church was there. There was a, there were nuns from the Maryknoll order on, on Yap proper, and priests. I never saw the priests, but the nuns were very active, and I was actually quite friendly with one of them, Sister Mary. She's a lovely woman. And, uh.

SCULLY: [00:39:39] Americans?

FELDMAN: [00:39:40] Americans, yes. And, um, they were, they were Catholic. They went to church every Sunday. I used to go with them. They sang hymns. It was really nice. But, um, you know, as soon as something bad happened, like a hurricane was coming or someone was sick, oh, the amulets would come out and be hung over the door. There would be prayers to the various gods of the ocean, the trees, or whatever was appropriate. They never really lost their old religion. They just kind of layer Catholicism on top of it.

SCULLY: [00:40:14] Sure.

FELDMAN: [00:40:16] So that was, that was interesting. Um, so yeah, so I worked with this group and we worked on these plans, and I did the same thing the second year on Satawal. Satawal was really interesting because it was a true island, not an atoll. So it was just surrounded by ocean. So there was no water table or anything. Life was a lot tougher there.

SCULLY: [00:40:41] Hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:40:42] They only got water through rain catchment, and there were these stagnant pools in the middle of the island. They were like green with loads of dragonflies all around. And like that's where you had to go to take a bath. It was, uh.

SCULLY: [00:40:57] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:40:58] I don't think I was clean for a year. I got scabies. It was awful.

SCULLY: [00:41:03] Oh, boy.

FELDMAN: [00:41:04] I got to have quite a serious case. Um, they really had, and fishing was a lot tougher. Like on Lamotrek, they just went out to the atoll and, like, hung around the, the coral. And, you know, there's fish everywhere there. I mean, at least there were then. I don't know about now, but, uh, they, uh, in Satawal it was much harder. And yet I'd say they were much kinder, more pro, more proactive people. Um, they're kind of lazy on Lamotrek. And on Satawal, I was much closer with my family. My hut was right across from their hut. You know, it was like I lived really close to them. And, uh, it was a more positive experience with the people, I would say.

SCULLY: [00:41:56] Of course, you're stepping in now with a year under your belt.

FELDMAN: [00:42:00] Of course.

SCULLY: [00:42:00] Of experience and so on. Did that make a big difference in your work?

FELDMAN: [00:42:03] You know, I mean, it's hard it's hard to say for sure, but I think it did. Of course, I made mistakes on Lamotrek and, you know, did some things differently on Satawal. Um.

SCULLY: [00:42:16] Such as what? What kinds of mistakes, lessons learned did you have?

FELDMAN: [00:42:19] Lessons learned. Um, I think, I think on Satawal I tried to work with the women more than I did on Lamotrek. On Lamotrek, I was new, so I was very, uh, concerned with trying to fit in and follow the rules. And, you know, on Satawal I wasn't as concerned with that. You know, I just, I, I learned that there was a lot of leeway given to a foreigner. And as long as you were perceived as essentially respectful, you weren't going to be held to every single rule, and that there was a lot to be gained through working with women who, you know, a lot of them also did handicrafts too. So I'd say that was like one of the lessons.

SCULLY: [00:43:05] So men and women did handicrafts?

FELDMAN: [00:43:08] Yes.

SCULLY: [00:43:08] Could be part of.

FELDMAN: [00:43:09] Women less than men.

SCULLY: [00:43:11] Part of that economic niche.

FELDMAN: [00:43:12] Yeah. So I saw that as being economic niche.

SCULLY: [00:43:17] Were the women more productive as a rule than men?

FELDMAN: [00:43:20] In general or?

SCULLY: [00:43:21] On second island.

FELDMAN: [00:43:22] Or as to handicrafts?

SCULLY: [00:43:23] In general.

FELDMAN: [00:43:24] Oh, God, yes. Yeah. No offense.

SCULLY: [00:43:27] No, no, no.

FELDMAN: [00:43:28] The men, the men on Satawal were a little more, uh, proactive than on Lamotrek.

SCULLY: [00:43:34] They were?

FELDMAN: [00:43:34] Yeah, a little bit, which is.

SCULLY: [00:43:36] It's a harder island. It's a tougher place to live.

FELDMAN: [00:43:38] Yeah, maybe that's why. I don't know, but, um. But in general, women work from sun up to sundown. They never were just lying around. They were always like harvesting, planting, preparing food,

making thread, making *teors*, making this, making that. I mean, they were just always, always working. And the men were like in the men's house, you know, drinking. I mean, they were so lazy sometimes on Lamotrek, and the women would complain. I remember once we didn't have fish for like three weeks because the men were just, wouldn't go out. And, you know, finally the women. This was one of the lessons I kind of saw, is that all the women are not just passive. Eventually they will like rise up in revolt and like, you know, like shake the men by the shoulders. You have to fish.

FELDMAN: [00:44:33] Then we, we went out and caught the crabs a lot during that time, I remember. I didn't mind. I like crabs, but they wanted fish. Oh my God, we cooked a dog.

SCULLY: [00:44:43] Well, you're dealing with a protein, protein scarcity.

FELDMAN: [00:44:45] Exactly. We ate a dog during that time.

SCULLY: [00:44:47] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:44:48] It was like, I was, by that, by that time I was living in my little hut off the compound. But I came to the compound for dinner and I was walking over there and I smelt this incredibly great smell. It was like roasted meat. I'm like, what the hell is that? Yeah, they were roasting a dog.

SCULLY: [00:45:05] It wasn't fish.

FELDMAN: [00:45:07] Yeah.

SCULLY: [00:45:08] Oops. Was that you or me?

FELDMAN: [00:45:10] Yeah. Me. Okay. I don't see anything on the floor.

SCULLY: [00:45:20] Hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:45:21] Oh, one fell off. Luckily, it didn't break. Okay. We're fine. Um, yeah. So I got there. I'm like, what? What is that? And then they said, oh, you know, it's one of the dogs. And the dogs were so mangy, they were always eating their own excrement. And it was so disgusting. And I was like, I don't know, but I was so hungry. So finally I said all right, give me a piece. And at the moment I took it, the fire flared up and I could see I was holding like the equivalent of a drumstick. And there was like the dog's little hand, like all curled up. I'm like, right, I can't eat this. I just can't eat this. I cannot eat a piece of meat with a dog's paw on it. It's too much for me. So I didn't eat it, but I came very close, very close to eating dog.

SCULLY: [00:46:14] So you basically, then you began to wrap up and you were going to leave the work on the islands.

FELDMAN: [00:46:23] Mm hmm.

SCULLY: [00:46:24] How did that go? Did you break in a new volunteer?

FELDMAN: [00:46:29] No.

SCULLY: [00:46:29] Was there any transition?

FELDMAN: [00:46:31] No.

SCULLY: [00:46:32] Any continuity after you left?

FELDMAN: [00:46:33] No. I mean there were new volunteers but they were on Yap. I was on, I was on Satawal. By the time I finished, I was ready to go.

SCULLY: [00:46:45] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:46:45] Um, I mean, it's hard life on those islands.

SCULLY: [00:46:48] Sure.

FELDMAN: [00:46:48] No electricity, no running water, no toilets. You're sleeping on the floor. Um. I learned some really incredible things that have affected me my whole life. I'd say the most significant one was I learned to weave. And this, I became known as the weaving volunteer.

SCULLY: [00:47:07] I see your email address, Sara weaves.

FELDMAN: [00:47:08] Because I still weave to this day. In the back room there I have a loom. And, um, I, I love weaving and, um, I had to relearn in the States because a loom here is not the same as a backstrap loom. But I learned to weave, and I, um, that was a great way to integrate into the culture with the women. Also, I learned to dance, which not very well, but that led to one of the best experiences there, which was, um, there was. This was on Lamotrek. There was a, I don't even know what to call it, a celebration.

SCULLY: [00:47:54] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:47:54] And it involved a big fire on the beach and the men playing music, like drums and stuff, and the women dancing. And you put like a lot of turmeric on you. And we made like very elaborate flower leis and stuff on our heads and everything on our chests, and wore like special kinds of *teors* or skirts with like.

SCULLY: [00:48:18] This was all women's, women's activity?

FELDMAN: [00:48:21] Well, the men played the music and watched, and the women did the dancing. The men didn't dance, although I think they danced one dance.

SCULLY: [00:48:30] A man's dance.

FELDMAN: [00:48:31] Yeah, a man's dance. But the men and women never danced together. That was not their custom. You danced in a line and like so, like I danced in a, in a line. Like on the beach with the fire under the stars. And you know, with this like music. And I, it's hard to describe like

this feeling of just, just such another world, you know? I feel so lucky that I was able to do that.

SCULLY: [00:49:02] Did it impact their perception of you?

FELDMAN: [00:49:04] I don't know.

SCULLY: [00:49:05] Uh huh. Yeah.

FELDMAN: [00:49:06] I hope so.

SCULLY: [00:49:07] You're one of us.

FELDMAN: [00:49:08] Yeah, I hope so. It's really hard to say. They're not the world's most communicative people.

SCULLY: [00:49:14] Uh huh, yeah.

FELDMAN: [00:49:14] I don't know, I don't know. It certainly helped my, uh, relationship with the girls who taught me, that's for sure. They were very proud of me.

SCULLY: [00:49:23] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:49:24] Um, but the men, who knows. I don't know.

SCULLY: [00:49:29] Now, if there had been a male, if you teamed up with a, a male expert coming in, would that have made a difference in terms of getting the men moving?

FELDMAN: [00:49:38] Male expert? You mean like another Peace Corps volunteer?

SCULLY: [00:49:41] Another volunteer coming in for community?

FELDMAN: [00:49:42] I think, I'm only theorizing.

SCULLY: [00:49:45] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [00:49:45] But I would say probably what would have happened is they would have ignored me and just followed him.

SCULLY: [00:49:49] Ah, uh huh.

FELDMAN: [00:49:50] I don't know that I would have had any ability to impact anything in that case. I think it's better that I was there by myself, actually, but I wouldn't say I was super successful.

SCULLY: [00:50:02] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [00:50:02] You know, I was young, I really didn't know what I was doing, and there were times when I didn't have much to do. I even taught some English just to keep myself occupied. But, you know, as I say, because I learned to weave and because I participated in the preparation of food and everything. And, you know, I kept myself busy, but I'd say my work was maybe 30 to 40 percent of my time at the most. The rest was just day to day life and, you know, like day to day life there is pretty monotonous. So by the time I left, I was ready to go. I got a farewell tattoo, a traditional island tattoo.

SCULLY: [00:50:44] For women?

FELDMAN: [00:50:45] Yes.

SCULLY: [00:50:45] Not a man's tattoo, but a separate?

FELDMAN: [00:50:47] No, a woman's tattoo. They all had tattoos.

SCULLY: [00:50:48] Were they different?

FELDMAN: [00:50:49] Yes, but, but only men give the tattoo.

SCULLY: [00:50:53] Ah.

FELDMAN: [00:50:54] So, you know, the, the taboo part of the body there is the legs, not the top. So, you know, the tattoo is on my left thigh. It's of a dolphin, but it's not, it's very stylized. You'd never know it was a dolphin. It's just some lines. But I know that's what it is. And normally it runs all the way down to your ankle, all the way down the outside of your leg. But I still retained enough of my own culture to realize that would not be a good idea. I knew plenty of guys who did it, um, yeah, Peace Corps guys. But I just did it on my thighs so I could not, you know, be flashing it at job interviews.

FELDMAN: [00:51:34] Um, and, uh, yeah, they do it with a pointed hibiscus. Hibiscus, like the spine of a hibiscus. They, like, really sharpen it up, and then they use a kind of ink that, um, that comes from the plant on the island. And I remember asking him, I'm like, what's going to happen like when I get old, like what's going to happen? And then he was like, yeah, it will fall. But it's sort of, it's held up pretty well, I must say.

FELDMAN: [00:52:07] So I was like marking off days on the calendar and really looking forward to leaving. And yeah, it was just time to go. I wasn't, I wasn't, um, terribly sad when I left the outer islands. I went to Lamotrek on the way back and they all laughed at me because they said I had a Satawalese accent. Good God. Um, and, uh, then we had to wait a while. I can't exactly remember why, but we ended up waiting a couple of weeks or so on the main island, on Yap, just sort of tying everything up, and I went back out to Gagil to stay with my family there. Whenever I went on to Yap, I always went to Gagil and the other volunteers didn't. They stayed in Colonia, the town, but I always went to Gagil for at least part of the time. So I went to Gagil and they gave me, I still have this on my shelf in the living room and I'll show it to you on the way out.

SCULLY: [00:53:04] This was your host family from Gagil?

FELDMAN: [00:53:06] Yes.

SCULLY: [00:53:06] Aha.

FELDMAN: [00:53:07] Um, they gave me a, they just handed it to me. They didn't really say anything. They're like, oh, this is for you. You know, like, very casual. And it's like a mother of pearl, looks like kind of a big shoehorn with coconut coir wrapping. And I was like, oh, okay. Thank you. It's pretty. I didn't know what it was. Okay. It's like a deed to land. If I ever go back to Gagil, I have my own land. Yeah, seriously.

SCULLY: [00:53:37] Fascinating.

FELDMAN: [00:53:37] And it was so typical that they would just give it to you and not, like, make a big deal of it. Not big on ceremony there on Yap, I guess. I mean, I don't know Yapese culture like I know, uh, our island culture, but. And I also had a beautiful carved, um, canoe, but I've lost it somewhere along the line, and I don't.

SCULLY: [00:54:01] That happens.

FELDMAN: [00:54:01] I don't know where it. Yeah. Um, and I also have a carved piece of wood from Yap that's here, um, that I still have and really, really love. So, you know, I took some artifacts with me. So it was time to leave. And I, um, I remember going to the airport. So, you know, I'll fess up. Yeah, I had a Yapese boyfriend, and he rode his motorcycle to where our van was going or, well, it was a truck actually, to the airport and just, like, stood on the side of the road. And so like that made me cry. So I started crying and I couldn't stop. I cried all the way to Guam in the airplane. I mean, I was just a wreck. I think because I knew I'd never go back.

SCULLY: [00:54:54] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:54:54] It's so remote, you know? I just kind of knew I never would and I never did.

SCULLY: [00:54:59] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:54:59] And I don't think I ever will.

SCULLY: [00:55:01] Yes.

FELDMAN: [00:55:02] And it may have made me very sad.

SCULLY: [00:55:05] Now, this was.

FELDMAN: [00:55:06] Even though I was ready to leave.

SCULLY: [00:55:07] The people, the whole experience, or the boyfriend?

FELDMAN: [00:55:09] No, the boyfriend started it. But what, what it ultimately was really about was, yeah, the whole experience. Just the living there, you know, the people, the, the, the life, the experience, the dancing, the weaving. I mean, there was a lot, there was a lot of negative stuff. There was a lot of bad stuff, for sure, mainly boredom. But, you know, squabbles with the family, loneliness. I mean, it was very isolated. Um, we talked on the shortwave once a week and that was it. And, um, so it's not, and I never, I haven't idealized it in all these years. And I didn't then. But still it was such an incredibly unique experience. I mean, how many people get to do stuff like that? It was such an opportunity for me. I mean, I don't know that I helped them all that much, to be honest, but it was a great, great thing for me as a young person.

SCULLY: [00:56:19] And then you head off back.

FELDMAN: [00:56:21] Yeah. I didn't go back to the States. I traveled for years after that, mainly in Asia. I lived in Japan for a long time. That's where I met the guy I mentioned who I went to Portugal with. We're still friends now. Um, and, uh, traveled all over Asia. I didn't come back to the States until I was almost 30.

SCULLY: [00:56:40] Huh.

FELDMAN: [00:56:43] And so, yeah.

SCULLY: [00:56:43] So several years you were.

FELDMAN: [00:56:45] Mm hmm. I did, I really enjoyed traveling. I had that itch.

SCULLY: [00:56:49] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [00:56:50] And, uh, I came back to the States and um, so, you know, I did the usual things, you know, I got a job, I got married, I had a kid, um, I became a lawyer. I just, I hardly took vacations. I just worked and worked, and it all sort of became a bit of a distant memory.

SCULLY: [00:57:13] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:57:13] Um, I mean, I had a lot of adventures while I was traveling too. I lived for a couple of years on a boat and, you know, sailed all around. And I really had a lot of interesting experiences, but I put it behind me and lived a pretty traditional life.

SCULLY: [00:57:31] Having toughed it out on Yap and so on, did that enable you more effectively in your years of travel?

FELDMAN: [00:57:38] Oh, it did for sure. And one thing I always say is that unlike I would say most Americans, um, I think I have a really clear sense of what I can do without, which most Americans have no idea. I mean, why would they? And no, not all, plenty of Americans are doing without right now. But I mean, like, I realized, at least for a long time in my life, I could completely do without every modern convenience. Um, I don't know if that's true now, but for a long time.

FELDMAN: [00:58:14] And I think now I would, I would, I think I realized that what I really couldn't do without was books. And I mean, I just had to read. I just go nuts. And music. So, you know, like, I had tapes that, uh, I'm making a, a round and round gesture. Yeah, I had tapes and a tape player, and I would, like, lay my batteries out in the sun to try and, like, get just the very last charge out of them. And my family would send me batteries in every care package and, um, so, yeah, so I could listen to music.

SCULLY: [00:58:56] Did you have a hard time reentering America?

FELDMAN: [00:58:59] No.

SCULLY: [00:59:00] You'd been all over.

FELDMAN: [00:59:01] I know. Yeah, I know, but no, I really didn't, I, not at all. I would always read about how like people get overwhelmed in the supermarket. Too much choice. But I'm like, what's that? I was in Yap for two years. I was in America for like 20. I think my American background is deep enough that I'm not going to freak out because I'm in a grocery store that's big. No, I didn't really have any problem. A lot more problem this time around.

SCULLY: [00:59:32] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [00:59:33] This time around has been very hard.

SCULLY: [00:59:35] Uh huh.

FELDMAN: [00:59:36] But the first time around? No. I think maybe because, you know. I came back, I got really involved in things. Uh, I had a kid, I went to law school. I had a lot else.

SCULLY: [00:59:47] Yeah, yeah.

FELDMAN: [00:59:47] Taking up my attention. Yeah. So, no, I didn't find it very hard. No. And you know, but I mean I missed certain things, but, um, not, that wasn't that bad.

SCULLY: [01:00:03] And then you're, you're married, you're a mother, you're working. You've got a career.

FELDMAN: [01:00:09] Yeah. Why did I do it again?

SCULLY: [01:00:11] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:00:12] Good question. Yeah, I, it's hard. It's really hard to say. So I had a super demanding job. Um, I was a vice president for programs at the California State Parks Foundation. I was there for 13 years. This was a job I had, you know, before. Before that, I was executive director of the National Council of Jewish Women. So I had very stressful, demanding jobs that.

SCULLY: [01:00:39] Sure.

FELDMAN: [01:00:39] Sucked up a lot of time and energy. Um, I had started traveling again by that point because my son was already grown up. I was single and I could do what I wanted, so I volunteered in India for a month. Yeah, it was this organization called Encore. It was.

SCULLY: [01:00:59] I've heard of it, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:01:00] It was ex Peace Corps volunteers. And Maura Harrington, I think is her last name, she was the executive director at that time. So that's where I met her for the first time. And we discovered, we knew we had both been in Micronesia, not at the same time. I went to India, Mumbai, and then I traveled for almost a month after that. I took a sabbatical from work, which they were generous enough to give me and, um, some other trips to Europe and stuff. And I just started traveling again, and I think that, um, affected me, and I got kind of tired of my job. It was so stressful. There were a lot of problems with our government partner, the Department of Parks and Recreation, which I won't go into here.

FELDMAN: [01:01:52] Um, but it became harder and harder to do a good job. A lot of stonewalling and a lot of, a lot of difficulties. And they weren't difficulties that had anything to do with me personally. It was organizational. Um, so, um, I was. I do remember quite clearly, um, I had a little house up in the hills and my son was there, I don't know, doing something with me. And I was complaining to him about, you know, I have to make a change, but I didn't want to go from the frying pan into the fire. I didn't want to just get another job that would be equally stressful. And he said to me, why don't you join the Peace Corps again?

SCULLY: [01:02:35] Hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:02:36] And I said, Jim, are you insane? Like, why would I do that?

SCULLY: [01:02:40] Go back to Yap.

FELDMAN: [01:02:42] I can't do that anymore. And, you know, like, well, what would I do with the house and why? I had all these reasons not to do it.

SCULLY: [01:02:50] How old was your son at the time?

FELDMAN: [01:02:51] Um.

SCULLY: [01:02:53] In high school or?

FELDMAN: [01:02:54] No. No, he was in college.

SCULLY: [01:02:56] Uh huh, okay.

FELDMAN: [01:02:56] Maybe just out. Somewhere in his early to mid 20s, I guess.

SCULLY: [01:03:01] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:03:02] And, uh, but I remember him standing there saying that to me, and I think he planted a seed somehow.

SCULLY: [01:03:08] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:03:09] And, um, so I, I guess I started thinking about it. And then I do remember this. It was May, I remember that. I don't remember what year, but probably 2015 or '14 I guess. It was May and things had gotten much worse at work, and I was really stressed out, and I had something happen at work that I really didn't like. It was a bad day. And I thought, I came home and I filled out the application online. I'm like, you know, like I just, I have to do something. It was almost like on a whim almost, you know, and like, boom. Like the whole thing happened so fast. I filled it

out in May. I just remember that because it was almost my birthday, and by the following January it was all set. And I left in April.

SCULLY: [01:04:04] For Georgia.

FELDMAN: [01:04:05] Uh huh. So the application was different. Like you couldn't say where you wanted to go. You could just say where you didn't want to go. And I really agonized over that. But finally I said I didn't want to go to Jordan because I didn't think that I would be, being Jewish, that it would be, you know, given all the tensions that it would.

SCULLY: [01:04:26] That would be in 2014? Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:04:28] Yeah, that it would be a good idea. But other than that, I was willing to go anywhere. I kind of suspected, given my background, that it would be somewhere in Eastern Europe. So when I got the offer.

SCULLY: [01:04:40] The background, your legal background?

FELDMAN: [01:04:43] Legal and mainly nonprofit, because I moved from practicing law to the nonprofit world in like 1997. So for almost 20 years I'd been doing nonprofit work, and I knew that there was, you know, that that kind of work was, was used, that there were programs that used those skills. By the way, I remembered what the "I" is. It's individual, Individual and Organizational Development. IOD. And indeed, that's exactly what, um, what happened is. So I got the offer and it came not in an envelope but an email. And I remember just being so, so excited. I mean, I knew Georgia, I'd seen the, I mean, there had been news and, you know, of that country and I knew about it, but very little.

FELDMAN: [01:05:36] And so, you know, I took a day just not to be too impetuous and did some research. You know, one of my concerns was, is that anti-Semitism is still very strong in Eastern Europe? And particularly in the Ukraine, I think. And, um, I wanted to kind of try and figure out whether that would be an issue. It wouldn't necessarily mean I wouldn't go, but I just wanted to know. And so I did some research and what I found out, and what indeed was exactly my experience, is that they're not anti-

Semitic at all there. They have millennium of Jews living in Georgia and all their Jews left in the early 1990s. They went to Israel, and for a long time I didn't understand why, because they had such a long history of living peacefully together but.

SCULLY: [01:06:29] Big synagogue in Tbilisi?

FELDMAN: [01:06:31] Mm hmm, there is.

SCULLY: [01:06:32] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:06:32] But, um, what, what actually. The reason they left is just because when Georgia dropped out of the Soviet Union, when the Soviet Union broke up, Georgia was the first country to leave. And they left, but they had no government. They had no currency, they had no banks, they had no utilities. They didn't have safe water or electricity. They, they literally had lived so long under Soviet rule, they had no idea like how to make a country.

SCULLY: [01:07:02] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:07:02] And things were very, very, very hard there for a good many years. And there was a lot of crime. There was like a Georgian mafia, there was a lot of bribery and all the things you would expect in a situation like that. And the Jews had the ability to leave and go to Israel, so they did. So. But the Georgians miss them and they always, you know, they would always talk to me about it. We had neighbors or still they keep in touch with their former neighbors in Israel.

SCULLY: [01:07:35] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:07:36] Um, so, you know, I could see that there was not a big problem there with that. And I read about it and it looked like so interesting and I'm like, I'm going. So I accepted the offer. I didn't, I'm like, I must be insane. I'll never forget giving notice at work. Oh my God. I mean, it wasn't like I was giving notice at McDonald's. You know, I ran like millions of dollars' worth of programs. And I'm still friends with my

boss. She left too, and not that long after me. She's, she's head of the Municipal Art Society in New York now. We're still in touch.

SCULLY: [01:08:12] She forgave you for leaving her?

FELDMAN: [01:08:14] She was pretty mad at first, to tell you the truth. But she, she, she was, she was nice about it. I had two goodbye parties, one in LA, one in San Francisco. And the one in San Francisco, they made, like they had like 100 photographs of me throughout all those years. Me with different people doing different things. They were just printed out on paper but popped up on the wall.

SCULLY: [01:08:37] Yeah, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:08:37] I still have them.

SCULLY: [01:08:38] Marvelous.

FELDMAN: [01:08:39] So anyway, it was a very, very and. And in San Francisco, when we said goodbye, she was crying. I was shocked, I really was. But off I went. Yeah. It was like I sold the house. And luckily for me, the market was just going back up and that right then and I sold my house, which made me very sad. But because it was a great little house. But I had to do it.

SCULLY: [01:09:08] And where was that?

FELDMAN: [01:09:09] It was in northeast Highland Park area of Los Angeles, at the top of the hill. And yeah, I sold it. I put my stuff in storage. I had one moment when my son came over to help me pack, pack everything up to. I'd already gotten rid of a lot of stuff, and I needed to pack what I wanted to keep and put it in storage. And he was being like kind of a jerk to me, which he's quite prone to. And he was just, and, and I said to him, don't, you know, like, don't act. Don't act like this to me right now. Like I can't take it, you know, and I like burst into tears. And I was like sobbing. And I think it really shocked him. He's like, he like changed his behavior right away.

FELDMAN: [01:09:57] But I told him, you know what if I've made some terrible mistake? Like I sold the house, like, what if I can never get another one? You know, what if, what if I can't get another job? What if, what if? And, you know, he really felt sorry for me. So, you know, he started behaving himself, but it was so funny in retrospect. But at the time it was a real meltdown. Like in the same way that I kind of wondered about going to Micronesia when I saw that photo. I had that same kind of meltdown with Georgia, but of course I went.

FELDMAN: [01:10:32] I was a little worried about all the medical stuff, but actually I got through that pretty easily. I was lucky, though, because I had, um, I had Kaiser and I hardly had to pay anything. My doctor was very nice, and he sent me for all these tests and did it in a way that was all covered under my insurance.

SCULLY: [01:10:52] Oh good.

FELDMAN: [01:10:52] If I had to pay for all that out of pocket, like a lot of applicants do, oh my gosh. So I was very lucky, but I got through all that, I got accepted. I didn't give notice until the medical stuff was done because I wanted to make sure. But yeah, so off I went. We left in April of 2014 and, uh, we went for orientation for like a week at a place called Bazaleti. There were about 50 of us, 50, more, maybe more like 50.

SCULLY: [01:11:25] In Georgia?

FELDMAN: [01:11:26] Uh huh, in my group. It was, that's the standard size of the groups. There's always 100 to 120 or something of Peace Corps in Georgia. And then we went to, uh, the town where we were going to live with families for training. And, um, we met our families in a park, uh, you know, like, they stood on one side and we stood on the other side and it's a, it's a town called Khashuri. And, uh, they would like call your name and you'd come forward and they'd call the name of your host family. They'd come forward and like off you'd go. And so public, you know, somebody was videotaping it. That's how they do it, though. I don't know how they do it in other places.

SCULLY: [01:12:12] And that was it. You take off with your family.

FELDMAN: [01:12:14] Yeah.

SCULLY: [01:12:14] And you're on your way.

FELDMAN: [01:12:15] Yeah.

SCULLY: [01:12:15] Was this part of the training or was this your assignment?

FELDMAN: [01:12:19] No. This was, this was the family you stayed with for your training.

SCULLY: [01:12:22] Ah.

FELDMAN: [01:12:23] So, um, so, uh, we. I went, my family was, um, a woman named Eka, and she had two grown sons and her mother in law she lived with. Her husband had gone to Ukraine to work and, like, married another woman and just left her completely destitute. So part of the reason she took in Peace Corps volunteers was, you know, for the money. But she was very nice, very nice. I'm really, um, you know, very fond of her.

FELDMAN: [01:12:55] And I just remember at one point, like when we got there, my bedroom was going to be upstairs, and I had, you know, big heavy bags of luggage, and I put them down. She didn't speak any English. And she said to me in Georgian, the boys, her son, the boys will take it and take it upstairs. So the word for boys in Georgian is, is, um, let me see. Without. It's not that I don't remember the word. I have to put it in the right form of speech. And, and so if you're speaking to somebody, you say *bicho*. And if you're making it plural, *biches*. So she said, *biches* will take the luggage. And I'm like, the bitches, what? I know, I was so confused. Oh my God.

FELDMAN: [01:13:39] So we start, uh, we, we went to a school, um, for our training, and we had language all morning. And then in the afternoon we had all

sorts of training related. Then we broke out into, um, um, into groups, uh, like teachers were one group and IOD was another group. So we did a lot of stuff related to IOD training, training on grant writing, you know, training on organizational effectiveness. Training was very good there, very good. And the language training was excellent. Georgian is one of the ten most difficult languages in the world.

SCULLY: [01:14:22] I can believe it, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:14:23] It's got a grammatical structure that's enough to make your head explode. It's so hard. I never became fluent. A few people did, one person in particular in my group. But it's just so, so hard, long, hard to say too, long strings of consonants together. Like you can have up to five consonants in a row in a word. How are you supposed to say that? Um, it's a very, very challenging language. And the teachers were great, and it's amazing how much I learned.

FELDMAN: [01:15:00] The one thing that happened during training that I didn't like at all was that there were like about, they put us into clusters. And the clusters went to class together, language class, and had lunch at each other's houses every day all through training. And what they did was they took all the older people and put them in one cluster. And I was very upset. I felt, and so were others too, we all felt like we were being somehow kind of stigmatized. And in the end, there were two people in our class who were good enough in language that they got moved to other more advanced classes. I was in the middle. I was neither the worst or the best. And unfortunately, then what they did was they took two young people who were really struggling and put them in our class. So I then became the best in the class and was like really pulled down by the problems that other people were having.

FELDMAN: [01:15:59] So my language training was problematic. On the other hand, if they had taken us and put us, just mixed us in randomly, apparently that had caused a lot of problems in the past too. So I don't really know what the answer is, but I really didn't like being put in a group based solely on my age, you know? I felt like we should all sink or swim on our own merits.

SCULLY: [01:16:24] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:16:25] Um. So.

SCULLY: [01:16:27] How long was that training period?

FELDMAN: [01:16:29] Uh, like.

SCULLY: [01:16:29] Before you got assigned?

FELDMAN: [01:16:30] Like three months.

SCULLY: [01:16:31] And then assignment came.

FELDMAN: [01:16:32] And then assignment. Yeah. We got our assignments about the middle of the training. Um, I remember that day vividly. First we had language tests and you had to achieve a certain level, which I did by the skin of my teeth. I think they were just being nice, but, um. Uh, and then this is the way they do it. They still do it this way in Georgia, I just saw somebody a few weeks ago who told me.

FELDMAN: [01:17:01] They make the, the staff, they make a big map of Georgia with like tape or something, um, out in the playground of the school. And they put like rocks where the main cities and assignments are, and then they give an envelope to one person and it has someone's name on it. So they call that person's name. And that person like, you were all circled around the map, comes out and like takes the envelope and opens it. I'm going to, you know, Kutaisi. And then they walk over and stand on the Kutaisi stone. And then that just like continues throughout. Everybody's giving each other assignments and everybody's walking to their different places. And in the end, we're all standing on the place where we are. So.

SCULLY: [01:17:47] The Peace corps coordinator is giving out the assignments and then?

FELDMAN: [01:17:51] Yeah.

SCULLY: [01:17:53] Uh huh. You've already been pegged for an assignment.

FELDMAN: [01:17:55] Oh, yeah.

SCULLY: [01:17:55] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:17:55] Oh, yeah. Totally. So, um, and then after that, off you go to, um. Um, wait. I'm trying to remember the order of this exactly. Because then, yeah, then you go, we went to another place. We had, like an orientation weekend where we meet the people, our counterparts, who are going to be working with. We were back in Bazaleti actually, more training. And then there's a big thing. It was very similar to when we met our training host family. Big crowd, pulling names, coming forward. Yes. Oh my God. It's, um, so I, uh, I met my, uh, the person who ran the organization I was going to be working with. Her name also is Eka. There's, like, six names in Georgia. Nino, Miya, Eka, a few others. Salomé. Um, there's just not, yeah.

SCULLY: [01:19:00] What was the, what was the organization? Was it a NGO or?

FELDMAN: [01:19:03] Yes. My, this IOD group, we all went to NGOs. So I was assigned to Gori, birthplace of Stalin, if you didn't know.

SCULLY: [01:19:13] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:19:14] Um, it's about an hour outside of Tbilisi. Um, during training, we had the opportunity to fill out a questionnaire and have an interview with the IOD coordinator and talk about like where we'd like to go, where we'd be the happiest, where we thought we would do the most good. And it didn't control where they assigned you, but they listened to you. And in my case, you know, I really did not want to go to a remote mountain village. I wanted to be in a bigger town or a smaller city. And indeed, that's exactly what I got. So I was very happy with my, um, assignment. I ended up in Gori. It's about 50,000 people. And, um, you

know, it's a city. It's not a very attractive city. It's very cold in the winter. Um, and, uh, but there I was.

FELDMAN: [01:20:08] And the organization was called CHCA, which stands for, um, C-H-C-A. You know how it is with acronyms, you actually forget what it is. Uh, Center. Center Humanitarian something Abkhazeti. Abkhazeti refers to Abkhazia, which is one of the country, one of the areas of Georgia that's occupied by Russia.

SCULLY: [01:20:39] Yes, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:20:40] And that's where all of the founders of this organization are from. So it's an organization that works with IDPs, internally displaced people, people who had to run from Abkhazia, and then later in 2008 from South Ossetia. The people from Abkhazia are generally, not all of them, but tend to be, a lot of them were from Sukhumi, which was the main city there, better educated. Maybe people would have some jewelry sewn in the lining of their coat when they ran, that kind of thing, you know, they had some resources. The people from South Ossetia were almost all agricultural workers, farmers. Um, so two different groups, and they were treated very differently in Georgia.

FELDMAN: [01:21:30] The ones from Abkhazia were actually treated really badly because it was the mid 90s and Georgia had very little resources or government. And they were just sort of put into any dwelling that, abandoned schools or police stations, old hotels, you know. And some of them still live there, without running water, without heat. It's so cold there in the winter.

SCULLY: [01:21:57] Mmm. Yes.

FELDMAN: [01:21:57] It's really terrible. And there were a lot of scandals. Some of them were in Tbilisi, got kicked out of their houses. The ones from South Ossetia, they built village, they built settlements for them. Um, they're really different than the normal Georgian village. They're like cottages all exactly the same on a straight grid. Nothing in Georgia is on a grid.

SCULLY: [01:22:23] Now, the Ossetia refugees were the agriculturalists, is that right?

FELDMAN: [01:22:26] Yes. So they're living in these little cottages. But, but it's, depending on the settlement, they may have indoor or outdoor plumbing, but at least they have it. And they have little backyards and everybody grows stuff. And you know, they're like, not beautiful places, but. And they're stigmatized even though they're Georgian.

SCULLY: [01:22:48] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:22:49] Um, so yeah, during training we had a weekend where we job shadowed and I got sent to a, um, uh, to an IDP camp to do job shadowing there. And I was a little worried I might get assigned to a camp, but I did get assigned to Georgia [Gori]. And this, uh, um, uh, CHCA, Charity Humanitarian Centre Abkhazeti. That's it. Um, was run by this woman Eka who was, became a very important person to me. She's very attractive, very smart, perfect English speaking even though she'd never been to the United States. She just was a polyglot. She spoke Italian, she spoke English. She spoke Russian. Georgian, of course. Anyway. She really took me under her wing and taught me so much. And I feel like.

FELDMAN: [01:23:46] And I worked in the Gori office and had a counterpart there. Her name is Marta, Marta Bibi Rashidi. And, uh, both Marta and Eka, uh, I'm still in touch with both of them, especially Marta. Marta became a very close friend. Again, she spoke good English. None of this was good for my Georgian. But, um, you know, we worked very closely together. And so, you know, my job was to kind of help take this organization to the next step, the next level, you could say. And I did, I worked a lot with them. I mean, I did a lot of grant writing, but I also like, you know, redid their whole electronic filing system, managed a project to create a whole new website, you know, working with a web designer.

FELDMAN: [01:24:44] Um, there were a lot of frustrations along the way. Everything's bootleg there. It's, you know, there's so many problems that if they would just do it right in the first place wouldn't exist. But it's, it can

be very challenging. But, um, you know, it really, a lot of it worked, if not 100 percent, 75 percent. And especially Marta I feel like that I really, really helped her a lot to, you know, I pushed her to do things in a way that is not typically Georgian. The typical Georgian way is to do it at the extreme last minute. It's very typical, and a lot of Peace Corps volunteers really struggled with it. But, you know, I would like put her on a schedule.

FELDMAN: [01:25:36] And it was great for her because ultimately she went to work for the city of Gori and she on her, okay, I helped her with it a little bit, but she wrote, and she wrote an EU grant, those are not easy grants, and succeeded. She got the grant. A big construction project planned for the city of Gori. She never could have done that before. So, you know, she's thanked me many, she acknowledges it and has thanked me many times. And I feel like she is, you know, much more of an asset to Georgian society now than she was before. She had all the potential. She just needed somebody to kind of push her a little, you know? And she says so herself. And, uh, yeah, she became a very good friend.

FELDMAN: [01:26:30] And then I lived with a family, and I lived there for three months. I didn't think they were actually all that fond of me, but when I told them I was moving to my own place, which was allowed, there was a big struggle for me, you know? I really wanted it, but I also didn't want to leave them. It was hard but, you know, they were so upset, oh my God, when I said I was leaving. And it wasn't because of the money.

SCULLY: [01:26:58] Uh huh.

FELDMAN: [01:26:58] They both are food inspectors for the government, they don't need. It's not a money thing. As a matter of fact, when I tried to give them my last prorated month of money, she refused to take it. You need it for your new apartment. I had to put it on a shelf. That was very un-Georgian, but I maintained my relationship with them the whole time. I went there every weekend for dinner, and I formed an especially close relationship with their oldest daughter, Salome, who's very bright. I helped her with her English, not in terms of really tutoring, but we read *The Hunger Games* together and every week we would discuss a

chapter. When the third movie came out, we went to Tbilisi together, and it was such an adventure to see the third movie. It was like a little expedition out to see.

SCULLY: [01:27:49] Are you still in touch with these people?

FELDMAN: [01:27:50] Oh, yes, I am. All of them, especially Salome. Salome, actually, after the Peace Corps, as I think I've mentioned, I stayed in Georgia for like three more years just until I came here. And she lived with me in Tbilisi. She had her own room, and it was only supposed to be a month or two because her parents bought her a tiny apartment in Tbilisi to live in when she went to college. But there was some big dispute with the gas company. I never could quite get what the problem exactly was, but it took years to resolve. So the whole time she lived with me. So I'll just say like she's like a daughter to me.

SCULLY: [01:28:39] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:28:40] I remember once I was complaining to my son like, she's never leaving. I mean, like she, she lived in the second bedroom, which was my office, and I had my own business writing grants, so like I kind of needed it.

SCULLY: [01:28:53] Is that what you did post Peace Corps?

FELDMAN: [01:28:54] Yes, yes. I had lots of clients, including CHCA.

SCULLY: [01:28:59] Hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:29:00] And, um, I, uh, I like I wanted my office back and he's like, well, mom, you know, you always wanted a daughter. And I'm like, yeah, but like 20 years ago, okay, not now. But truthfully, she is like a daughter to me. I mean, we're Skyping tomorrow. We Skype every three weeks. We text all the time.

SCULLY: [01:29:20] What is her name?

FELDMAN: [01:29:21] Salome.

SCULLY: [01:29:22] Solome.

FELDMAN: [01:29:23] Salome.

SCULLY: [01:29:24] Solome with an O?

FELDMAN: [01:29:25] No. S. Well, is there an O in there? S-A-L-O-M-E. Salome.

SCULLY: [01:29:31] Aha.

FELDMAN: [01:29:32] And she has a sister, Nutsa, who's a very naughty girl. And, uh. But I'm especially close with Salome. Salome is, um, very intelligent, very ambitious, very driven. And she just got an internship with, uh, Transparency International that I helped her with.

SCULLY: [01:29:54] Which would be a Georgian agency?

FELDMAN: [01:29:56] Mm hmm. It is a Georgian one. I mean, it's an international NGO in Georgia. And she just came back from six months in Germany, where she studied on the Erasmus program, and she's applying for programs that come to the U.S. to study. She said, I'll come stay with you, Sara. It's like people just don't understand how big the United States is.

SCULLY: [01:30:18] Yes, not if you're working in LA.

FELDMAN: [01:30:20] Yeah, I mean, Georgia, you can drive from one end to the other end in like 11 hours or so. So yes, I mean, it's a lot easier now than of course Micronesia ever would have been. Even now, I think, I mean, I can text, I can Facebook, I can internet, I, you know, it's. I can send packages, they can send packages to me. But so I text with her mom too. And this is how I keep up my Georgian a little bit.

SCULLY: [01:30:49] When did you leave Georgia?

FELDMAN: [01:30:51] Uh, ten months ago.

SCULLY: [01:30:52] Ten months ago. So you're kind of a new arrival here after a long tenure.

FELDMAN: [01:30:56] Yeah.

SCULLY: [01:30:57] In Georgia.

FELDMAN: [01:30:57] It's been a big adjustment.

SCULLY: [01:30:59] Has that been tough?

FELDMAN: [01:30:59] Yeah, because, I mean, it's a big adjustment being from the West Coast.

SCULLY: [01:31:02] This is not L.A.

FELDMAN: [01:31:03] No, it's not. To North Carolina as well as from Georgia. And so, you know, I mean, I came for a job and I'm working in an office. It's just such a different environment than Georgia, it's just so different and not in a good way.

SCULLY: [01:31:20] Hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:31:21] And it's been it's a big adjustment, a big adjustment. But, you know, um, I mean, I'm surviving. So in terms of Georgia.

SCULLY: [01:31:31] What, what. But the people you're working with here, it just isn't like Georgia?

FELDMAN: [01:31:36] No, they're very nice people. I don't want to say anything bad about my current position, but it's just the kind of social ties that you make there. The kinds of friendships and the kinds of, um, relationships you have at the office that just don't exist here. It's just different. It's been a big, big adjustment for me.

SCULLY: [01:32:03] More distant here?

FELDMAN: [01:32:05] Much.

SCULLY: [01:32:05] Less personable?

FELDMAN: [01:32:06] Much.

SCULLY: [01:32:06] Uh huh. Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:32:07] Everyone eats lunch at their desk at my office.

SCULLY: [01:32:10] Mm hmm.

FELDMAN: [01:32:10] You know, in Georgia, it's, it's a, it's a group thing. There's often wine involved. And it's just not, it's just different. It's a little hard to explain because there's something amorphous about it. And Georgian people can be on the surface actually quite unfriendly. Like if they don't know you, they don't pay any attention to you. It's not like they've got it out for you, but they just like walk by you on the street.

SCULLY: [01:32:37] It's like that in Armenia as well.

FELDMAN: [01:32:38] Yeah, but in, um, but your family and your, all the extended family and then the friends that you make, you become like family to them. That's a whole different world. And anybody you bring, they will treat like family. So, like when my friend Malcolm came with two other friends, we had supra at my family's house. There was toasting, uh, you know, my friend Malcolm speaks fluent Russian. So my host father, Basil, was so happy that he finally had somebody he could talk about politics with because that was beyond my Georgian capabilities. Um, when my son came, oh my God, giant supra expeditions out to Ateni.

SCULLY: [01:33:28] Sara's boy is here.

FELDMAN: [01:33:29] Oh, yeah, it was.

SCULLY: [01:33:30] Big deal.

FELDMAN: [01:33:30] Yes, it was. So.

SCULLY: [01:33:32] Did he get married off while he was there?

FELDMAN: [01:33:35] They would have liked it. Yeah, there's a lot of that. Yeah. I didn't get it so much because I'm older. But the young girls, oh my God, they were constantly. Beautiful, educated, smart American girls were, like, pushed into the arms of, you know, farm louts, you know, guys who didn't even finish high school and couldn't speak English.

SCULLY: [01:34:00] Oh boy.

FELDMAN: [01:34:00] And yet they're like, oh, I want to marry an American. As if an American girl would have any interest in him. It was hysterical. The, the huge divide in perception, you know, about American girls and what they wanted.

SCULLY: [01:34:14] Georgian mothers are always proud of their sons, I'm sure.

FELDMAN: [01:34:18] They are. So I mean, I really loved it there. I loved, um, the people and, you know, and that culture that, that. Uh, there are things about the culture I didn't like certainly, but, but overall, it was just a culture I felt very comfortable in and like I could be part of. And I worked hard on my Georgian, and I learned actually a lot even after I left the Peace Corps. And I had to use it a little more in Tbilisi than in Gori, which was surprising. In Gori, when I would try and use my Georgian, I'd go in a store and try and use it. They would just stare at me and they would say [speaks Georgian] which means I don't understand you. I can't understand you. They wouldn't like make it.

SCULLY: [01:35:02] Because of a regional dialectical difference?

FELDMAN: [01:35:04] No. Just because I had an accent, I was a foreigner. And, you know, if I'd spoken Russian. Yeah. But in Tbilisi, they're a little more used to foreigners.

SCULLY: [01:35:14] Oh, yes, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:35:15] There were still a lot of people who didn't speak English. And I'd have, you know, shop owners in my area where I lived, and I'd have to speak, uh, Georgian with them. And they were willing to speak Georgian with me. You know, they weren't just. Gori people are a little cold, but I still loved it there. I had an apartment with a great view. I had my family, I had Marta. I really enjoyed my work, as I say, uh, a lot of grants. And I would go into Tbilisi like about once a week, um, and go to the main office there. And I would go to lunch and we would talk about politics, we would talk about the organization of Abkhazia, the IDP situation in Georgia. I learned so much from that. I really did. She left the organization to go work for the Danish Refugee Council, and her husband Nukri became the director, and I worked for him for a couple of years after the Peace Corps. Very difficult man.

SCULLY: [01:36:22] But this was in Tbilisi?

FELDMAN: [01:36:24] Yeah. He didn't speak any English. So we would get in fights and I'd have to use my Georgian. And usually there was another person in the office with us, and they'd be very impressed by the fact that I was able to express myself in Georgian because I spoke English most of the time.

SCULLY: [01:36:44] Well, you went to Georgia and your second stint with a great deal of organizational skill in your toolbox and so on. Did you come out with further?

FELDMAN: [01:36:54] Oh, yes.

SCULLY: [01:36:56] Further acumen and so on?

FELDMAN: [01:36:57] Yes, absolutely. Especially vis a vis grant writing. Oh my gosh, I learned so much. I mean, mainly I kind of well, I learned most of it from Eka. Um, but I also just learned a lot by doing, simply by doing. And I'm also, I wanted to and I applied for only the, um, what was it

called? The SPA committee. Uh, small project something? I forget the acronym, but it was the grant committee of Peace Corps. So part of our job, and I totally did this all the time, was to review the grant applications that Peace Corps volunteers all over the country were making to the SPA program, which was funded by USAID. And there was someone from USAID on the committee too.

SCULLY: [01:37:50] This was within Georgia?

FELDMAN: [01:37:51] Yeah. Yeah. All within Georgia. And, you know, it was a Peace Corps grant program funded by USAID. And people often applied for like an English classroom in their school. We got so tired of seeing those. But then there were all sorts of other innovative grants.

SCULLY: [01:38:08] So you maintained a tie-in with the Peace Corps and programs as well through the?

FELDMAN: [01:38:12] No, no, this was not after Peace Corps. This was during.

SCULLY: [01:38:15] I see. Oh, I see.

FELDMAN: [01:38:17] After, no.

SCULLY: [01:38:18] Yeah. No, you were.

FELDMAN: [01:38:19] I was.

SCULLY: [01:38:20] That was it.

FELDMAN: [01:38:20] Yeah, that was it actually. I still stayed friends with a few people in the office and had lunch now and then.

SCULLY: [01:38:26] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:38:27] But I was not a Peace Corps volunteer.

SCULLY: [01:38:29] No. And Peace Corps comes and goes. You had ties.

FELDMAN: [01:38:32] Yeah. Um, so anyway, I, um. But during the Peace Corps we all, you know, lots of volunteers sat on committees, different committees. There was a safety committee. There was a programs committee. Anyway, there was a grants committee, and I sat on that. So to review the grant applications for this program of volunteers all throughout Georgia. And, um, I think one of the best ways to learn is by teaching.

SCULLY: [01:39:06] Sure.

FELDMAN: [01:39:06] So by reviewing them and saying you need to do this differently, you need to do this better. You need to be more clear about this or that. I learned a huge amount myself by doing that. That was super helpful. And then by sitting on the committee and discussing the grant applications, I really enjoyed that work I did. Um, I'd go into Tbilisi. I think we met quarterly. And, uh, you know, I could stay the night and socialize a little. It was, it was really fun.

FELDMAN: [01:39:40] Um, so I also got involved during the Peace Corps, because that's what we're focusing on, with an organization called, um, um, Let's Play Together. And it was formed originally by the group of Peace Corps volunteers the year before my group, but they had just kind of started it and hadn't really given it a lot of thought. But they partnered with an organization called MAC, McLean Association for Children. Um, and it was, the program basically was an event day of sports activities for disabled children. So disabled children are really stigmatized in Georgia. There's not very much special programming for them. They often don't go to school, they can't go to regular school. Um, there's all sorts of issues.

FELDMAN: [01:40:41] And parents are very, very protective. They keep them in the house. I mean, this is not unique to Georgia at all, of course, but so this program was designed to kind of demonstrate both to parents and to the community, that these kids could be active and, and do stuff. And what we did was we would bring in young girls, teenagers, from the community, and each person would be paired with one of the disabled kids and would take them through the day.

SCULLY: [01:41:14] A type of mainstreaming for the disabled child?

FELDMAN: [01:41:17] Yes. I mean, it was only one day, but it was, it was not just for the disabled child, but for the people who volunteered, the Georgians who volunteered at the event, to change their perception of the kids as well.

SCULLY: [01:41:29] Sure.

FELDMAN: [01:41:30] So we formed a board. We really cemented the relationship with MAC. Um, we, um, held these events. We held one in Gori. It was great. It worked because there's a disabled center there, actually, whose director is in a wheelchair. And so it was really easy to recruit the kids. It's a little harder to recruit the volunteers, but, um, it went very, very well. And we would have them like every other month all over the country. And MAC, uh, brought some resources to that and supported it.

FELDMAN: [01:42:06] And I actually ended up being, doing a lot of grant writing consulting for MAC after I left the Peace Corps. The head of it is, um, his name's Jeremy Gaskill. He was a Peace Corps volunteer, he and his wife, in the, uh, 19, 19, late 1990s in, uh, Zestaponi, which is a rather godforsaken place. Um, and so he came back. He's got three kids, and they live in Georgia, and he runs the organization. I did a lot of grant writing for them. He's a great guy. Um, so, um, that was, that was an organization I was really quite pleased.

SCULLY: [01:42:53] Yeah, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:42:54] Working with and being associated with and putting on those events.

SCULLY: [01:42:58] Yep.

FELDMAN: [01:42:58] I still have photos, and I even have some hysterical videos of this guy, Russell. He was in Gori, actually. He worked with another nonprofit there. So he's arm wrestling with this kid. Uh, actually, she wasn't really a kid, young woman. And he's arm wrestling. And of

course, you know, he lets her win, of course, but he's, like, grimacing and making all these faces. And, you know, when, when he finally gets slammed down, the look on her face, she was so pleased with herself. We made up all the activities and brought in people. It was great. I really enjoyed that.

SCULLY: [01:43:36] Well, you're back here now. Uh, are you continuing in the not-for-profit vein here?

FELDMAN: [01:43:43] Well, I work for, I work for a nonprofit, Ipas.

SCULLY: [01:43:46] Ipas, uh huh.

FELDMAN: [01:43:47] They're in, um, uh, Southern Village, Chapel Hill. So a lot of driving. Um, I'm there on contract. I'm there, well, I got promoted recently, so now I'm their senior contracting grant manager. But I don't do grant writing anymore. That job doesn't involve writing. It's more legal in nature, compliance and stuff like that. But, um, yeah, it's a good job. Well paid, good benefits, but socially it's a little bleak. So, um, I'm finding that ageism here in the U.S. is, it's quite subtle, and I certainly can't accuse Ipas of it. I mean, they hired me, so obviously, I mean, they, they took a gamble in that way. But, um, the, it's mostly young women there. And like, they're perfectly nice to me, but no one has ever invited me anywhere.

SCULLY: [01:44:48] Mm hmm, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:44:48] I just think it doesn't occur to them. You know, it's like, what could she possibly have in common with us? In the Peace Corps, those young people are forced to associate with you.

SCULLY: [01:44:59] Yes.

FELDMAN: [01:44:59] And even then, you know, there was some resistance in Georgia. But, I mean, thankfully, there was a big enough group of people that there were plenty who weren't that way at all. I became, I just put my friend efforts over there and ignored the other ones. But here it's a lot

harder. Um, I mean, all my friends in Georgia are young, all of them. I don't even have any, I don't even have any old friends. Really. But, uh, yeah. So it's, but it's, it's a nice place. I'm just putting my efforts elsewhere, like, I'm involved with this group called You Can Vote, which is just a nonpartisan political, you know, voter enfranchisement organization. And I'm meeting with them next week, as a matter of fact, to talk about doing some grant writing for them, because I just want to, I really enjoy writing and I'd like to keep doing that.

SCULLY: [01:45:59] So basically, if you want a social life, it's not going to be in the workplace. It's going to be.

FELDMAN: [01:46:03] No, I don't think so.

SCULLY: [01:46:05] You're going to explore the community and find niches that would be.

FELDMAN: [01:46:08] I hope so.

SCULLY: [01:46:09] Open to, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:46:10] Yeah. So that's why I got involved with the returned Peace Corps volunteer group.

SCULLY: [01:46:15] Sure, sure.

FELDMAN: [01:46:16] Absolutely. To like, you know, meet people. And, um, you know, I go to the happy hour sometimes, not every month, but. And I have met some nice people, particularly Thomas. You know Thomas?

SCULLY: [01:46:28] Yes, I do, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:46:29] Yeah. Because he also was in Georgia.

SCULLY: [01:46:32] Ah, that's right.

FELDMAN: [01:46:33] Yeah, yeah, he was in [inaudible].

SCULLY: [01:46:34] Yeah, that's right. Well, that's a commonality. That's, you know, that's a start.

FELDMAN: [01:46:39] Peggy Schaffer, she's very nice.

SCULLY: [01:46:40] I know Peggy. Yeah, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:46:42] She's very, she's been very nice to me and helped connect me with a number of people.

SCULLY: [01:46:47] Good, good.

FELDMAN: [01:46:47] And sometimes I go to the book club. Unfortunately, I just haven't managed recently, but I like it, and.

SCULLY: [01:46:53] I've gone to a couple of those, but I can't schedule it in. It's just.

FELDMAN: [01:46:57] It's tricky. It can be challenging.

SCULLY: [01:46:59] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:46:59] I mean, I'm already working full time, but, um, I, uh. Um, what was I going to say? Peggy? Oh, yeah. So Peggy took me to the Christmas party and.

SCULLY: [01:47:13] Oh, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:47:14] Very recently here.

SCULLY: [01:47:15] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:47:15] In Raleigh.

SCULLY: [01:47:16] Yes.

FELDMAN: [01:47:16] And we, we drove together. She drove.

SCULLY: [01:47:19] I was there too.

FELDMAN: [01:47:20] Oh, you were?

SCULLY: [01:47:20] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:47:21] See, I was there too. Do you remember me?

SCULLY: [01:47:22] It was a rather large Victorian house.

FELDMAN: [01:47:23] Yeah.

SCULLY: [01:47:24] I don't, but.

FELDMAN: [01:47:25] It was a lot of people there. Yeah, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:47:27] I don't remember you either, sorry. But, um, I was sitting in the living room talking with somebody, no, the dining room, talking with somebody at the table. And I knew because Peggy had told me that there was a volunteer here who had been in Georgia, but I didn't know if he'd be at the party or who he was or anything. So I was sitting there talking to someone across the table, and someone came behind me and spoke to me in Georgian. I heard, oh yeah, this person who was Thomas, of course, came and he was like, [speaks Georgian]. Which is hello, how are you? It's a typical greeting.

SCULLY: [01:48:06] Yes, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:48:07] That's the way he talks.

SCULLY: [01:48:08] Yes. Sure.

FELDMAN: [01:48:09] And I'm like, oh gosh. I started crying just to hear the Georgian, you know.

SCULLY: [01:48:17] Yes, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:48:17] And he has a good accent too. And you know, I turned around and we kissed, which is the typical, very typical. Once, one kiss. Go, go right. And, uh, men to men all kiss each other. Women all kiss each other, and even women kiss men. I mean, that is the, that's a business greeting in Georgia.

SCULLY: [01:48:39] Yeah, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:48:40] Occasionally I had people who would try and shake hands with me, and I would tell them in Georgia, like, cut it out. We're in Georgia, now give me a kiss. But people, you know, who I worked for, worked with. But, um, yeah, Nukri always did that. He was always shaking. Nukri, for God's sake! But, uh. So, yeah. So we kissed and then we started, you know, we immediately switched to English, but I mean, just to hear the language, it was great. So we've become friendly.

SCULLY: [01:49:11] Well, I appreciate your taking the time to share your story with us.

FELDMAN: [01:49:16] Sure. How long have I been talking? I don't know. Not that bad.

SCULLY: [01:49:20] Can you think of any final comments or that you might want to add?

FELDMAN: [01:49:26] Well, I mean, I did it twice.

SCULLY: [01:49:30] Yes.

FELDMAN: [01:49:30] So obviously I'm a supporter of Peace Corps.

SCULLY: [01:49:34] Yes.

FELDMAN: [01:49:35] I think it's, um, I, you know, I think it's just, expands your worldview in, in a way that cannot be found otherwise. It's unique

because, you know, you, even if you travel a lot, even if you stay somewhere, it's just completely different from being really embedded and living in a community, working in a community. It's a rare experience. And I think for Americans in particular, it's really important. And, um, I think that, you know, you get as much from it as they get from you and in some cases more.

FELDMAN: [01:50:20] And, um, you know, I mean, it's not perfect for everybody. There's definitely people who really struggle with it. Um, and then there's other people who just do great and they're so happy, and everything in between. So you have to have, you know, reasonable expectations, be flexible, you know, be able to endure a lot of like emotional upheaval. Um, But, you know, in the end, I think it's, it's totally, totally worth it. And, you know, I'm very, I do not regret for a minute that I did it, either time.

SCULLY: [01:50:58] I'm guessing that Georgia will continue to be a part of your, your existence in some ways.

FELDMAN: [01:51:06] Sure. It will. Actually, next month. Um, I signed up for this. Thomas is having a supra. Supra, it's a feast.

SCULLY: [01:51:15] Ah, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:51:16] At his house. And, you know, it's part of the silent auction.

SCULLY: [01:51:19] I remember it. Yes, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:51:21] And so I bid on it just because I thought it would be fun. So I'm going to bring some Georgian wine.

SCULLY: [01:51:26] Good for you.

FELDMAN: [01:51:26] We'll do some toasting. Yeah.

SCULLY: [01:51:28] Where are you getting Georgian wine?

FELDMAN: [01:51:30] I had to order it from D.C. Good God. I've been in every wine shop in the Triangle. It's, and haven't found any. And you know, it's the birthplace of wine. It's archeologically proven.

SCULLY: [01:51:42] I would believe so, yes, yes.

FELDMAN: [01:51:44] You know, clarity is the, the big pots that they bury underground.

SCULLY: [01:51:50] Yes. Sure.

FELDMAN: [01:51:50] Ferment the wine in.

SCULLY: [01:51:52] Yup, yup.

FELDMAN: [01:51:52] And I love Georgian wine, I love it. And especially, they have the amber wine which is white wine that for part of the fermenting, uh, process, they leave the skins in so it gets a kind of orangey glow. It's kind of a bit of a rough taste. It's not a super refined wine, but.

SCULLY: [01:52:11] Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:52:11] Oh, it's so good. A friend, uh, I'll end with one story, which has to do with here. So I had a very close friend in, uh, Tbilisi who I actually became friends with after the Peace Corps. But, you know, it's still an example of.

SCULLY: [01:52:29] Sure, sure.

FELDMAN: [01:52:30] The connection.

SCULLY: [01:52:31] Of course.

FELDMAN: [01:52:32] And her name is Nadia and we worked together at CHCA. And, um, so we were, we were, we were good friends. And she's like, she's 26. I don't know, maybe she's a little older. She's definitely under 30 and, I don't know, we just really got along. And so she came to the

United States on a State Department program, one of those study strange things. And, um, uh, she came to Charlotte because part, part of this particular program was going to different universities. And she went to one or two in Charlotte. And then they came here and she went to Duke, I think, or UNC, I can't remember which one. But anyway, so of course, I drove to Charlotte.

SCULLY: [01:53:20] Sure.

FELDMAN: [01:53:20] And I stayed at a hotel and I met up with her. And, um, I just remember going into the lobby. This is like, I don't know, like six months ago or something, and I'm in the lobby. And there she was. And we were just so happy to see each other. It's not just that I was happy to see her. She was so happy to see me, you know? And we were just like hugging. We couldn't stop. And, you know, we were both a little teary eyed. And we went to dinner and we had this great time and we posted on Facebook "together again" in Georgian and all of this, you know, it's just like this big reunion. And I just, I realized how those relationships really have affected my life, you know?

FELDMAN: [01:54:11] And it just, seeing her again made it so vivid. I hadn't really been actively missing her before that. I mean, I missed her, but I was so involved in just trying to get settled in and like, get furniture. And I was buying a house, this, that, and the other thing. But oh, seeing her, it just all so came rushing back. Yeah, it really did. So, you know, I just, I think it's very important for me to keep my contacts. I don't have any contacts back to Micronesia.

FELDMAN: [01:54:41] Uh huh. Yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:54:42] Most people, older people were illiterate. And, you know, the younger ones were not really.

SCULLY: [01:54:49] And you were in very rural, now very urban in Georgia.

FELDMAN: [01:54:53] It was a very, the, the Micronesia experience was a typical Peace Corps experience. Sleeping on the floor, no running water, put the batteries out in the sun. You know, that. Eating dog, whatever.

SCULLY: [01:55:05] Yes.

FELDMAN: [01:55:06] But, and the Georgia experience was the polar opposite. I had an apartment, it had a shower. Okay, I had to keep a bucket in there for when the water went off, but I had to climb up five flights. Oh my God, all the windows knocked out and a million wires running along the concrete walls from where everybody bootlegged into it.

SCULLY: [01:55:26] Yeah, yeah.

FELDMAN: [01:55:27] But it was, you know, I had a. It was a, it had a sink. It had a shower. I had a washing machine. It was, it was pretty basic by American standards. You'd be living in public housing. But for Georgia, it was just completely typical. And but it was so, it was just completely the opposite. I lived in a city and an apartment. I had a cell phone that worked. I could Skype with my son, you know, it's just completely different. And yet each experience was really, really valuable and really, really important in my life in very different ways. But I think the underlying value of Peace Corps to help people become more independent, to gain skills, you know, to like meet those three goals at Peace Corps has, was the same. The same. Yeah.

SCULLY: [01:56:30] Get more young Americans into the Peace Corps, I think.

FELDMAN: [01:56:34] It seems like there's plenty applying.

SCULLY: [01:56:37] Uh huh.

FELDMAN: [01:56:37] Yeah. From what I've read, there's.

SCULLY: [01:56:40] Good.

FELDMAN: [01:56:40] I mean, I think that this new, well, it's not that new anymore, but relatively new application system where you apply for specific jobs. Uh, I have very mixed feelings about it, but I don't think it can be disputed that it's resulted in a lot more applications.

SCULLY: [01:57:01] I see.

FELDMAN: [01:57:01] That's what I've heard.

SCULLY: [01:57:02] Well, good. Good. Yes. Well, I want to thank you, Sara Feldman, for your oral history of two important stints in the Peace Corps. And I will process this, uh, interview and, and get the information to the JFK Library, and you'll be hearing from them. And you will have access to any and all of this if you need, for any reason, once it's processed and digitalized and so on.

FELDMAN: [01:57:34] Okay.

SCULLY: [01:57:34] Well, thank you again.

FELDMAN: [01:57:35] You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]