

Christine M. Anderson Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Christine M. (Laws) Anderson served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji from 1974 to 1976 as an arts and crafts teacher.

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Oral History Interview

with

Christine M. Anderson

November 27, 2018
San Francisco, California

By Julius Sztuk

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

SZTUK: [00:00:01] Today is November 27th, 2018. This is Jay Sztuk, and I'm interviewing Christine Laws Anderson, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji from 1974 through December of 1976, and Christine was an arts and crafts teacher trainer at Nasinu Teachers College in Suva. Chris, thanks for agreeing to be interviewed today. Let's start with your pre-Peace Corps life. How did you originally learn about Peace Corps and what made you decide to join?

ANDERSON: [00:00:41] It's funny because I was working for a greeting card manufacturer and decided to take a job as public relations assistant to the regional director for Peace Corps. They, he wanted someone who wasn't a former volunteer to do that work, and so I went to the Westwood office. I worked for him for two years. I met so many volunteers, each with a fascinating story, who were doing things that I wouldn't have thought of doing going through high school and college in L.A. I didn't really meet a lot of people at that time who were thinking

of service to others. So I worked for him for two years and then I thought, well, what can they do with a person with a graphic design degree? And I submitted my application.

ANDERSON: [00:01:41] They had 63 countries at the time. I spoke some French, some Spanish, and they put me in Fiji. I had actually didn't have any geographic preference, but I said I'd like to avoid a humid climate. So they sent me to a place that had 120 inches of rain a year and never got below 70 degrees. So that was how I got to that assignment, and I didn't know whether I'd be teaching American art or have to learn real fast about Fijian art or what I was going to specifically be doing. But I, upon arrival in Fiji, I was put into the Fijian language group. I had kind of hoped for Hindi because I liked the calligraphy. I had dated a guy who had been a volunteer in India, so but Fiji was very diplomatic.

ANDERSON: [00:02:37] Half the population are Hindu Indians and half are Fijians. So Peace Corps put half of our training group in Fijian and half in Indian. So I had three months of training. I went to two different villages, one in Nasinu, where I absolutely had an amazing experience of the generosity of people in Fiji. People who weren't afraid to invite a drunk passerby into the living room where we were having dinner on the floor. And, you know, just, um, I thought that was so genuine.

SZTUK: [00:03:24] And this was in a Fijian village?

ANDERSON: [00:03:26] Yeah. And then the next village I went to was Nuwowo out in Levuka. And I had a different experience there, but again, it was a chance to practice the language I was being offered in language training by our Fijian instructors. I learned to tease a guy from New York who was in our training group and say, well, you're from an island, just like Fiji is an island. And so that then the third village offered in our training was a cross-cultural visit. So I went to Navua. I was with my Indian family, the Norians, and I learned, I adjusted to the cultural expectations of wearing modest skirts, ankle length skirts, and made the curries and chutneys I had been familiar with in L.A. Actually I ate a lot of Indian food there.

ANDERSON: [00:04:33] And so my interesting experience during that cross-cultural stay was being asked, well, how do I plant rice in Los Angeles, where I come from? Oh yeah. I come, you know, from a very urban area. And so I was used to getting it at the market. So I helped plant rice in that family's backyard. I caught a fish in my long skirt. It's one of the three fishing experiences that I loved the most in Fiji. One was rapping line around a tomato, like a ketchup bottle, and dropping the hook from a boat. One was in Natadola camping. The fish, sunfish, washed ashore and I caught, went racing down to the shoreline, caught a fish that way.

SZTUK: [00:05:29] So as an urban person, I, you know, adjusted a bit to that experience of going to during training. One of the fellows in our group didn't make it, so not everybody, you know, successfully. Their skills may be something that Peace Corps was eager for, because he was a physics math teacher, going to be that. But if they don't sort of adjust to what's expected in Fiji, they don't get to stay.

SZTUK: [00:06:02] Do you remember who that was?

ANDERSON: [00:06:03] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:06:03] Who was it?

ANDERSON: [00:06:04] He was from Los Angeles. He got into trouble about two months after we were there.

SZTUK: [00:06:11] Yeah, there were a handful of guys.

ANDERSON: [00:06:14] Yeah, they were adjusting to the drinking part of Fiji, not necessarily the other parts.

SZTUK: [00:06:21] But I'm going to back up a little bit. So you got accepted and got this invitation to Fiji. Did you know anything about Fiji or have you heard of it before?

ANDERSON: [00:06:29] No. I had worked on staff in L.A., so I knew all of the countries, and actually had to learn that they weren't misspelling Tonga

when they were inviting people to Togo in Africa. But Fiji, we had a guy on our staff who had been a volunteer in group two of Fiji's Peace Corps volunteers, so he was really excited to take me to an Indian restaurant in L.A. and tell me about his experiences. He was a teacher, Dick Earl. And then my family, of course, thought, oh, you're going to the cannibal islands. That's about all the information there was in books around that time. This is '74, 1974. So not everybody even knew about Fiji other than, I mean, even now it's become a tourist destination, but not so much then.

SZTUK: [00:07:29] Yeah, yeah.

ANDERSON: [00:07:31] It was expensive to get to. And so.

SZTUK: [00:07:35] Very far away.

ANDERSON: [00:07:36] Very far away. And I was a little naive. I thought, oh, on my school break, I knew you get a break at the end of the year, I'd go to see the Taj Mahal. I'd go to India during that, because I knew you had almost three weeks of break. So my sense of geography has improved.

SZTUK: [00:07:58] Yeah. So what was your family's reaction?

ANDERSON: [00:08:01] Well. Two years is not much. At that time, you know, if it went badly, it was still only two years, so nobody expected changes to, you know, happen badly. I'm a good correspondent, so I, you know, wrote to them when possible. There was no telephone service where I was during training or on my assignment. So that was actually kind of nice. People had to come see you or write to you and you'd get mail. Delayed mail, sometimes about a week and a half to get from California to Fiji. But they were enthusiastic.

SZTUK: [00:08:46] They were?

ANDERSON: [00:08:46] Mm hmm.

SZTUK: [00:08:49] So I should state that I was in the same group as you. So I've got a little insight, insider information. And we didn't, we weren't in the same language training, but I do. I do remember one thing from when you went down on one of these homestays.

ANDERSON: [00:09:05] Mm hmm?

SZTUK: [00:09:06] Is that you had the kids write their names down. What was it on? Tell us. Tell me about. Do you remember that? You had them write it on a piece of cloth.

ANDERSON: [00:09:15] Yeah, I made use of fabric a lot. And so in one of the summer school kinds of things I did during training, I was going to do tie-dyeing and the news went through the school like it was wildfire. People were taking their shirts off in order to get the fabric printing techniques that I was teaching in the little school at Bunimono. And this is in a place where the rain is on the tin roof. And it was an interesting introduction to teaching there.

SZTUK: [00:09:52] Yeah. Well, I think after having the kids write their name on the cloth, didn't you embroider it?

ANDERSON: [00:09:56] Oh, I did. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:09:57] So you would remember all of their names.

ANDERSON: [00:09:58] It's permanent. Permanent in my memories. Yeah, I've got. I do that a lot.

SZTUK: [00:10:04] Yeah. I thought that was a great idea. So any other experiences from that training period or the home stays that you can think of or?

ANDERSON: [00:10:15] I was glad that I had the opportunity to go to two different villages and a cross-cultural Indian town. I was always asked, you know, when are you coming back? When are you coming back? And I would say in Navua, I'd say, oh, when the bridge gets finished.

Because the bridge had washed out several times before I got to that to that part of the island and it washed out again. A brand-new bridge had been in construction. It wasn't finished when I left. And then the first big flood it washed out.

SZTUK: [00:10:48] So did you kind of keep in touch with those families?

ANDERSON: [00:10:50] I did. I'm still in touch with three or four of my former students. It's gone down from about a dozen that I was pretty frequently in touch with. I know about when their kids are born, when they've gotten put in arranged marriages. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:11:09] So you said your training was about three months.

ANDERSON: [00:11:11] Yes.

SZTUK: [00:11:12] And then tell me about your assignment, your work assignment.

ANDERSON: [00:11:15] I was invited to Fiji with the information that I was going to be teaching art at two Indian schools. This is in contrast to having the two months of Fijian language training.

SZTUK: [00:11:28] Right, disconnect with the language training.

ANDERSON: [00:11:30] So I wound up having tutoring in Hindi for about 10 days. And then that assignment fell through because the Minister of Education, um, they were. He told the schools who were trying to say, well, you have to give her housing. No, you have to give her housing. So I had no housing. That was going to be part of my school assignment. And so the Minister of Education said, OK, you don't have an art teacher for the next two years. So I wound up going to the teacher's college. I actually was sworn-in in January of '75 without an assignment. I stayed with the Peace Corps nurse in her house that needed to be fumigated, with albino cockroaches flying in the facilities. And shortly after that they found the assignment at the teacher's college. So I got to teach in.

SZTUK: [00:12:28] Was that a little discouraging when you were kind of in limbo for a while?

ANDERSON: [00:12:31] I had worked in Peace Corps in L.A., so I knew the administration can be, um, a government administration can be challenging. So, you know, I might. I didn't. I wasn't too too worried. One of the ladies who was in my training group and had been my pal in Navua wound up going home in January because she felt that the hurricane that came through while we were finishing our training was enough to send her back to that old boyfriend that she'd left in America. So.

SZTUK: [00:13:15] So then you get assigned to the, uh.

ANDERSON: [00:13:18] Teacher's college. And I wound up teaching in English because the British have set up that system so that the children are taught in English primarily. I was teaching integrated arts. So the kids that were going to do art, P.E., or music in the high school level would were in my classes. I had, my favorites were the licensed teachers. They had been in Fiji and had a one-year experience of teacher training years and years before. And so they were just so enthusiastic for anything I could share with them. And then the third group were the two-year secondary, well, two year regular kind of college students. And so I taught them, and some of those are the ones that I've stayed in touch with. Some of them were put in arranged marriages with licensed teachers that I knew too. So I've kind of known some of those families.

SZTUK: [00:14:09] Those would have been the Indian.

ANDERSON: [00:14:10] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:14:11] Indian teachers. So there at the school, you had a mixed population.

ANDERSON: [00:14:18] Half female, half male.

SZTUK: [00:14:21] Yeah, and you got to work with both cultures.

ANDERSON: [00:14:24] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:14:25] Or the many cultures that are in Fiji.

ANDERSON: [00:14:29] Mm hmm.

SZTUK: [00:14:30] And so walk me through a typical day. What was your typical workday there?

ANDERSON: [00:14:35] It was. It was longer than I expected. I had worked in an administrative kind of jobs in my career prior to that, but I thought teaching up, oh, you'll start at 8:00 and you'll finish at 3:00, maybe a couple more hours for homework, you know, to prepare for your lessons and you'll be, you know, that's not, doesn't sound bad. That wasn't the case. This was my first year of very formal teaching, trying to research what they could benefit from, what resources they had. So I was teaching how to do things with art supplies that they could get ahold of. Things. I think I was most effective because I could teach with, if you had a fish, you could use the bones for jewelry. You could make fish prints with the skin. There was, I really liked teaching there and studying things that would be useful.

ANDERSON: [00:15:35] I got publicity for the art classes from a study of tattooing. Fijians don't tattoo as much as some. Some groups in other cultures will scar their skin in order to make a raised pattern. So that got first page on the Fiji Times with coming out to see my students in the lessons that we were learning. We were painting on the skin. But it wasn't boring. I had heard that Peace Corps volunteers had a lot of off time. That didn't happen for me. I was, I don't know if it was because I was eight miles from the capital city, so I would be able to go in and get some groceries from the capital and come back, or what the story was. But I had sent myself some books to read during those two years, and I never read them at all.

SZTUK: [00:16:35] Yeah. So you lived near the capital, did you? Did you live on the school compound or in the neighborhood?

ANDERSON: [00:16:39] I did. I lived in the school compound in a house that was a wood house that was elevated off of the soil. And so I had plants growing underneath my house that I'd only bought in nurseries in L.A. So that was kind of pretty to have maidenhair ferns and different kinds of lush, tropical flowers. My house didn't have hot water, so I spent the two years without hot water. So that made it easier to come back to move to San Francisco, which was undergoing a drought, because they were asking people not to use water so much. So I thought I was well prepared for my culture. Also, with the mice that would be in the house. When I had mice in San Francisco my first month, it was like, what's the story here? I'm in civilized country. And so I bought mousetraps and I was buying mousetraps for the size mice that were in Fiji. The mice would eat the lure and go away. So I kept going to smaller and smaller mouse traps.

ANDERSON: [00:17:44] But I had electricity, so I could work a long time into the night at home. And I was just, you know, a flip flop walk away from the school art building. First year, I also made clothes for myself with the sewing machine that my New Zealand volunteer roommate had. And the second year I would go up to the home ec department and make clothes for myself there. So that was one of the things I'd worried about in leaving America was, how am I going to sew for two years?

SZTUK: [00:18:27] I remember they had treadle sewing machines?

ANDERSON: [00:18:31] Yeah, yeah.

SZTUK: [00:18:32] Was that what you used?

ANDERSON: [00:18:33] Yeah, that's what they had up at the classroom. And so, um. One of the other activities in art that I was doing was batik and stenciling and stuff, and I learned to use a kerosene iron. I had electricity.

SZTUK: [00:18:54] So describe a kerosene iron. How does that work?

ANDERSON: [00:18:56] Kerosene iron is just crazy. It's got this little contraption on the back of the iron that will, um, that you put the kerosene in and then you light it. And so you have this sound like a hot air balloon at the same time that you're ironing. I grew up with kerosene lamps and iron, old 1880s artifacts in my family.

SZTUK: [00:19:22] Yeah.

ANDERSON: [00:19:23] And so but I had never even heard of a kerosene iron, and so I thought that was pretty cool.

SZTUK: [00:19:31] Sounds like something you could burn yourself pretty good on if you're not careful.

ANDERSON: [00:19:34] Oh, I think so. I think so. Definitely. Yeah. I used the Primus and different kinds of kerosene stoves when I was in more rural areas in the homes. I went to visit with one of my students who was a licensed teacher, and she invited me to her home up in Labasa area, and so I got to meet her family. She had left her family to take this one-year course at the teacher's college, and I've been involved with her family ever since. You know, they've, both her daughters have been married. I've made wedding gifts for them and stayed in touch since the '70s.

SZTUK: [00:20:25] So what was it? I'm sure you remember her name then.

ANDERSON: [00:20:27] Oh yeah.

SZTUK: [00:20:28] What was her name?

ANDERSON: [00:20:30] So I have. The friends that I've kept in touch with there, the Ryans, Mayawatiram and her husband Hari, H-A-R-I.

SZTUK: [00:20:47] Also this was an Indian lady from Labasa.

ANDERSON: [00:20:50] Mm-hmm. Yeah. And so she moved, I guess her assignment eventually after she finished her teacher's college thing was still on that island, but not as close. Probably a 40 minute bus ride from Labasa. And so when I went back in '84 with now my husband, who I met in Fiji, we went on a bus to just go and see her. And on the elementary school compound, the bus driver forgot that we were on the bus. I thought that showed we really fit in pretty well because you didn't even notice that we were still on the bus and we were very unfamiliar where we were going. We got to her home. She wasn't there, but her neighbors invited us into their house. We had tea and probably some biscuits at their house. You just don't have that in California. I, you know, I will never forget the hospitality in Fiji. I think it was just so sweet.

SZTUK: [00:21:56] Yeah, so talk about that a little bit. You just got off the bus and had nowhere to go, so they invited you into their house. Was that typical?

ANDERSON: [00:22:06] Yeah, it would be hard to not to stand out as you're making your way in an area that, um, you're the white people. And so but that happened also with a family in, um, in another part of Fiji, where we got to their house, they weren't there, their neighbors took us to a stream to, you know, enjoy the sightseeing in that area. And eventually, the people we were looking forward to meeting came home. One of the things we did in '84. My husband said he felt like a visiting education officer. We went at the crack of dawn to get to a village where my friends would be. And we'd get there by sunset. We'd spend the night with, you know, socializing and staying with my old students and then get up the next day to take a punt, a boat, to the bus stop to proceed to visit other people. So all of his work companions that he knew were in Suva, right in the capital city. All my students naturally were sent to outlying places.

SZTUK: [00:23:25] They were all over the place.

ANDERSON: [00:23:26] Mm-hmm. Fiji's got 300 islands when there's low tide and my students went to all sorts of places. One of the sweetest letters I've

kept all of these years is from a fellow whose assignment took him on a boat to get to it, and he writes about his homesickness. And his homesickness was just like anybody's homesickness that we're familiar with, because he was going someplace unfamiliar, didn't know who he was going to see.

SZTUK: [00:24:00] Yeah. Even though it's in the same country.

ANDERSON: [00:24:04] Yeah, I've often wondered what happened to Apollo Qata because, and I've asked a few friends if they can find him for me, because that made an impression on me. His last name, Q-A-T-A.

SZTUK: [00:24:23] He was one of your students?

ANDERSON: [00:24:24] Mm hmm. We've had some of my students come back. We just had a student come by about two years ago on their way to on various busses and things from Fiji to see other parts of the United States. And I get this call totally out of the blue. And she remembered me with such fondness and it was like, my god. It's nice to know that you've made an impression on people.

SZTUK: [00:24:52] Yeah. So they found you after that somehow.

ANDERSON: [00:24:55] Yeah. Well, it's a closely knit community. The Fijians often have someone who they, they don't call them cousins, they're sisters and brothers. And often you'll find someone, you'll see a name that you think you know, and you'll ask somebody else about it. And oh yeah, that's my, you know, relative. And I don't know if exactly that's really their auntie, but they just have a genuine affection for everybody.

SZTUK: [00:25:30] Yeah. So they have these large extended families.

ANDERSON: [00:25:32] Absolutely.

SZTUK: [00:25:33] Hard to figure out what the real relationships are. So were you at Nasinu Teachers Training College for your entire?

ANDERSON: [00:25:43] Yeah, it was my two years experience. And during school breaks, my students and I would go to a village and we would teach arts and crafts during the day, and the villagers would teach us traditional weaving, because my students were going to be going to these various islands. And not everybody knows how to do bark cloth printing or any of the crafts that Fijians are known for.

SZTUK: [00:26:12] So you got to visit quite a few different places as part of your job.

ANDERSON: [00:26:15] I did. I did. I took advantage. I got to see where the cannibals actually originally fought, and it made a lot more sense when you study all of the tools, the wooden clubs and things that are so beautifully carved, how they could not just be slaughtered in these jungle like settings. These were not the open grasses that you sometimes see in TV movies of battles.

SZTUK: [00:26:44] Yeah.

ANDERSON: [00:26:45] This was, it made a lot more sense to me.

SZTUK: [00:26:47] The jungle kind of places?

ANDERSON: [00:26:49] Mm hmm.

SZTUK: [00:26:50] So what place was this that you're talking about? Do you remember the name of it?

ANDERSON: [00:26:52] I wrote it down because I thought I might be asked.

SZTUK: [00:26:55] Was it in the interior of Viti Levu?

ANDERSON: [00:26:58] No, it was on a coast.

SZTUK: [00:27:00] On the coast?

ANDERSON: [00:27:00] And in fact, it was a place that if, um, you could almost see a tourist island off the shore. And this village, they got their water from rainwater collected in barrels and stuff. They were on the coast, so we got to see a traditional fishing kind of net activity. And I should have, I wrote it down. It seems to me it was K-A-B-A, Kaba. Now, being in California, I think it's fun to say words in Fijian like tholorondo because of, you know, I learned the pronunciation of Fijian words, but not necessarily all of those pronouns. The nominative pronouns that are necessary in order to. You, not all of you, you and me.

SZTUK: [00:28:15] Yeah. The sounds of the letters are different in Fijian. Yeah. So any other interesting places you got to see traveling with your students?

ANDERSON: [00:28:30] Um, let's see. I've mentioned a couple of them. I also went down to Kadavu with John and sort of played and did seashell things with the kids, the young kids that were down there. Where else? Interacted with a Swiss architect that was out in Lami that participated in boat racing in Fiji.

SZTUK: [00:29:10] Yeah.

ANDERSON: [00:29:12] And he's from Switzerland, so I went to one of his parties. No one spoke Fijian, no one spoke French, no one spoke Spanish. They spoke Italian or German. You know, things I didn't speak. So I remember it was as much as, it was as difficult speaking at that with those people as it had been in trying to learn Fijian in the beginning. You did a lot more hand gestures and it doesn't do you well to only be arrivederci. That's goodbye.

SZTUK: [00:29:49] So there were a lot of expatriates around at that time.

ANDERSON: [00:29:51] There definitely were.

SZTUK: [00:29:54] So tell me about the impact this Peace Corps Fiji experience has had on the rest of your life.

ANDERSON: [00:30:05] It changed my life. I mean, even joining the Peace Corps staff in L.A. changed my life in meeting people. I didn't know that the people from Santa Barbara that are just so kind and nice. And what's the story with that? They had a very large Peace Corps recruitment from that school, and I thought I should have gone there.

SZTUK: [00:30:29] UCSB?

ANDERSON: [00:30:30] Uh-huh. And I could have majored in medieval studies. All sorts of strange things. But in my artwork, I, well, in my family you didn't. It wasn't so bad if you failed at something. So the fact that I wasn't making a lot of money for two years in Fiji wasn't, you know, a disaster. And so I think it gave me the confidence to become a freelance artist here in San Francisco. So I've involved a lot more artwork that has an ability to share what I liked about Fiji in my artwork. And so I've taught needlework to people. I've made etchings and embroideries that have mossy patterns in them, like a Wizard of Oz scene where we know we're not in Kansas, but it's palm trees with mossy on the trunks. And I had always said, you know, there's no upper age limits for Peace Corps. So I had thought maybe I would do that eventually again.

SZTUK: [00:31:46] You still thinking about it?

ANDERSON: [00:31:47] I don't know, my health isn't. My walking is not as good as it was in Fiji. I'm not sure that I have the right health anymore, but I sure love the people I met there.

SZTUK: [00:32:06] And you've stayed in touch with other volunteers as well as local people?

ANDERSON: [00:32:09] I have. I have. I helped organize a reunion of volunteers in Kirby Cove that brought about 80 people from the United States all over.

SZTUK: [00:32:21] Yeah. When was that, back in the?

ANDERSON: [00:32:22] The Kirby Cove thing was, I think, '84.

SZTUK: [00:32:29] And that was one of many reunions as I recall.

ANDERSON: [00:32:31] So that was the second one.

SZTUK: [00:32:32] Yeah.

ANDERSON: [00:32:35] You did the third or fourth one down in Catalina. Yeah. So I thought those were so useful because you got to meet people who had your assignment perhaps after you left. Not my particular successor had a nervous breakdown.

SZTUK: [00:32:52] Really?

ANDERSON: [00:32:53] I actually went in at the end of my first year in Fiji, and Dan Cantor, the Peace Corps director, looked at me and he said, what are you doing? Because I looked so tired. I, you know, if I didn't. I was full fledged, fully fledged into that assignment. And plus the humidity. Remember I said I don't do well with humidity.

SZTUK: [00:33:19] Yeah.

ANDERSON: [00:33:20] So but I looked tired and I was teaching more classes than normal, normally. But if I didn't teach them, then the students really wouldn't have had that amount of art available. So it was my choice and, um. But anyhow, so she used up the amount of paper in a few months that I had used in two years. So paper is not something that people are going to be able to get in the outer islands.

SZTUK: [00:33:53] So you tried to use other.

ANDERSON: [00:33:54] Oh yeah, definitely.

SZTUK: [00:33:56] That was smart.

ANDERSON: [00:33:57] Yeah. Well, bamboo sheets, bamboo that comes off of trees. You can etch into it with a with a sharp seashell and make a print from that. It was just, it was a lot of fun. You could take, the PE department when they were ready to throw away the basketballs or whatever, soccer balls and stuff. You tear that open and you can print, carve into that and make rubber stamps.

SZTUK: [00:34:24] OK. You would glue it to block a wood or something?

ANDERSON: [00:34:29] Well, you could. But if you kept it in a, you know, somewhat arc shape, then you could print on an uneven surface too. Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:34:41] Well, that's pretty inventive.

ANDERSON: [00:34:42] And then there's the plants. You just crushed different plants and we did that with my classes so that they would know that you could get something totally unexpected from onion skins if you boil them and make an ink or paint out of them.

SZTUK: [00:34:57] Did you just discover this there?

ANDERSON: [00:34:59] Yeah.

SZTUK: [00:34:59] Or did you know about this?

ANDERSON: [00:35:01] No.

SZTUK: [00:35:01] So you experimented while you were there.

ANDERSON: [00:35:02] Oh man, I wish I had known more before I went to Fiji. I can. I eventually traveled to Singapore after. We traveled three months through Southeast Asia. I did get to India after Peace Corps. And I saw carving into seashells like cameos that I didn't know about. You know, it's like, oh yeah, you could do that. I had, during one of those school breaks, I told all the students to bring back seashells with them, and they brought some seashells I had never seen. It was like, whoa. We can't just break that up and try and drill a hole with a nail and a stone.

That's a beautiful shell. So but I learned, I researched. I had, I was given the opportunity to order books. The British High Commission gave Nasinu Teachers College a grant for art books. They may do that every year, but the people who had done it in the past didn't care. And so maybe the books never arrived.

ANDERSON: [00:36:03] I cared, and by the end of my first year, those books came in. And so I had books that talked about leaf printing and different things and comparative cultural things with other islands, other parts of the island, the Solomon Islands. They've got alligators. So they had, or crocodiles, and they had artwork that had that. It was a great two years experience.

SZTUK: [00:36:29] Yeah, it sounds like it. And it sounds like you introduced them to a lot of new stuff.

ANDERSON: [00:36:32] Yeah, yeah.

SZTUK: [00:36:35] And so you mentioned a trip back in 1984. Have you made any other trips back?

ANDERSON: [00:36:40] No, no, that was pretty exhausting. I, you know, things don't change an awful lot in Fiji. They've had political coups that have changed the relationship between the cultures. It's kind of sad to see families that got along, don't get along necessarily. I have had students whose kids were raised and thought they could become teachers or they would get, um, they wanted to go into higher education. And these vocational schools had changed. You have to have a sponsor in order to be a student at FIT.

SZTUK: [00:37:25] Didn't know that.

ANDERSON: [00:37:26] So it's kind of sad that aspirations are not as successful right now.

SZTUK: [00:37:40] So back to the time you lived in Fiji, what did you do in your leisure time? What did you do for fun?

ANDERSON: [00:37:50] Let's see. Well, I learned some of those Fijian crafts so that I could offer those. A lot of cooking, a lot of learning to use local vegetables and fruits and things. Socializing, especially like with no television at the time and no broadcast radio after 11 p.m. unless there was some catastrophe going on. We actually didn't mind the fact that there was a cyclone or two that would come through because you'd have radio all night and hear about different inoki and kalera getting their furniture. But I think just the typical things I had thought I would do some knitting. I thought I might be teaching embroidery. The missionaries had already come through some of the villages, and so people knew embroidery more than I expected. So I wound up not really doing needlework with people. I did other kinds of crafts.

SZTUK: [00:39:04] So over the years, you've probably seen a lot of people come and go from Peace Corps Fiji through your continued connection. Do you have any thoughts for or have you given advice to people who thought they might want to join the Peace Corps?

ANDERSON: [00:39:22] Oh, it's pretty hard to keep me from not talking about it. Yeah. Especially because I had such an appreciation of, say, skilled tradesmen who no longer should be getting up on those ladders could teach those skills in Fiji and other Peace Corps assignments. I think because I did recruitment for two years before I was a volunteer, came back. I was the first person in the United States on Peace Corps staff who had got a leave of absence to become a volunteer.

SZTUK: [00:39:54] Oh, so you went back to work for Peace Corps when you came back?

ANDERSON: [00:39:56] Yeah. But having worked for them for two years, I thought, well, a leave of absence would, you know, be easy to fulfill. Turned out my job disintegrated while I was gone. The guy that I was working for didn't want to come up to San Francisco, and they moved the offices up here. So the region communications office wasn't up here anymore. But I eventually got a job in the recruitment office, so I was telling people how to join VISTA, which is the domestic version, and the

Peace Corps. And I think like everybody else, I think that Peace Corps' training provided me confidence to do whatever I wanted. And I learned some agriculture things that I could do while I was there. I did informal teaching in America before I went overseas, but now I've made a career of teaching since 1980 or so.

SZTUK: [00:41:09] Are you still teaching?

ANDERSON: [00:41:10] Yeah. Wherever I can get hired.

SZTUK: [00:41:16] And you still have some Fijian friends today? There's quite a community.

ANDERSON: [00:41:20] Oh, there's a large community here in Northern California, so we've had additional group get togethers. When we've had these reunions, we've had a night where we've made, say, Indian food on a Friday night and Saturday we've made a big *lovo*. And I had no idea there was many Fijians in the area. Actually right now I'll see someone out on the street and I'll go and ask. I'll say *ni sa bula* to them because they look to me like they could be Melanesian, and they're helping, they take care of the elderly in San Francisco perhaps and so as a caretaker. I've gone over. I've crossed the street and given my greeting and their client has said to me, it's not to me, it's said to the Fijian, it's someone from your home country, dear. So, you know, it's like, right, so.

SZTUK: [00:42:28] So I heard a story just yesterday. I was talking to Paul Milo.

ANDERSON: [00:42:33] Oh, neat.

SZTUK: [00:42:35] You know what I'm talking about?

ANDERSON: [00:42:37] Absolutely. Because Union Street has this fair in every June and so it's very crowded. And my husband got sort of separated from me and I tried to get his attention in Fiji in a crowded market. You can go, psst! And only the person you're doing that turns around. That never, you know, made any sense to me, but that really was true. So

John turned around and so did Paul, and it was like, well, what's this? What's this American turning around for? So I went over and introduced myself, and he was a former volunteer from Fiji. So crazy.

SZTUK: [00:43:19] What are the chances of that happening?

ANDERSON: [00:43:22] Yep.

SZTUK: [00:43:24] Well, are there any other memories or stories you'd like to share? Or final words of wisdom?

ANDERSON: [00:43:34] Ha, wisdom. I don't know. I was greeting people in California. If I was to meet somebody up out on the, uh, in this neighborhood. I remember just, you know, saying hello to them as they were coming into a restaurant or whatever. And so it's crazy because you want to be effusive and you'll look, people will look at you somewhat strangely. But it pays off sometimes, you know. I think it's nice to have some kindness going around in the area. So that's. I make that a thing I want to do.

SZTUK: [00:44:21] All right. So, well, if you don't have anything to add, I want to thank you for taking the time for doing this today.

ANDERSON: [00:44:26] Thank you.

SZTUK: [00:44:27] It's been fun. And that concludes the interview.

ANDERSON: [00:44:29] OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]