

Phil Lopes Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Phil Lopes served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from June 1961 to July 1963 on a community development project.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Phil Lopes

October 15, 2001
Tucson, Arizona

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:00] This is Bob Klein, and I'm interviewing Phil Lopes, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from, um, was a volunteer June 1961 to July 1963. The project was community development. Today's date is October.

LOPES: [00:00:22] Fifteenth.

KLEIN: [00:00:23] October 15th, 2001. OK. What I like to do is begin by asking people to go back to, oh, six months a year before they became involved with the Peace Corps and sort of address two things. What was going on in their life at that point? Perhaps a little bit about your background, and then move forward into whatever was that got you going. So that would have been sometime in early '61? '60?

LOPES: [00:01:01] Yeah, I was a sophomore second year college student in California in a community college. So when in June of '61, I was going to graduate.

KLEIN: [00:01:19] With an AA degree?

LOPES: [00:01:20] An AA degree, right, in liberal arts. And so I was faced with, you know, what do I do next? And I had been accepted into the University of California system out of high school. So continuing on with the University of California was one was one option. But I hadn't been a great student. So I thought, you know, since I'm not a great student, it probably means I'm not terribly interested in being a student right now. What are some other options? So there were.

KLEIN: [00:01:54] Let me go back to just, where had you grown up?

LOPES: [00:01:57] Sure, sure. I'm sorry. I grew up in a little town, 60 miles west of Fresno in California, a little place called Dos Palos, two sticks. And it's a small, rural agricultural community. I don't know if you know the Central Valley of California, but it's just lots and lots of small little communities around there. And my father was in the trucking business and had been since he was 16. His father had stowed away on the boat and come from Portugal in the early 1900s and had left my grandmother and my father's two older brothers in Portugal. Got off in Panama, worked on the canal for a while, got scared of the malaria, stowed away again and wound up in San Francisco right after the fire. We're not exactly sure, aught-five, six, somewhere in there. Then sent for my grandmother and my father's two older brothers and they stayed in California. My father and his younger brother were born and raised in California. So I'm a second generation Californian. And my mother's family was also Portuguese, but they came from the Azores islands.

KLEIN: [00:03:13] Don't cover the mike.

LOPES: [00:03:14] Oh, I'm sorry. They came from the Azores islands. And so I grew up speaking Portuguese. Because even though both my parents were not, their first language was not Portuguese, my grandparents' were,

on both sides and they were very close. We lived close. We spent a lot of time together. So I spoke Portuguese as a youngster and when I went to school, actually, I was speaking more Portuguese than English.

KLEIN: [00:03:40] When did you go to high school then? Was there a high school in that town?

LOPES: [00:03:42] Yes. In Dos Palos, California, there was a small high school and I went there and I did well, you know, I did OK. I was more of an academic student. Although I played at sports, I wasn't terribly good at it. I was also good in industrial arts, in woodshop and woodwork and metal shop and that sort of thing.

KLEIN: [00:04:09] Were you the first in the family to go to college?

LOPES: [00:04:12] Yeah, I was the first in my family to graduate from high school. My mother, my mother finished the eighth grade. My father never did. My mother had one sister who finished high school, but none of her siblings did. None of my father's siblings finished high school.

KLEIN: [00:04:27] Do you have any brothers and sisters?

LOPES: [00:04:29] Yes, I'm the oldest of five. And so when I graduated from high school, you know, I wasn't terribly interested in being a student. Although I'd been accepted at the University of California, I decided not to go because most of my friends were going to the community college, which was only 60 miles down the road. And as we used to refer to them in those days, it was a high school with ashtrays. So, you know, you could do damn near anything you wanted to. So we just kind of moved a small segment of the senior class from Dos Palos to there.

KLEIN: [00:05:06] Right.

LOPES: [00:05:12] At that time, again, I was probably a serious student, but I had no interests to speak of. I had, although I'd thought about being a lawyer, but that was a passing thing. I was not very worldly in terms of knowing about what was going on in the world. I mean, when I look back about

what was going on in the fifties, you know, McCarthyism, for example, I knew nothing about that. I mean, I remember when World War II was over, my father was very happy about that. I remember that. But those fifties, you know, the first thing I remember about politics, my grandfather on my mother's side was an avid newspaper reader. And he got he got a television before any of the rest of us did. And I remember watching some of the conventions. I think it must have been '59. No, it must have been earlier than that. It was Adlai Stevenson and Eisenhower which would have been '52.

KLEIN: [00:06:21] '52 and '56.

LOPES: [00:06:22] Yeah, OK. It was in there. It was probably '56 because I don't think we had a TV in '52. But that was kind of my first exposure to those sorts of things. The only time I ever left California was in 1956. I was active in scouting, became an Eagle Scout and went to the National Jamboree in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in 1956.

KLEIN: [00:06:48] Oh. How did you travel?

LOPES: [00:06:50] By train. All the way. All the way there and all the way back. It was a wonderful, it was a wonderful experience, you know, Chicago and New York and the South and it was just. And Washington, D.C. was just a real.

KLEIN: [00:07:05] So you graduated from the community college. It was what?

LOPES: [00:07:09] '61, June of '61.

KLEIN: [00:07:12] June of '61, OK. And were obviously faced with some choices. Had to do something.

LOPES: [00:07:16] Yeah. Even before that, you know, do something. And there were two or three of us that used to talk about this because we were all finishing, you know, moving on. And we talked about the Merchant Marine. I actually, you know, thought, hey Merchant Marine might be interesting. I thought about the military, you know, I thought that might be kind of

interesting. But I didn't hear Kennedy's speech in Michigan, but I heard about it. And two or three of us were together one night and we started talking about it and started talking about the Peace Corps and said, you know, that might be kind of an interesting thing to do. But it was one of those, you know, we're drinking beer and talking about girls. And then for two minutes, we talked about this other thing, you know?

KLEIN: [00:07:55] Were you aware of Kennedy's inauguration?

LOPES: [00:07:58] Yes. Yes, I was. Yes, I was. Oh, yeah, yeah, I was. Because being a Catholic and my father, my family, being a Catholic, that was a big deal. The fact that Kennedy got elected was a big deal because he was a Catholic. So I was enmeshed in that. I wasn't involved in the campaign or anything like that. But it was a lot of talk in my family about him.

KLEIN: [00:08:20] Being an Eagle Scout, or on your way to being an Eagle Scout, had you done any kind of community service work? Did you have any orientation toward that kind of thing?

LOPES: [00:08:31] I did. It was church related mostly, agriculture related mostly, but nothing significant. Nothing significant. My family was much more oriented to the family and the church than they were to outsiders. I mean, my mother and father, for example, didn't belong to anything like a service club, for example, until way after I was in high school. Prior to that, they were not part of that. My father, as I look back on it, was a very innovative guy, both business wise and engineering wise. I mean, there's a number of things that he built to haul agricultural commodities, which is what he did. Never put patents on them, but he was very smart in that regard. However he was, he never considered himself terribly articulate and terribly worldly. And one of the things that he used to say to all of us are two things. One, get an education, and two, what he referred to as having a good lip. Being able to speak articulately and in public and that sort of thing. Those were very important to him. He didn't think that he had that himself.

KLEIN: [00:09:58] Being the oldest son, did he hope that you might join him?

LOPES: [00:10:03] Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:10:04] You worked with him at times?

LOPES: [00:10:05] Oh yeah, yeah. Throughout, from the time I was old enough to, I started. I got a driver's license at 13 and started driving truck when I was very young and worked with him in the business in the summers and after school and on weekends from as long as I can remember. Oh yeah, that was the plan. There was no question that that was the plan.

KLEIN: [00:10:26] And it was only in, I think, late April or early May, that Peace Corps began to put out questionnaires where you could actually go to a post office and get it.

LOPES: [00:10:37] That's right. That's right.

KLEIN: [00:10:38] And then there was an entrance exam as well, the equivalent of an entrance exam.

LOPES: [00:10:43] Right.

KLEIN: [00:10:44] So how did you then take the step? What led you? What was the step?

LOPES: [00:10:49] Well, yeah. And it's funny because I'm going to talk about the three of us because we're kind of connected in this thing. The guys who first talked about the Kennedy speech, because we were all in school at the same time. And so I was on the student council and the dean of students, a fellow by the name of Paul Pittman, took a liking to me, and I went to talk to him one day, you know, about all of this stuff. Merchant Marine, what am I going to do next? And I told him about the Peace Corps. And he said, you know, I don't know. I don't remember now whether he said, I have an application here, or I've heard about it and I know where to get one. So somehow I got an application. And I sent it. And, you know, several sometime later, again, the same three guys sitting around drinking beer, talking about girls, which was what we mostly did. I said, I picked up an application for the Peace Corps, and the other two

said, so did we. Which was really, it was really quite amazing. So it was a fluke. I mean, I didn't. I knew very little about what the Peace Corps was. For me, it was just another one of those options that presented itself because I had to do something.

KLEIN: [00:12:01] No more defined than joining the Merchant Marines.

LOPES: [00:12:04] Nothing. Nothing more than that. There was no idealism involved there. You know, I barely knew what it was, kind of thing. But then I got called to take the test and all three of us took the test at the same time.

KLEIN: [00:12:20] Do you remember where you took the test?

LOPES: [00:12:21] Yeah, in Fresno. Yeah, we took it, I don't remember now where, but somewhere in Fresno we went.

KLEIN: [00:12:27] Do you remember looking around at the others taking the test and trying to match yourself up? Well, you know, I don't know if I can do it, or anything like that?

LOPES: [00:12:35] Oh, yeah, oh yeah. Because none of us had bachelor's degrees and we thought, hey that's going to be a bad thing right there. And we were all young. I mean, we were 18, 19 years old, and most of the people in the room, as I recall, didn't look that young. Had no idea how old they were, but they didn't look that young. But hell, the room was full. You know, I've forgotten now, but my guess would be 35 or 40 people that took the test in this, you know, in this little place.

KLEIN: [00:12:59] Did it include a language test?

LOPES: [00:13:01] Oh yeah. You know, you may be right about what it included, but my recollection was that it was a language aptitude test. I mean, it must have been more than that, but that was my recollection.

KLEIN: [00:13:14] Yeah, well, that's OK.

LOPES: [00:13:16] And at that point, at that point, I had taken two or three years of Spanish in high school and I had taken Spanish while I was at Coalinga, so I was pretty damn good. And having spoken Portuguese helps a lot, you know, because, you know, Latin based language. But we all spoke some Spanish, all three of us. All three of us.

KLEIN: [00:13:41] And your other two friends were both Portuguese speaking?

LOPES: [00:13:44] No, no, no. One was a high school friend of mine, we're still very good friends. Are you familiar with Mentholatum?

KLEIN: [00:13:55] Yeah.

LOPES: [00:13:55] His grandfather invented that. He's from the Hyde family in New York, very wealthy. He still doesn't have to work, pisses me off. But he was the guy from high school. The other fellow was a guy who I had met at Coalinga, and he came from Albuquerque, New Mexico, came there just as a student. So we all took the test and, you know, it was still a lark. You know, it was still one of those, eh you know. And I kept looking for other things. And I'll be damned if shortly after graduation, like a week, because my girlfriend at the time had left school in the spring semester and moved back to Albuquerque. But she had come out for graduation and we were staying at my house in Dos Palos with my parents after graduation. And I get this telegram saying, you're invited to training. So they invited me to training. In hindsight, I didn't know this until much later, well I guess I knew it in training, but there in the Congressional Record, there's a list of the 25 first people that were invited for training. Are you aware of that?

KLEIN: [00:15:26] No, I did not know.

LOPES: [00:15:28] Yeah, I think it's 25. It may be 20. I don't know. Actually, I went back and looked. It was in early June, I believe. But the names were read into the Congressional Record.

KLEIN: [00:15:37] And it was the group invited for the Colombia project?

LOPES: [00:15:39] No, it was Colombia and Tanganyika. Actually, Ghana may have been there too. I'm not sure.

KLEIN: [00:15:44] I don't think so, because we had a crazy timetable too. But there wasn't much time from. The earliest exam was given, I think, was early May. And if you went into training in June, things must have happened very quickly.

LOPES: [00:15:59] Oh, very quickly, very quickly. I had three days to say yes, and I had maybe a week or two to pack myself and get myself to New York.

KLEIN: [00:16:10] To New York?

LOPES: [00:16:11] To Rutgers. So we flew to New York, to New Brunswick.

KLEIN: [00:16:14] What was your family's reaction, you remember?

LOPES: [00:16:17] Oh, I think they were enormously proud because my picture was in the newspaper and all of these news people were calling and I went on television. I mean, this was hot shit, you know?

KLEIN: [00:16:31] Yeah, yeah.

LOPES: [00:16:32] So no, they were enormously proud. Hadn't the faintest notion about what the hell I was going to do. My father, until he died in 1991, refers to it as "that Peace Corps thing." But no, they were enormously proud, also somewhat anxious and somewhat fearful. I mean, Colombia, where the hell is that? You know, isn't this country OK? So there was there was a mix of enormous pride and some anxiety about where I would be.

KLEIN: [00:17:03] Sure. Did you have any sense of Colombia?

LOPES: [00:17:06] None. None whatsoever.

KLEIN: [00:17:07] The name.

LOPES: [00:17:08] The name. Yeah. None whatsoever.

KLEIN: [00:17:11] Do you call if you, in going to Rutgers to the training, whether. Oh hold it, hold it! [recorder is jostled]

LOPES: [00:17:17] Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

KLEIN: [00:17:20] Do you recall in reporting to training, whether it was expected you were going to go directly from training to Colombia? In other words, not be back?

LOPES: [00:17:29] Oh no, it was understood that we were going to spend some period of time in New Brunswick at Rutgers. That was the training period.

KLEIN: [00:17:36] And then straight to Colombia or?

LOPES: [00:17:38] No, no.

KLEIN: [00:17:38] With leave.

LOPES: [00:17:39] With leave. I think there was a week or two in between that I came home. But when I got on the plane in San Francisco, I'd never written on a plane before, number one, and number two, I never ridden on a jet. I was hot shit. But I was sitting next to two other guys. We were three abreast there. We're all going to the same place. We discovered that in the seats. And those two guys became two of my best friends in Peace Corps, and we're still, we still maintain contact.

KLEIN: [00:18:19] So you reported?

LOPES: [00:18:22] Arrived in New York, took a train to New Brunswick, went to Rutgers. Put us up in the dorm and we were off.

KLEIN: [00:18:29] OK, how many, do you remember how many were in training? Approximately.

LOPES: [00:18:39] I think there were 80 something. It may have been 90.

KLEIN: [00:18:42] And did you have a sense that they knew exactly what they were doing? I mean, was it well-organized or was it?

LOPES: [00:18:52] Oh no, oh no. It was. They were making it up as they went along.

KLEIN: [00:18:57] OK. And were there two distinct groups? There was a faculty at Rutgers who was going to train you, but were there Washington types who?

LOPES: [00:19:07] Yes, Washington types came in and CARE types came in. Because CARE was running the program in Colombia that we were going to be part of, so they were part of the training as well.

KLEIN: [00:19:20] So from the get-go that was built in.

LOPES: [00:19:23] Yeah. And there were very few Rutgers faculty. Most of them were from elsewhere.

KLEIN: [00:19:31] Do you recall who?

LOPES: [00:19:32] Yeah, the guy who taught us Colombian history and about Colombia, his name was Fred Pike. He was from Notre Dame.

LOPES: [00:19:44] The guy who taught us community development was a guy by the name of Richard Poston. He was from Southern Illinois University. Um, but we had U.S. government types there as well. We learned to ride horseback, learn to play soccer. But the big emphasis was on Spanish. We spent a lot of time in Spanish classes and we were immediately segregated into language competency levels. Now I wasn't in the top group, but I was in the second to the top group.

KLEIN: [00:20:21] And that would, given your background, that was relatively easy.

LOPES: [00:20:24] Right, right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:20:25] Did they make it clear that you were going to be functioning in Spanish and that that was a determinant as to whether you went?

LOPES: [00:20:32] Oh yeah, oh yeah. They made it clear that was the Spanish and your, for lack of a better term, ability to get along, whatever that meant.

KLEIN: [00:20:44] We'll get to selection. Do you recall the selection process?

LOPES: [00:20:48] Oh, yeah, very well.

KLEIN: [00:20:50] What do you recall of it?

LOPES: [00:20:51] Well, there was a whole battery of of psychological tests.

KLEIN: [00:20:58] Paper, pencils.

LOPES: [00:20:58] Right. And then there were sessions with shrinks, as we used to refer to them as.

KLEIN: [00:21:03] One on one?

LOPES: [00:21:04] One on one, right.

KLEIN: [00:21:05] What was your reaction? I mean, I assume you hadn't, that was the first time you'd ever sat down with a psychiatrist.

LOPES: [00:21:11] Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:21:13] Do you recall?

LOPES: [00:21:14] I don't recall. It certainly was, I certainly was not anxious. I was anxious about going because, you know, once I got there and got involved in all this, you know, I thought this was hot shit and I wanted to go. So I didn't want to get deselected, as the term was then.

KLEIN: [00:21:30] Yeah. Was that happening with the group too? I mean, was there an excitement about you knew you were first?

LOPES: [00:21:36] Oh yeah, oh yeah. When Shriver came and we went to the White House to see Kennedy. I mean, that was all hot shit, you know? So everybody got really involved in that, really wanted to go.

KLEIN: [00:21:51] Do you recall, was it, um, during training was the job that you were going to be doing defined for you?

LOPES: [00:22:00] Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:22:01] And what was that to be?

LOPES: [00:22:03] We were to be community organizers. They called it community development. And you know, now I'm much more sophisticated about those things. But we were really trained to be to be organizers in the social work sense in the sixties. Because this guy, Richard Poston, he was the guru for community development and he understood what it was working with small groups in poor communities to do stuff. And that was our assignment.

KLEIN: [00:22:37] Do you remember reading, was one of the assigned readings from Saul Alinsky?

LOPES: [00:22:43] No. Well, I don't think so because I'm familiar with Reveille for Radicals, but I don't think it was assigned. And I don't remember now, because I became very aware of Alinsky later in my life. So I don't remember whether I was introduced to it there or not.

KLEIN: [00:23:11] What was the role of CARE in the projected project and also then in training? How did they come into it, I mean?

LOPES: [00:23:19] I'm not sure how they came into it, although I can speculate. They had been in Colombia for years and Peace Corps had no infrastructure there at all. But CARE had an office, had staff, had all these people, and really had a notion about how this thing was going to work,

much more than Peace Corps. They had a notion about how it was going to work and they were there at Rutgers, essentially telling us how this thing was going to work. For example, part of us would be assigned to the National Coffee Federation, because the National Coffee Federation had community activities going on in the communities, in the coffee growing communities of Colombia. So a portion of us would be assigned to them. Another portion of us would be assigned to the National Community Action Program because there was a national community action program in Colombia.

KLEIN: [00:24:24] Were there Colombians involved in the training?

LOPES: [00:24:26] No, no. None at all that I can recall.

KLEIN: [00:24:30] And do you recall particularly recall Shriver's visit?

LOPES: [00:24:39] Oh yeah, oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:24:40] Can you characterize it or mention any anecdotes relating to it?

LOPES: [00:24:46] All I can remember is I was just in awe of this, this guy who's just a dynamo, you know, and articulate as hell and kind of slobbered when he talked, you know? And, you know, obviously very wealthy, you know, very well dressed. What at that time was probably a five hundred dollar suit, you know, but just an incredibly impressive guy. Plus the fact that he was Kennedy's brother-in-law, you know, all of that was, he just had this aura about him. It was just incredible.

KLEIN: [00:25:19] Did he meet informally with you? I mean, was there evenings?

LOPES: [00:25:24] No, no. He just came for an afternoon. And I remember we got on some bleachers out on the soccer field and we all kind of got around him and took a picture.

KLEIN: [00:25:34] Oh, OK.

LOPES: [00:25:35] But no, I don't remember anything terribly formal.

KLEIN: [00:25:40] Were you isolated on campus? Were you staying in a separate dorm?

KLEIN: [00:25:45] Yes. Yes.

KLEIN: [00:25:46] So it was really just the group of trainees.

LOPES: [00:25:49] Yes, I believe. We may have been in more than one dorm, but I don't remember other people in the dorm with us.

KLEIN: [00:25:55] And classes, obviously the classroom was set aside just for you.

LOPES: [00:25:59] Right, right.

KLEIN: [00:26:00] And a language lab.

LOPES: [00:26:01] Right, right. Well, well, if you mean by a language lab, someplace where you get in with earphones and stuff, I don't remember that.

KLEIN: [00:26:08] Oh, OK. I don't know.

LOPES: [00:26:12] I don't remember that.

KLEIN: [00:26:14] Did the language training emphasize simply spoken Spanish or did you go beyond?

LOPES: [00:26:20] No. No, it was conversational. Although, you know, I'm not even sure we had a textbook now that, uh. Hmm. I don't recall that, but it was it was highly conversational and very good language teachers, very good language teachers.

KLEIN: [00:26:38] All of whom were American?

LOPES: [00:26:40] Yes. As far as I remember, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:26:47] Do you remember the male-female split in the group?

LOPES: [00:26:50] Oh, there were no females.

KLEIN: [00:26:51] Oh, it was an all-male group. Oh, I didn't know that.

LOPES: [00:26:52] Yeah. Because in those days, a female couldn't survive in South America.

KLEIN: [00:26:58] Ok, OK.

LOPES: [00:26:59] They couldn't do it. So we were all males.

KLEIN: [00:27:03] It's funny the things I don't even think about. Was there a phys ed or a survival component to training?

LOPES: [00:27:12] No, no survival, but phys ed. Medicine ball, pushups on your fingertips. All this shit that I'd never heard about, you know, and I had been an athlete, so I was in fairly good shape. But yeah, a lot of that and a lot of soccer, a lot of running, weightlifting. All that sort of stuff.

KLEIN: [00:27:29] Well, did the staff encourage people to decide whether they wanted to do this? In other words, self-select, or do you recall that at all?

LOPES: [00:27:44] I don't recall, I don't recall. And I don't recall anyone leaving voluntarily. Although they may have, yeah, but I don't, I don't recall.

KLEIN: [00:27:54] Of course, the selection process, the fact that you're being selected, sort of generates this excitement of wanting to get through. And I think a lot of people get caught up in that. How long was training altogether?

LOPES: [00:28:09] Well, I think it was supposed to be seven weeks. But then they decided to add on a week or two and I think it became nine. Because I remember they gave us, when they added on the time, they gave us a long weekend. And I flew to Ontario to see my girlfriend. I remember that.

KLEIN: [00:28:38] Getting to be a world traveler.

LOPES: [00:28:39] Yeah. Um. So, you know, it may have been six and one, seven and two.

KLEIN: [00:28:46] But total then was close to nine weeks.

LOPES: [00:28:48] I think about nine, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:28:51] Do you recall final selection? I mean, the effect on the group?

LOPES: [00:28:55] Oh, it was devastating.

KLEIN: [00:28:57] In what way?

LOPES: [00:28:57] Because everybody got a piece of paper slipped under their door. And so, you know, you're walking around with your piece of paper and you're wondering, you know, what kind of piece of paper did you get, you know, because obviously there were two kinds of pieces of paper. And actually, you know. God, this is bringing back crazy memories. There may have been two periods. There may have been an intermediate.

KLEIN: [00:29:23] I think so.

LOPES: [00:29:24] And a final. Yeah. Now that I think of that. But I remember the final. We had moved dorms because, I don't know, summer school was starting or something, and we moved over to the girls campus, which was the Downer campus. Rutgers females. Is it Downer?

KLEIN: [00:29:45] Douglass.

LOPES: [00:29:46] Douglass, right, Douglass. So something happened. We had to move. We moved to Douglass, and that's I remember that's where we got the final note under the door, was at Douglass.

KLEIN: [00:29:57] Do you recall, were many people deselected?

LOPES: [00:30:01] Well, 62 went, so.

KLEIN: [00:30:05] So maybe from 83. Were there people deselected that where you or others in the group felt that they shouldn't be? They shouldn't have been deselected?

LOPES: [00:30:25] No, I don't think so. And I'm speculating here. My guess is we basically said somebody else knows better than we do. Although during training, we did have some complaint about something because I remember we all wrote a letter to Shriver and said, this is bullshit, you know. I don't remember what it was. I don't know if it was language training or what it was. It was some complaint that we had. And we wrote to him and it got changed. Whatever it was, and I don't remember. But no, I don't remember any. You know, some surprises. But I don't remember anybody being terribly disgruntled about others leaving.

KLEIN: [00:31:13] Through the training, though, you felt pretty confident that you were going to be selected.

LOPES: [00:31:18] No, I wasn't. I wasn't terribly. I wasn't all that confident because, you know, at that time and in some measure to this day, I'm still not a terribly. Second youngest person in the group.

LOPES: [00:31:30] Oh, OK, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:31:33] Now your two friends, they were in the group too?

LOPES: [00:31:35] Oh, no, no, no. That's a whole other story. If you want, we can get that.

KLEIN: [00:31:40] When you write your book.

LOPES: [00:31:42] No. Let me just tell you, because it's got an interesting ending, if this is a good time to do it. Um, one of those guys, six months later had decided to not go on to school, went back to work on his father's ranch. The Mentholatum guy got an invitation to India and went to India. The third

guy decided to go on to school, went to Stanford, got a degree in history in and graduated in 1963, then went into the Peace Corps two years after me. Wound up in Colombia, and ready for this?

KLEIN: [00:32:24] Yes.

LOPES: [00:32:24] He wound up eventually, after trading sites here and there, back in my site in Colombia.

KLEIN: [00:32:32] That's incredible.

LOPES: [00:32:33] That's a wonderful story. I love that story. I haven't seen him since we left Coalinga in 1961. We still talk every once. We were going to get together in Washington because, you know, we've been all these years, you know, we're going to get together, we're going to get together. He lives in Mississippi and has lived for years. So all of those guys wound up in the Peace Corps, and the guy who went to India is one of the few returned volunteers that I've ever met who hates the country he served in. He hates India, hates Indians.

KLEIN: [00:33:14] I've encountered a few.

LOPES: [00:33:14] There aren't very many, though, there aren't very many. So anyway, that's what happened to those two guys. Where were we?

KLEIN: [00:33:23] Well, I had asked whether you felt confident and you indicated that you were a little uncertain.

LOPES: [00:33:29] Yeah, my Spanish was good. I was, you know, I passed all the physical tests. I could ride horses. I was good in the things that we were, you know, we were going to do. I mean, I knew about chickens and I knew about carpentry and I knew about rabbits.

KLEIN: [00:33:48] And so you did have agricultural training?

LOPES: [00:33:52] Well, no, we didn't have agricultural training. Well, no, we didn't have any agricultural training, but we were told about the kinds of things we might do. We got into more agricultural training after we got in-country.

KLEIN: [00:34:01] Yeah, OK.

LOPES: [00:34:03] But I was not, still wasn't terribly confident as I recall, but I made it.

KLEIN: [00:34:13] During training, did you have? Was the group divided as to where they would ultimately be assigned?

LOPES: [00:34:21] Oh no, we didn't know that until after we'd been in-country for a while. Because we did like another four weeks of training in-country.

KLEIN: [00:34:30] Did the people from CARE who were part of the training, was it the intent that they were going to go with you to Colombia, or were you going to encounter a different group?

LOPES: [00:34:40] No, some of them. Well, I don't remember whether they were there with us or they traveled up from Colombia to spend time with us, I don't remember. But some of them that were in New Brunswick were with us down there.

KLEIN: [00:34:52] What was CARE's overall agenda in being in Colombia? I mean, I don't know.

LOPES: [00:34:58] Well, are you familiar with CARE's background? You know, it started off with care packages and food, but by that time they were into all kinds of stuff. They were giving people not only food, but they were giving them tools. They were giving them money to do things with. So they were involved in lots and lots of stuff and deeply involved in Colombia. Lots of people there. Lots of activity.

KLEIN: [00:35:24] Where was their money coming from? Some must have been from the feds.

LOPES: [00:35:33] That's a good question, I don't know that. But my recollection, Bob, is that in those days, I mean, we're talking about Point Four. We're talking about predecessor to AID. And I don't remember that there was much contracting with non-government, I mean, certainly nothing like it is today. But I don't know. I mean, we talked a lot about Point Four in training and what they were doing, but I don't remember that connection.

KLEIN: [00:36:04] Did you have, was there any talk of CIA, any sense of possible involvement? Did you play a game about who might be the CIA guy in the group?

LOPES: [00:36:20] If we did, I don't recall. Don't recall. I do remember us being told that that might happen. I'm not sure we were ever prepped as to what to do about it. I'm thinking of another of another incident because it involved Fred Pike from Notre Dame. We had a guy come from Washington. I don't think it was Peace Corps Washington. Maybe AID or I don't know what it was. But some guy who came and did with us for a couple of evenings something called buzz groups. And what these essentially were, in hindsight, I think they were kind of personal growth action taking groups.

LOPES: [00:37:14] And Pike got livid. Because I remember this, I mean, it just shocked everybody. He gets up in this lecture hall where we were all the time. He gets up in the middle of one of these things and saying, this is an insult to your intelligence, and he just kind of went on and on and stomped out and wanted us to stomp out. I don't remember what happened, but that was a big deal. And then, of course, people from Washington came, what the hell's going on? What the hell's going on here?

KLEIN: [00:37:44] Do you remember a guy named Charlie Peters coming out?

LOPES: [00:37:47] I know Charlie Peters. I don't know, was Charlie Peters with Peace Corps at that time?

KLEIN: [00:37:50] Yeah.

LOPES: [00:37:51] Was he? Because I worked for Charlie Peters later on.

KLEIN: [00:37:54] Oh, OK.

LOPES: [00:37:55] But no, I don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:37:59] So the trainings came to an end, and 62 of you were chosen.

LOPES: [00:38:03] Right. We went home for a week.

KLEIN: [00:38:06] Do you recall what the week was like? I mean, did you have second thoughts? Did the family say, don't go or?

LOPES: [00:38:13] Oh no, I had no second thoughts. And my family never said, don't go. But they would not have been unhappy if I'd have said, I'm not going. Because, you know, I'm supposed to take over this business and it's OK if you go to school and go to college and stay around, but going this far away. And there was a rule then, I couldn't come home. We could not come home during the period, so it was goodbye for two years. And you know, I'm the oldest son, I'm the oldest grandson on my mother's side, and here I'm taking off, you know. That was not easy.

KLEIN: [00:38:52] Did you have a specific shopping list that you were to buy? You know, the kinds of clothing and stuff?

LOPES: [00:38:57] Oh no. Oh no. Piece of cake because they gave us everything.

KLEIN: [00:39:00] They did?

LOPES: [00:39:00] Oh yeah, yeah. When we got to Colombia, we were just supposed to take one suitcase with, you know, dress stuff in it. Because when we got to Colombia, we had a duffel bag. Damn thing was this high filled to the gills with Sears clothes. Three pairs of boots, short sleeve shirts, long sleeved shirts, khaki pants, gray pants, socks, jackets, underwear, the whole nine yards.

KLEIN: [00:39:32] So was there any kind of official send off when you left your town to come? Were you to report to Washington, was that the deal?

LOPES: [00:39:44] No, no, no. We got together at JFK. It wasn't JFK then. Idlewild. Yeah.

LOPES: [00:39:54] We just all flew into Idlewild and we left from there. No, there was no, I don't recall any send off from home. I went around and said goodbye to my friends kind of thing.

KLEIN: [00:40:04] But you had mention meeting Kennedy, though. And I'm not sure where that came in the sequence.

LOPES: [00:40:10] That came where we were at Rutgers. We went one day to Washington.

KLEIN: [00:40:16] Just put you on a bus and took you on down there?

LOPES: [00:40:18] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:40:19] Was it just your group?

LOPES: [00:40:20] Just our group, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:40:22] And what do you recall of that?

LOPES: [00:40:25] I recall us standing in this big room, sparsely furnished, with gorgeous hardwood floors and this huge staircase. I ought to go back there and see if I can recollect. I've been in the White House since, but I never thought about this. And here he comes down these steps, and what I remember about him was he was stiff. I remember he had that bad back, and I don't remember anybody ever telling me that before. But he comes down, you know, he comes down the, you know, kind of one of these numbers, you know, that's kind of. He just came down. We were all standing there. He stands there with us. We're just in a big crowd. Everybody said, don't take any pictures, but everybody was lifting their camera, taking pictures like this. And we just spent a few minutes there with him. And you know, hi, how you doing? Glad to see you. Good luck. That sort of stuff.

KLEIN: [00:41:17] Was the press there also?

LOPES: [00:41:19] No, no, no. Just us. Yeah, just us.

KLEIN: [00:41:22] Did you meet, get a chance to go on like a reception line and shake hands with him individually?

LOPES: [00:41:30] No, but I think he shook hands with us all right there in the circle.

KLEIN: [00:41:33] Sort of just kind of moved around.

LOPES: [00:41:36] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:41:36] Did he give any kind of speech?

LOPES: [00:41:39] Uh, very low key. As I say, it was, very proud of you. Glad to see you're going, glad of your interest. We think this is a great thing. You guys are hot shit, you know, that sort of stuff.

KLEIN: [00:41:51] Shriver must have been there, too.

LOPES: [00:41:52] Probably, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:41:54] OK. I didn't know that was the sequence. So you report to Idlewild Airport. Was it a charter flight?

LOPES: [00:42:03] Yeah, it was a charter flight on a Colombian airline. Avianca. It was a Constellation. It was a four engine Constellation, which is the only thing that was flying to South America in those days. You know, jets had only started in what, '59?

KLEIN: [00:42:20] Right.

LOPES: [00:42:21] This is '61, I mean. So we flew. It took forever to get there. We arrived in the middle of the night and one of the things, you know, I'm sure they had told us a zillion times that in Bogota, it gets colder than hell. And

it was just freezing cold, and there was some screw up with the transportation. It was 3:00 in the morning and we were waiting around hanging around the airport.

KLEIN: [00:42:52] This must have been in September then?

LOPES: [00:42:55] It was, I believe this was September, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:42:57] Yeah, because you went into training in June, you had the nine weeks.

LOPES: [00:43:01] Yeah, it was September.

KLEIN: [00:43:06] What was your initial impression? Obviously the initial impression must have been it's cold here.

LOPES: [00:43:12] Well yeah, that was the first thing. It was colder than hell. And we went directly to this Rockefeller Foundation experiment station, experimental station, agriculture agricultural experimental station, and stayed in these dorms.

KLEIN: [00:43:29] Where was the station?

LOPES: [00:43:30] It was, um.

KLEIN: [00:43:32] In relation to Bogota.

LOPES: [00:43:33] Well, it's a bus ride. Maybe 20 minute bus ride, 15 minute bus ride outside of Bogota. Facatativá.

KLEIN: [00:43:45] What was the name of it?

LOPES: [00:43:47] Facatativá.

KLEIN: [00:43:48] OK, you're going to have to write that out after. Was there any kind of reception at the airport from on the Colombian side?

LOPES: [00:44:00] I don't recall. You know, it was cold, we were tired, and we were probably drunk.

KLEIN: [00:44:09] So they allowed you drinking at this point.

LOPES: [00:44:10] Oh yeah, oh yeah. We had a good time. I don't remember. My guess is not because after we got to, I'm sorry, it's not Facatativá. It's Tibaitatá. Tibaitatá is the name of the experiment station. Ok, but the bus was Facatativá. The bus we got on was to Facatativá. Because while we were at Tibaitatá, there was this whole stream of Colombian officials who came to visit us. So I don't think there was anything official at the airport.

KLEIN: [00:44:51] Now what did you do? How long were you at the station and what was the agenda there?

LOPES: [00:45:01] I'm guessing about four weeks. It may have been three, may have been two and a half, I don't remember. But lots of introduction to Colombia. Lots of introduction to Acción Comunal, which was our program. The guy who was there.

KLEIN: [00:45:19] Now was that the CARE program?

LOPES: [00:45:21] No, no, no. CARE was just the administrative unit.

KLEIN: [00:45:24] Ok. Acción Comunal.

LOPES: [00:45:26] Acción Comunal. Community action.

KLEIN: [00:45:28] Is a program of the Colombia government?

LOPES: [00:45:30] Right. A cabinet level national program.

KLEIN: [00:45:34] Ok, that you would then assign to?

LOPES: [00:45:37] We were assigned to, that's right. They were our guides. They were our supervisors, our counterparts. Each one of us had counterparts and our counterparts were employees of either Acción Comunal or the

coffee federation, depending on how we got assigned. We did agriculture. I mean, we did a lot of field trips. I saw my first gathering of semen from a bull because they had a station there. Chickens, rabbits. There were some classes, but most of it was just visiting places that were doing this stuff.

KLEIN: [00:46:17] So they put you on a bus and take you to these things.

LOPES: [00:46:22] Off we'd go.

KLEIN: [00:46:22] Did you, at any time during this time, did any of you have a sense that they were just delaying because they weren't ready for you?

LOPES: [00:46:37] No, not that I recall. Not that I recall. I mean, you know, they were probably putting it together as we went along much the way they were doing in Rutgers.

KLEIN: [00:46:45] Now during this time at the station, then they must have begun to work out your assignments.

LOPES: [00:46:59] Yes. Yes, yes.

KLEIN: [00:47:00] OK. Go ahead.

LOPES: [00:47:02] And they did. They did a couple of very interesting things.

KLEIN: [00:47:08] Tell me who the "they" is in this case.

LOPES: [00:47:10] Well, it was CARE who was, you know, watching over us there because the Peace Corps country director didn't come until much later. Chris Sheldon, you know, he came much later. So for all practical purposes, it was CARE. So they were the ones that were at Tibaitatá and they were the ones that were involved with this.

KLEIN: [00:47:32] Were they all Americans or Colombians or a mix?

LOPES: [00:47:38] They were all Americans. The secretarial staff were Colombian, but as I recall, they were all Americans.

KLEIN: [00:47:44] So it's still kind of an American show up to this point.

LOPES: [00:47:48] Yeah, yeah. An American show. But every place we went, everybody who talked to us, were all Colombians. Who didn't speak any English. But one of the things they did to us that I still think was a hell of a good idea. They matched us, a strong Spanish speaker with a weak Spanish speaker. And the idea was that we would spend three months together and then the strong Spanish speaker would move on to another assignment. And we were in twos for the most part. I don't think anybody started off singly. We wound up singly. But I don't think anybody started off singly.

KLEIN: [00:48:37] Right.

LOPES: [00:48:41] No, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. No, I think I'm wrong, I think it's the reverse of that. I think, because we were supposed to all split up, you know, after that 30 days, then everybody would be gone. So I think it was the exception that you were with somebody. And so the first place I went, I knew I was going to be gone in 90 days and the guy who I was with, wonderful guy, Ron Schwartz. He spent most of his time in Nairobi, most of his adult life. Hell of a guy. My first real introduction to Judaism. It was just, because his mother and grandmother lived in Kings Highway in Brooklyn. So we went to a long weekend and I went there. It was wonderful. And then later on, I went to visit his father, who had remarried and lived in Connecticut. He was a big shot, you know? So those two kind of glancing lifetimes.

LOPES: [00:49:49] It was wonderful. Anyway, so towards the end of the three-month period, Ron Schwartz was saying, hey, you know, I think I don't think I want you to leave. I want you to stay, you know? I said, no, no, no, I want to go. I want to go. And it just happened that one of those guys that was sitting next to me on that plane from San Francisco to Idlewild was also the strong Spanish speaker, and he was moving on. And Peace Corps had gotten a request from a priest. And the priest said, contacted the Peace Corps and said, I want some volunteers here, OK? So the Peace Corps, Gerry McMahon, this other guy's, told the Peace Corps,

we'd like to be together. They said, hey, you know, we just got this inquiry from this priest. Let's go out there and take a look at it. So we went out there.

KLEIN: [00:50:46] Now, where was there?

LOPES: [00:50:48] Well, where I spent the first three months was in southern Santander province.

KLEIN: [00:50:58] Ok. Can you give me a sense of how the group dispersed? I mean, in relation to Colombia?

LOPES: [00:51:06] We were everywhere, except in the Amazon area.

KLEIN: [00:51:16] OK.

LOPES: [00:51:20] There were a few of us in the jungles of, close to Panama, but there were a couple there.

KLEIN: [00:51:29] Were there assignments that were considered better than others? I mean, or more desirable?

LOPES: [00:51:36] Yeah, at that time, the closer you were to Bogota, the nicer it was going to be.

KLEIN: [00:51:40] Why?

LOPES: [00:51:40] Because you could get into Bogota.

KLEIN: [00:51:42] And there were no other major cities you could relate to?

LOPES: [00:51:45] Oh yeah, there were. But Bogota was the one that we knew. But we were all, you know, fairly close to big cities, because Colombia has a lot of big cities. I mean, in my first assignment in southern Santander province, I was maybe three quarters of an hour from the state capital. And my second, my second assignment was an eight-hour bus ride.

KLEIN: [00:52:14] Ok, now the first assignment, you were there for about three months just by yourself?

LOPES: [00:52:21] No, with Ron Schwartz, with the other guy, with the week Spanish speaker supposedly.

KLEIN: [00:52:25] And what was your assignment?

LOPES: [00:52:32] Well, we had been met by our counterpart. We had a counterpart in that. Ron and I both concluded shortly thereafter that he was a worthless son of a bitch, but we had, you know, we had a counterpart. And so he had been there for a while. And the guy who he worked for, who was an employee, also an employee of the coffee federation. We wound up living in his house. Living in his house. He had a big room that had been a bar. He said, you know, if you want that, you guys can have that. So we fixed that sucker up and lived in it.

KLEIN: [00:53:09] Were you expected to find your own housing?

LOPES: [00:53:12] Yeah, we were expected to find our own housing. That was our toot. Yeah, our own housing and our own transportation.

KLEIN: [00:53:18] Now who was paying you?

LOPES: [00:53:25] I mean, where was the money coming from or how were we getting paid, what was the mechanism?

KLEIN: [00:53:29] I mean, you weren't on the Colombian payroll.

LOPES: [00:53:30] No, I wasn't on the, no. The money was coming from CARE. And what happened was, one of the things we had to do, was set up a bank account in a town as near to our places as we could. And then they would wire money, which is what they did, wire our living allowance.

KLEIN: [00:53:48] OK. And do you have any idea, you remember what the level of the living allowance was, whether it was adequate?

LOPES: [00:53:53] Oh, it was more than adequate, more than adequate. Yeah, I mean, we had plenty money. But you know, it also didn't cost us hardly anything. I mean, I'm not sure we paid any rent for that converted bar.

KLEIN: [00:54:10] Was that because it was, you were part of this, the coffee federation?

LOPES: [00:54:15] No, no, no. We were expected to pay rent. Now, in hindsight, we must have paid him something. Because I don't think he would have let us stay there without paying him something.

KLEIN: [00:54:26] When you went out to this first assignment, did you begin to think that, you know, well, I'm a Peace Corps volunteer and there's work for me to do and a sense of becoming part of something?

LOPES: [00:54:40] Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:54:43] And were you prepared and did you proceed then to sort of relate primarily to Colombians?

LOPES: [00:54:51] Oh yeah, immediately.

KLEIN: [00:54:54] Ron have a little problem with that because of the Spanish?

LOPES: [00:54:57] A little bit, but Ron's not a shy guy. It didn't stop him, you know?

KLEIN: [00:55:01] Yeah.

LOPES: [00:55:01] You know, he, unlike me, I didn't want to talk unless I knew exactly how I was going to say it. But it didn't come out right. He didn't have that problem at all. He just said it, you know? And so we immediately, I mean, see, when we first got there, it was time. We had to go in and buy a bed. We had to paint the place. We had to get a bank account. We had to buy a horse. You know, we had to do all of this settling in stuff. So we had to interact with everybody. I mean, there were no Americans around to help us do that.

KLEIN: [00:55:33] Why a horse?

LOPES: [00:55:35] Because we had to get out into the rural areas and the only road into that first place ended in the town. There were no other roads. So in order to get anywhere, we had to ride.

KLEIN: [00:55:50] During that first period, can you describe what would be a typical day? I mean, how did you spend your time?

LOPES: [00:56:04] Initially, we just spent our time going out and meeting people and talking to people and see what was going on. Because Dick Poston had told us, the first thing you do when you get there is you figure out what the needs are. You know, you figure out what the hell these people want. And you know, you can't do a survey. So the only way you know that is to go out and talk to people. At the same time, we're getting to know people, we're improving our Spanish, and we're talking to them about what the hell's going on here.

KLEIN: [00:56:32] Did your counterpart do the same thing?

LOPES: [00:56:36] Yeah, yeah. I mean, he was supposed to do a lot more, but you know, he was lazy, so he didn't always go with us. But yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:56:44] So on any given day during that time, it might be the two of you going out?

LOPES: [00:56:49] Or the three of us. Or sometimes this fellow who was our landlord who would also go out with us. We all had horses. We'd all go out on horseback and just talk to people.

KLEIN: [00:57:02] What kind of reception did you get, particularly when you got out to the village? I mean, were people suspicious? Were they accepting?

LOPES: [00:57:11] Nah, nah. They were, what the hell are you doing here? This is the end of the world. What are you doing here? They were enormously gracious and enormously forthcoming. Enormously inquisitive. But I think

all the time really wondering, you know, what the hell is this guy doing here, you know?

KLEIN: [00:57:35] Did you identify yourself as a Peace Corps volunteer?

LOPES: [00:57:39] Oh, yeah, right from the beginning.

KLEIN: [00:57:41] What was, did people recognize the name Kennedy?

LOPES: [00:57:45] Oh yeah, oh yeah. Many of the houses that we went into had Kennedy's picture.

KLEIN: [00:57:50] Oh interesting.

LOPES: [00:57:52] Many of them. And the Alliance for Progress was a big deal. That was an economic development program of Kennedy's.

KLEIN: [00:58:00] Right.

LOPES: [00:58:14] We had had, during training, we'd heard a lot about the church. Big deal, you know? I mean, we went into a lot of houses that said, Protestantism is communism. I mean, it was that blatant. And the church in Colombia had a radio station. And they distributed radios to every campesino they could. The radio only got one station though, theirs. It was still an interesting idea, but they have this radio and they had a newspaper. And so we were talked up on that radio station and in one issue of the newspaper, it had a small picture of every single one of us. With our specialty, because we were assigned specialties. Nobody quite understood why, but mine was carpentry.

KLEIN: [00:59:10] Oh, it was. OK.

LOPES: [00:59:13] Uh, so it's possible that they heard about us, but they certainly knew about Kennedy. But there was, during my entire time there was no end of wondering, you know, what the hell are you doing here? You know, why do you come here to suffer?

KLEIN: [00:59:33] Ah, OK. And how did you deal with that? Or how did you respond to that?

LOPES: [00:59:38] Well, we talked about the Peace Corps and what the mission of the Peace Corps was. You know, we're here to help. God, how many times did I say that? And we're here to learn about you and have you learn about us. I wound up, I'm not sure I went there terribly social. I don't know. But I certainly wound up being that way because Colombians are very social. I mean, they'll invite you to everything. They love to drink and they love to get knocked down, falling down drunk, and they'll just stand there and get drunk and they want you to get drunk with them. And they play games. They play pool in some places, they play bolo in some places, they play pool, and so they play all kinds of stuff and they invite you to be part of it.

KLEIN: [01:00:23] Yeah, which is great.

LOPES: [01:00:25] Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:00:28] Within the village, I mean, within the rural village you were going to, was there a traditional structure? I mean, the strong family ties, extended families, strong role for the church.

LOPES: [01:00:44] All of that. And a strong political culture, because Colombia is a very political place. And people identified with their party. And oftentimes people of one party did not speak to people of the other party. And we had to be very careful about that.

KLEIN: [01:01:06] But inevitably, it would seem to me, if you're there to do the need survey or to help facilitate change within the community, you're going to bump up against the political process.

LOPES: [01:01:20] And we did.

KLEIN: [01:01:21] It couldn't have gone well, I mean.

LOPES: [01:01:24] Well. I'll give you the most blatant example. Actually, I can give you two. This didn't happen in the first place because I wasn't there long enough. But it certainly happened in the other place, and the other place was much more divided politically among the conservatives and the liberals. We had to be very careful about. Because after we were there for a while, we learned who was who and we had to be very careful to play both sides. But we, in San Joaquín, which was the name of the second place that we went, where the priest had done a lot of preliminary work. But three months after he was, we were there, he got run out of town. So that's another story.

LOPES: [01:02:13] But, um, lots of brawls. Lots of shootings. Everybody was armed. Everybody either had a gun or a knife. And one day, the mayor of the town. We were standing at the edge of the plaza, leaning against a tree, talking to somebody and he starts walking down the street and he gets right across from us. And I'll be damned if somebody didn't run up from behind him and stick a knife right in his back. And run away. We knew who he was.

KLEIN: [01:03:00] He's just been stabbed in the back.

LOPES: [01:03:02] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:03:03] And you were witness to it.

LOPES: [01:03:04] Yeah, we ran over there immediately. And of course, the doctor was right there, ripped his clothes off, but he was dead. So Jerry, Jerry McMahon was my partner. We talked about this and we said, you know, there's, we need to do something to say this is not right. So what we decided to do was leave and we told everybody we're leaving, because you guys fucked up. We're leaving. We don't like this. So we left. And we didn't tell them we were coming back or not. So we went to Bucaramanga, the state capital, and stayed there for a few days. Talked to Peace Corps. You know, by this time there was a Peace Corps staff, but we still related mostly to the CARE staff. And decided we'd go back.

KLEIN: [01:03:54] But you made the decision to leave without consulting with either CARE or Peace Corps.

LOPES: [01:03:59] Yeah, we just did it.

KLEIN: [01:04:02] You must have been, I mean, it must have been kind of shocking.

LOPES: [01:04:05] Oh, I was, I mean, I've never seen anybody killed, before then or since so. But the suspicion was that that mayor. Mayors were named. Mayors were not elected. So the suspicion was that it was the other party that got him. And we knew who stabbed him. And we were prepared to tell. Nobody ever asked us. Interesting.

KLEIN: [01:04:35] And you didn't volunteer the information.

LOPES: [01:04:37] No, we didn't volunteer. But the guy took off and he was gone for months. But the second incident is not so much political, but it's this violent culture and drinking and drunkenness. One of our major projects was, because in this second town, the whole municipality was divided into small areas called *veredas*. And our goal was to create a community organization in every one of those *veredas* for the purpose of identifying needs and doing stuff. So, you know, in some places it worked great, other places it didn't work at all, but we were trying to work with all of these. I think there were 13 *veredas*. But in this one, well, the great need was a school. So we got them a CINVA-Ram machine, which is a block making machine. Are you familiar with CINVA-Ram?

KLEIN: [01:05:38] Yeah.

LOPES: [01:05:38] Block making machine from CARE. And we got them some cement from CARE. And then they did all the mixing and they paid the people and built the school. Well, towards the end, well, it was the end because our replacements were already there. We were up there at the inauguration of this school. I mean, this was a happy day. You know, everybody helped, this is hot shit, we built this school. See, folks, you can do stuff for yourself. And everybody started getting drunker and drunker

and drunker, and I was, you know, two sheets to the wind myself. So everybody started pulling out guns, shooting them up in the air and carrying on. I got really pissed and I probably wouldn't have got pissed if I was more sober, but I got really pissed again and I went around and I took them away from them. I took the guns away and so. And I told them, I'm not giving them back until you come and see me at home. So they all came eventually. But hell, I probably had half a dozen guns and half a dozen knives that I collected because I was sure they were going to kill somebody each other.

KLEIN: [01:06:42] You must have enjoyed a certain immunity from all the gunfire, pistol toting and everything.

LOPES: [01:06:48] Oh yeah, oh yeah. Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. We never felt fear. Ever.

KLEIN: [01:06:55] And no one ever took you aside and warned you about overstepping.

LOPES: [01:07:00] Never.

KLEIN: [01:07:00] How much of all this did you inform either CARE or the Peace Corps about?

LOPES: [01:07:08] I think most. We certainly informed him about the murder. And we were always having to do reports. So I can't think of any reason why we wouldn't have told them about it. Didn't keep it from them.

KLEIN: [01:07:28] Did various policies then start coming out from Peace Corps headquarters in Bogota?

LOPES: [01:07:35] Yeah, they started getting bureaucratized and organized. But they still didn't get very far while we were there. I mean, we were basically on our own and we basically did what we wanted.

KLEIN: [01:07:47] Did you ever have visits? I gather you spent much more time on the second, at the second assignment?

LOPES: [01:07:54] Oh yeah, I was there for the rest of my time.

KLEIN: [01:07:56] OK. Did you have visits from Peace Corps staff and or CARE staff?

LOPES: [01:08:02] Oh yeah, because one of the things they did organizationally was they selected four of the oldest volunteers of our group and made them what they called volunteer leaders. Gave them a jeep and they kind of traveled around in sections, each one had a section of the country. So they would come around every once in a while and see how we're doing.

KLEIN: [01:08:22] And so that was your main contact.

LOPES: [01:08:24] That was our main contact. That was the main contact. We got together once during the two-year period, all of us together. You know, there were times when somebody got married and we'd get together or something like that. But the only time we all got together was in March or April of '62. Because if you ever want to read some interesting history, read the Brazilian political history because part of this, one of the results of this violence. Because they had violence throughout the forties and fifties, they were killing each other like crazy. And actually, our site, that's another place where volunteers did not go. There was a place called Zona de la Violencia, the violence area. Nobody went to the violence area. We were the closest to the violence area, but we were not in it. But anyway, as part of an effort to try to get around this violence and this political bickering, the conservatives and the liberals made a deal. They decided that for the next 16 years, when they elected a president every four years, they would rotate the presidents.

KLEIN: [01:09:44] OK. Switch them.

LOPES: [01:09:45] Yeah. I mean, incredible thing. Incredible thing.

LOPES: [01:09:48] But in the spring of '62, March, April, something like that, was to be the first actual election. Because when they made the deal, Lleras Camargo, who I think was the liberal, became the president. So then the

first election was to elect the conservative. Nobody knew what the hell was going to go on. So the president of the country went to the Peace Corps director and he said, I think it's smart if those guys get out of there because we don't know what the hell is going to happen.

KLEIN: [01:10:25] And this was everyone?

LOPES: [01:10:27] Everybody. So they took us off to the coast. There was no violence on the coast. All they did was drink and dance on the coast. So they took us all to the coast and we were there for two weeks. And they made the mistake of, they had to pretend it was a conference, so we had to have some meetings, but they had the meetings in the Beer Workers Union Hall. They had this big thing of beer there all the time. So we just had a great time. But that was the only time we ever got together as a group, except at the end.

KLEIN: [01:10:56] Where you were assigned, how close were you to other volunteers?

LOPES: [01:11:04] The closest other volunteer to us was probably six hours away.

KLEIN: [01:11:10] Ok, so you weren't part of a social party network?

LOPES: [01:11:15] Oh no, oh no. We were, but it was really long distance. There were two volunteers in the next province to the northeast over on the Venezuelan border. And during the last three or four months that we were in country, we got together once a weekend each month to get drunk and play pool in the capital city. And as a matter of fact, at the end, we were going to have a big party talking about the bureaucracy of the Peace Corps, and the Peace Corps got wind of it. A whole bunch of us from that area were coming together and we're going to have a big party. The Peace Corps got wind of it and they said, you better not. We said, fuck you, and we had it anyway.

KLEIN: [01:12:11] What was the food like, I mean, what did you do for food? You had the room. The second place, where did you end up living? That was in the old bar?

LOPES: [01:12:20] Right. But in the second place. The first place was the old bar. In the second place we rented three rooms in the nicest house in town. Tile floors, well painted, well-maintained. And the family that owned the house lived in Bogota, and they only came during the summer. So the rest of the time we rented these three rooms, had free run of the house, had toilets, flush toilets, showers, and a maid came with it. Well, we took food in with the priest. We made that deal with the original priest, and we continued it with the second priest who came. We just went there three times a day and broke bread with him.

KLEIN: [01:13:07] Did you tend to work under the guidance or mentoring of the priest? Or were you just working more closely with counterparts then?

LOPES: [01:13:16] We had a counterpart there who was from Acción Comunal and he was good. He was good.

KLEIN: [01:13:22] And the three of you were assigned to the coffee federation?

LOPES: [01:13:25] No, no, no. The second assignment was not with the coffee federation. The second assignment was with Acción Comunal.

KLEIN: [01:13:31] OK. OK.

LOPES: [01:13:32] Yeah, because the second place was not a coffee growing region. The second priest was much more hands-off. You know, the first priest was an energetic, good, liberal, progressive, if not socialist, priest.

KLEIN: [01:13:57] And he had taken the initiative to get you?

LOPES: [01:13:59] That's correct. That's correct. The guy who came in later was much more hands-off and much more, you know, laid back.

KLEIN: [01:14:07] They were both Colombians?

LOPES: [01:14:09] Both Colombians. But knowing the kind of power that he wielded as the priest, we rarely did anything without his OK. I mean that,

you know, sitting with him to eat gave us an opportunity to talk about all kinds of stuff. And we did.

KLEIN: [01:14:25] In your second assignment, did you also do the spending time in the village trying to just meet people, get a sense of needs?

LOPES: [01:14:33] Oh yeah, oh yeah. And traveling out to all these *veredas*, because the priest had already started that process and we were just there to keep it going.

KLEIN: [01:14:41] Was there some point at which you began to feel, well, it's OK to collect all this information, but I have to do something.

LOPES: [01:14:52] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And we started doing from the very beginning, like because he had already started some projects. This school that we finally got built at the end, that was already being talked about, that had already been identified in that *vereda* as what they wanted to do. And another one in another *vereda* was getting piped water, bringing piped water. We never, we worked on that the whole two years, we never got that sucker done. And another was building a road because the municipality was a rectangle and the main road ran across the southern boundary. And the only way you could travel to the north was by horseback. And there was a small town at the north and they wanted to build a road. We didn't, that was certainly one of what everybody wanted, but they started building the road and they got it quite a ways along while we were there. But that really wasn't one of our projects.

KLEIN: [01:15:48] Was there a concept of something called communal labor that, you know, people?

LOPES: [01:15:52] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [01:15:54] Is that traditional? Is it church kind of?

LOPES: [01:16:03] No, it's not churchy, because the church is influential, but when you get out there in the hinterlands, it's much less so. And people were doing it because they bought this concept of self-help. Because, for

example, the school. They collected money to pay the maestro, the guy, the technical guy. But they had volunteers there every day making those bricks. We built some pig sties out of CINVA-Ram block too. Same thing.

KLEIN: [01:16:45] So that concept was in place long before you came.

LOPES: [01:16:48] Yes. Yes. Yes. Again, in varying degrees, depending on these different *veredas*. But yes.

KLEIN: [01:16:54] And the *veredas*, would they have a traditional head or would there be an elected head?

LOPES: [01:17:00] The more organized ones had elected officers.

KLEIN: [01:17:03] But were there strong traditional families within them?

LOPES: [01:17:06] Oh yeah, oh yeah. Every one has, you know, the richest, the most well-off. Relatively speaking, of course. And they command the most. So when we would go there and spend the night, we'd spend it with them. If there wasn't a place, we'd spend the night in the school, because most of the places had schools.

KLEIN: [01:17:27] How did, you travel around completely on horseback?

LOPES: [01:17:31] Completely.

KLEIN: [01:17:32] When you did the long trips for your socializing at the pool hall, how did you travel up to the other cities?

LOPES: [01:17:39] By bus. There was one bus came through in the morning going to the capital city and another bus in the opposite direction at night. So we would get on that bus. We would go to the regional capital, which was about two and a half hours away, switch busses and go into Bogota. It took us about eight hours totally to get in.

KLEIN: [01:18:01] Do you ever get stuck?

LOPES: [01:18:02] Not to Bogota. To Bucaramanga, the state capital. I'm sorry.

KLEIN: [01:18:05] You ever get stuck by the side of the road?

LOPES: [01:18:11] Uh, yeah. A couple of times getting from that regional place into town, busses would break down and we'd have to rent a cab because that was the only other way to get there.

KLEIN: [01:18:21] Oh, so there were jalopies or cabs.

LOPES: [01:18:23] Yeah, they could take a cab.

KLEIN: [01:18:27] During the. Was there any? Let's see. Oh, there was a break point in your service with the two weeks down at the coast. When that finally, when they finally pried you loose from the bar and sent you back to your assignment.

LOPES: [01:18:45] We had a brawl in a whorehouse, too. That is another story.

KLEIN: [01:18:50] Was there, did you go back with some sense of, well, I have about another 10 months and I need to really focus and get certain things done so I can walk away from here.

LOPES: [01:19:02] Yeah, that pressure was always on my partner and I because we wanted to do something. We wanted there, for there to be something left. And we kept being told that's not your assignment. You know, your assignment is instilling this virtuousness of helping each other and self-help. So if you don't have any projects, not a big deal. But we wanted something.

KLEIN: [01:19:26] Did the two of you work together all the time or did you split?

LOPES: [01:19:30] All the time.

KLEIN: [01:19:31] Oh, okay, so you were.

LOPES: [01:19:32] And with the Colombian promoter as well, the third guy.

KLEIN: [01:19:39] When a project moved into being realized, who would get credit or who would claim credit?

LOPES: [01:19:53] We would often get credit. Let me tell you. One of the things that we did a lot of that we haven't touched on here yet, that I think is important. I'm not sure it is important, but I'm not sure how good it was. This Colombian community action organization had a state director in the state capital. And in theory, they were supposed to provide us with support. For example, the galvanized tube to build the dam water system. You go in there and you just you wait and wait and get the runaround, get the runaround. But if we hadn't done that, and Gerry and I did that because we had the money to travel, we had the money to stay overnight if we needed to. Nobody else did. So if we hadn't have done that, that was a very important role for us. So we kind of liked doing that, you know, doing that facilitating thing. In theory or in hindsight, you know, if we want to be purists, we probably would have said, no, that's your job. You figure out a way to get your ass there. We decided that that was not, that was asking too much at the time. So we did a lot of that sort of thing.

KLEIN: [01:21:16] A lot. Yeah. And with the, was it on your own initiative you decided to do it or it came out of the project or I mean, how did you decide well this one's worth it. I mean, who made that judgment?

LOPES: [01:21:32] You mean about projects that we would work on?

KLEIN: [01:21:34] Right, well, and then do the facilitating role?

LOPES: [01:21:38] We made those decisions. Jerry and I made those decisions. Yeah, it was pretty much our show.

KLEIN: [01:21:44] And it was partly out of a sense that you felt you needed to see that some things were achieved?

LOPES: [01:21:50] Yeah, yeah. I think in hindsight, you know, more conceptual. There was a need to do that because things wouldn't get off the dime if

they didn't. Was probably conceptually more important than getting something done, but equally important nonetheless.

KLEIN: [01:22:11] Yeah. McMahon, first name?

LOPES: [01:22:20] Jerry.

KLEIN: [01:22:20] Jerry. You and Jerry were quite fluent in Spanish then?

LOPES: [01:22:24] Yeah, yeah. I was better than him, but we were both good. Because we were both the better speakers in those dyads.

KLEIN: [01:22:31] And you can move about and there were no barriers.

LOPES: [01:22:35] None. None.

KLEIN: [01:22:40] Did you miss American culture, you know, the movies, the this the that? Did the two of you sit there and talk English mostly?

LOPES: [01:22:52] Oh, when we were by ourselves we only spoke English. But that's interesting. Interesting question. I haven't really thought about any of this for a long time. When we would go to the capital city, we would have a good meal and we would go to a movie and we'd chase women. And we liked doing that. But I don't remember ever us sitting around and saying, oh, Jesus Christ, I wish I had a movie to go to, or I wish.

KLEIN: [01:23:25] What about holidays, though? You know when Christmas certainly would be?

LOPES: [01:23:28] Oh yeah, we traveled. We traveled. Well, we didn't always travel. I think the two Christmases we did travel, though, because Cali, which is a beautiful city in southern Colombia with the most beautiful women, has a big gala fiesta during the Christmas time. So we spent both Christmases down there.

KLEIN: [01:23:49] When you were in the village where you were assigned, your behavior had to be somewhat circumspect. I mean, clearly you must have been highly visible.

LOPES: [01:23:59] Oh yeah, absolutely, absolutely. For one thing, our rooms were right on the corner of the plaza where everybody passed.

KLEIN: [01:24:05] OK. Were there any other non-Colombians in the area where you were?

LOPES: [01:24:17] There were a number of people not from the town, but there were not, there were no non-Colombians.

KLEIN: [01:24:24] Missionaries or anything like that.

LOPES: [01:24:26] No, no, no.

KLEIN: [01:24:28] That's very different. So you're coming to the end of the tour. Through the time of year two, were there any particular medical problems that you encountered?

LOPES: [01:24:47] Two that I remember. I got diarrhea right after we got to Tibaitatá, and I spent most of that time trying to get rid of it and couldn't. Took it with me to the site, was there for a few months, and I finally said, this is bullshit. I'll have to adjust my lifestyle. I go to the crapper two or three times a day instead of one. This is easier. So I just decided to do that. When we were at Tibaitatá, I sprained my ankle. We were playing basketball and it was a cement court and it had a ledge. You know, at the end of the cement, it stepped off about six inches and I was running or something. I stepped off, then twisted the hell out of my ankle. And it was my first experience with a native indigenous *curandera*.

KLEIN: [01:25:40] A medical person?

LOPES: [01:25:43] Medical person, and they massaged me with some like my ankle with some stuff, and that was kind of fun. The only other medical emergency I had was I cut my finger. They, uh. Want the light on?

KLEIN: [01:26:00] No.

LOPES: [01:26:00] I cut my finger somehow. I think somebody built a swimming pool and I cut my finger somehow and it got infected. So when I went into Bucaramanga I got a penicillin shot. And then I went back to, by this time, there were other groups there of females. And Jerry was really sweet on one of the females in Bucaramanga. So I went back there and we were drinking, and all of a sudden my head started itching and I started feeling really crazy. So I immediately went back to the clinic and told them what was going on. And that's when I first learned I was allergic to penicillin and haven't had any since. An allergic reaction. But that was the only medical.

KLEIN: [01:26:41] Were there Peace Corps medical doctors?

LOPES: [01:26:44] No, we had a Colombian doctor in Bogota. And we had, they had identified, I don't know who identified for us, doctors in these capital cities that we went to.

KLEIN: [01:26:57] During the majority of the time in the second town, CARE wasn't involved at all?

LOPES: [01:27:04] Oh no, they were still the administrators. And they would send us stuff if we, you know, we needed materials or something, they would help us.

KLEIN: [01:27:11] But they were back there. And you, I mean, in a sense, where you were going with projects was being determined locally.

LOPES: [01:27:18] Yes. A health post, a medical center, is another thing that we constructed, but it was already on the books before we got there. But we got it finished. Again, volunteer labor.

KLEIN: [01:27:29] You mentioned second groups by the time you were in during your second year, was there another Peace Corps group that came?

LOPES: [01:27:38] I think they came during our first year. I think they came pretty fast and furious after we'd been there for a while.

KLEIN: [01:27:45] Do you have any idea of the number of volunteers who were in Colombia about the time, as of the time you left?

LOPES: [01:27:52] My guess is a couple of hundred.

KLEIN: [01:27:54] That many?

LOPES: [01:27:55] Yeah, yeah, because they were doing all kinds of stuff, I mean, they did, some came doing community development. This group that Jerry's girlfriend, now wife, was with was urban community development. There were some educational television volunteers, some university volunteers, lots of, there were lots of people around by then.

KLEIN: [01:28:17] But nobody came out except near the end, your replacements came?

LOPES: [01:28:22] That's correct.

KLEIN: [01:28:23] And how many?

LOPES: [01:28:24] Two guys. And they spent maybe two or three weeks with us.

KLEIN: [01:28:29] And what was your take on them?

LOPES: [01:28:32] We were pleased with them. We thought they were going to do OK. They were pretty hang-loose guys. Very serious.

KLEIN: [01:28:39] Language ability?

LOPES: [01:28:40] Not good, but OK.

KLEIN: [01:28:45] How did you stay in touch with the outside world during your time? You must have been aware of the things that were going on.

LOPES: [01:28:57] Peace Corps got everybody a subscription to Time magazine and the New Republic.

KLEIN: [01:29:02] Oh, OK.

LOPES: [01:29:03] So I began to be a New Republic reader then, and I still am. So that's how we stayed in touch. No phones. Telegraph. We could send telegrams and mail.

KLEIN: [01:29:18] Did you get a Peace Corps book locker?

LOPES: [01:29:20] Yep, got a Peace Corps book locker. Yeah, that came sometime later, but yeah.

KLEIN: [01:29:26] Right, right. I think during somewhere in the second year.

LOPES: [01:29:29] It was a great thing.

KLEIN: [01:29:31] Oh yeah, great thing.

LOPES: [01:29:33] And we socialized a lot. You know, I often tell my kids a story, because my youngest son is a jazz guitar player. He has a degree in jazz guitar and I don't have a musical bone in my body. But I tell the story about Jerry and I both decide we want to learn how to play Colombian guitar, which is a 12-string guitar. We thought that was cool, so we got the best guitar player in town to come over. So the first night he comes over and gives us a couple of lessons and he says, you got anything to drink? So we drank for a while. Second night he came, lessons were shorter. He says, you got anything to drink? So I only got about three or four lessons and all we did was drink.

LOPES: [01:30:14] Everybody plays guitar and they're very social people. We had dances, we had parties, birthdays here and there. One of the things we did was we had a fiesta of Acción Comunal and we elected a queen. By this time, this girlfriend of Jerry's was coming out to visit us. So she got to be the queen of Acción Comunal. And there were weddings and I was a godfather, religious godfather, for six children. And we'd been told in

training that that was the most obvious signal that you had been accepted. So I felt good about that. And I stayed in touch with those kids for a while. I don't anymore.

KLEIN: [01:30:59] Yeah. Did you tend to relate to particular families or people?

LOPES: [01:31:05] Oh yeah, oh yeah. There was this one family who had two girls, three girls, and two kids we got very close to. She was a school teacher, the oldest daughter was a schoolteacher. Pretty poor family. We got close to them. We got very close to the family that ran the little pension, the little hotel. And they had an extended family. And then there were several *vereda* leaders that we got close to.

KLEIN: [01:31:43] Some people find one or two individuals who become, oh, like informants or mentors, you know, in relation to the traditional culture. But someone who you get a little closer to, you can actually joke with. Did anyone like that emerge?

LOPES: [01:32:03] Oh yeah. I mean, we could joke with almost everybody. And we got information from everybody. We didn't have, it wasn't limited to to certain people.

KLEIN: [01:32:14] You didn't feel any great social distance with between you and the people.

LOPES: [01:32:19] Oh no. Oh no. Quite to the contrary. Quite to the contrary, we were. We were part of it.

KLEIN: [01:32:28] Was that common in the group, do you know?

LOPES: [01:32:30] In our Peace Corps group?

KLEIN: [01:32:31] Right.

LOPES: [01:32:37] I don't know. I don't know. I don't know, but we were very social. I mean, Jerry loved to drink, you know, he loved to drink a whole lot more

than I did, and that's what they did. So standing around with them and drinking and playing pool, you know, is.

KLEIN: [01:32:55] You usually go to a bar for this?

LOPES: [01:32:57] Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:33:01] Weekends. Were weekends any different than the, was it a normal Monday to Friday work week?

LOPES: [01:33:06] No, it wasn't because a lot of this volunteer work got done on weekends. Wednesday was the market day, so that split things up. There was a market every week. But people came in on Saturdays to do shopping. People came into church on Sundays, so we did a lot of work on Saturdays and Sundays.

KLEIN: [01:33:26] Were you both churchgoers?

LOPES: [01:33:29] No. Well, I was born and raised a Catholic, and we would go to mass every once in a while. But no, not a big deal.

KLEIN: [01:33:37] And the priest, no one made an issue of that?

LOPES: [01:33:43] No, no.

KLEIN: [01:33:43] Most projects at the end had what was called a termination conference.

LOPES: [01:33:50] Yeah, we did that.

KLEIN: [01:33:52] Where?

LOPES: [01:33:53] In Bogota.

KLEIN: [01:33:55] During your service, did you take any vacation leave and go out of Colombia?

LOPES: [01:34:01] Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:34:02] Where did you travel?

LOPES: [01:34:03] Jerry and I, first we traveled together. We did two vacations. The first one, we flew from Bogota to Guatemala City. And then we came back by land all the way to Panama. Hitchhiking and taking busses and doing all that sort of stuff. It was a great trip. We visited every Central American country except Costa Rica and Honduras.

KLEIN: [01:34:27] Was there a policy, a Peace Corps policy, that you would not to return to the United States?

LOPES: [01:34:32] Yes. Yes. Were not to return to the United States.

KLEIN: [01:34:36] Did many people violate the policy?

LOPES: [01:34:37] As far as I know, only one did. Yeah, he got his ass in a real sling, too. [tape break] We went south, traveled by bus all the way through southern Colombia and Ecuador all the way down to Cuenca, made that trip back.

LOPES: [01:34:54] Was that common? I mean, is that the way most people?

LOPES: [01:34:56] Yeah. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:34:57] They left Colombia and did local travel.

LOPES: [01:35:01] Well, I don't, I don't know. I better not say that. I don't know how common that was. But you know, it was fun just to go into Bogota or into Medellin or to Cali. I mean, you know, these are all very cosmopolitan places.

KLEIN: [01:35:21] Do you know if any of the group left early?

LOPES: [01:35:29] No. Two guys. Two guys died. Two guys were killed in a plane crash.

KLEIN: [01:35:35] Early on, wasn't it?

LOPES: [01:35:36] Right. Early on.

KLEIN: [01:35:37] Is that Crozier?

LOPES: [01:35:38] Crozier and Radley.

KLEIN: [01:35:39] Right, OK. Was there any observance of their, was there any funeral or, you know, anything that all of you came together on after they died?

LOPES: [01:35:54] That's a good question. I don't remember. I don't remember.

KLEIN: [01:36:08] How did you communicate with the Peace Corps office, which was in Bogota, eight hours away?

LOPES: [01:36:14] Oh, no, Bogota was 15 hours away. What was eight hours away was the state capital.

KLEIN: [01:36:18] OK.

LOPES: [01:36:21] Telegram.

KLEIN: [01:36:22] No telephones?

LOPES: [01:36:23] No, we had no telephones. Well, if we got into, we could go three hours down the road and there was a telephone. And then if we got into the state capital, there was a telephone, but we had no telephone.

KLEIN: [01:36:36] Were you tempted at any point to buy a car or try to get something more, a motorcycle?

LOPES: [01:36:42] Oh hell no, no, no. There was only one car in our entire community. The priest had it. This was the only car. Nobody had a car.

Everybody walked or rode horseback. So, no, there was never any. I missed driving, I liked driving, I still like driving. I missed it.

KLEIN: [01:37:01] Termination conference, do you recall it particularly?

LOPES: [01:37:10] Yeah, we were on the second. We were on a balcony in this little tiny restaurant. Getting drunk and we took off our clothes. We have a photograph of that somewhere. There were a dozen of us raising hell. No, we just had a great time. We just partied and I did a lot of, you know, that's when I finally got rid of my diarrhea. I finally said, this is time.

KLEIN: [01:37:35] People came out from Washington to conduct these sessions?

LOPES: [01:37:42] Probably. I don't remember. I don't remember.

KLEIN: [01:37:47] OK. During your time in Colombia, were you in regular communication with your family?

LOPES: [01:37:55] Yes. Yes. Not enough as my mother would like, but yes.

KLEIN: [01:37:59] And did she save your letters?

LOPES: [01:38:04] Actually, I think she did, and I think I have them. I also kept a journal.

KLEIN: [01:38:09] Great.

LOPES: [01:38:09] Yeah. I didn't. I wasn't terribly good and I'm not sure I went through the end, but I kept because Jerry kept it. Jerry was much better at keeping a journal. He did do that. And getting back to the COS, the end of service conference. My head was already in another place because I knew by the end of my service there, that I was going to Brazil on the Peace Corps staff.

KLEIN: [01:38:18] Oh, really?

LOPES: [01:38:37] Yeah. So that decision had already been made.

KLEIN: [01:38:40] How did that come about?

LOPES: [01:38:44] Well, towards the end of our time, there was a big push to get ex-volunteers in staff positions in other countries. So we were the first ones, you know, in Latin America to be ex-volunteers. So we got wined and dined a lot, and a lot of us went on staff positions. Two of us went to Brazil.

KLEIN: [01:39:08] People didn't come out to your village, it was when you were in.

LOPES: [01:39:10] No, we went in, I went in and met the country director in Brazil and got interviewed in Bogota. For the Brazil job.

KLEIN: [01:39:18] So they must have gone to. Who was director in Colombia?

LOPES: [01:39:23] Chris Sheldon.

KLEIN: [01:39:24] The whole time you were there?

LOPES: [01:39:25] Right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:39:26] So they must have come to Chris and said, we need to.

LOPES: [01:39:28] Identify some people, I'm sure.

KLEIN: [01:39:30] So then I would assume that at least Peace Corps in Colombia would rate you highly for the service you'd provided.

LOPES: [01:39:40] I think so. I think so. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:39:42] It may also have simply been the fact that you spoke both Portuguese and Spanish.

LOPES: [01:39:46] Oh yeah, that was a big thing. Oh yeah, that was obviously a big thing to go to Brazil. But guys went to, Jerry McMahon went to

Honduras. They went to Peru. They went to Ecuador. They went to Bolivia.

KLEIN: [01:39:59] So by the time of the termination conference, you knew what the next step was.

LOPES: [01:40:04] I did, and I think others did, too. I'm not sure all of them did.

KLEIN: [01:40:07] Did you have any concern that you should have been getting on with finishing a bachelor's degree?

LOPES: [01:40:14] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And my father and mother certainly were concerned, too, because here all of a sudden I was going to be gone for another two years. They didn't like that, you know. But oh yeah, I thought about that. But I thought, you know, the bottom line was, I'd never get this experience ever again. So now's the time to do it. Screw it.

KLEIN: [01:40:34] So leaving Colombia at the end of your tour, what did you take away? You know, what did you make of the experience you had had?

LOPES: [01:40:51] I wasn't sure of this at the time, but in hindsight, over all of these years, there's no question in my mind that it was life changing for me. Absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:41:04] And can you, in what way?

LOPES: [01:41:10] I became much more politically sophisticated. And decided some things I wanted, or at least what I didn't want to do with my life. You know, it's probably the same thing that most people go through during their four years in college. You know, like, get some direction. And that's what I had. I mean, I decided that I wanted to do international development work. Never did.

KLEIN: [01:41:48] Well, you felt that you would had done a good job?

LOPES: [01:41:51] Oh, yeah, I was very. I was very pleased with what I had done.

KLEIN: [01:41:56] Did you have a sense of personal growth?

LOPES: [01:41:59] Absolutely enormous.

KLEIN: [01:42:03] You were not the person who had come.

LOPES: [01:42:05] I had matured just incredibly. Of course, I was 19 to 21.

KLEIN: [01:42:13] Yeah. You must have been one of the youngest staff members.

LOPES: [01:42:18] Actually, I think I was at that point. Yeah, yeah, I think I was. I didn't go directly home, interestingly enough.

KLEIN: [01:42:26] Oh, I was going to.

LOPES: [01:42:27] I just told the story because I was at my dermatologist about two weeks ago. And I was standing waiting for him in the exam room and there was this bunch of pamphlets hanging on the wall and there was this pamphlet entitled Vitiligo. I picked that sucker up and I thought, I'll be damned. I've never seen a pamphlet, never seen anything about vitiligo. But in the medical checkout in Bogota, they found, they noticed. I don't know if I had noticed or they noticed. Somebody noticed that I had these white spots in my genital area. They didn't know what the hell it was. So they didn't let me go directly home. I had to go directly to the Navy Hospital in San Francisco and get checked out.

KLEIN: [01:43:10] Oh.

LOPES: [01:43:13] What I had was vitiligo. Do you know what vitiligo is?

KLEIN: [01:43:16] No.

LOPES: [01:43:16] You lose the pigment in your skin. People with these big white blotches on them? That's vitiligo. Well, I had it around there, but where I had it worst was on my foreskin. So in the infinite wisdom of these Navy doctors, they said, hell, why don't we just circumcise you?

KLEIN: [01:43:31] But they didn't ask you to convert.

LOPES: [01:43:36] But I said, sure, why not? So at age 21, I got circumcised.

KLEIN: [01:43:41] Did you, your folks were to come and visit you in the hospital?

LOPES: [01:43:45] Yeah, yeah, we met. We met. It was a terrible thing at the airport because we missed each other because we flew home through Mexico City and we got delayed and it was a mess. But yeah, we finally connected.

KLEIN: [01:43:58] You left, the group left individually.

LOPES: [01:44:01] Yes. Yes, yes. Because people went all over.

KLEIN: [01:44:03] Right, right. How long did you have a home leave then?

LOPES: [01:44:10] I was there for maybe a month and then I went to DC and I was in DC for two or three months.

KLEIN: [01:44:17] Break in. Had the Brazil project started?

LOPES: [01:44:21] Yes. Yes. Volunteers had arrived in Brazil in early '63.

KLEIN: [01:44:25] OK. And then, like other projects, the numbers had grown rapidly. And did they regionalize?

LOPES: [01:44:33] Well, by the time I got there, they weren't regionalized yet, but during the time I was there, they regionalized and they grew like crazy here.

KLEIN: [01:44:41] One of the things I sometimes end the interview with is trying to bring it up to today. If you were to talk to a young person, perhaps just finishing college, would you be comfortable trying to recruit them into the Peace Corps?

LOPES: [01:45:13] Yeah. I wouldn't be uncomfortable trying to recruit them, but I would try to answer a couple of questions, get them to answer a couple of questions before I pushed them hard.

KLEIN: [01:45:27] Such as?

LOPES: [01:45:28] Well for me, and this comes mostly from my later time in the Peace Corps, because I went back later as country director. And the kind of people that I thought were most inappropriate for the Peace Corps are people who went into it for career reasons.

KLEIN: [01:45:54] Ah, OK.

LOPES: [01:45:54] So I would try to find out if this person was going in because.

KLEIN: [01:46:01] It looks good on a resume.

LOPES: [01:46:02] If I want to go in the Foreign Service, this is the thing to do. It looks good on the resume. Or I want to be a veterinarian, so I want to go down there and get experience so that when I come back, I have a better chance to get into vet school. Because generally speaking, and of course, you can't make hard and fast rules. But generally speaking, people who went with that kind of an agenda were easily dissatisfied. As opposed to seeing this thing as an adventure, as just something to do, that do some things for people. Get to know something about yourself, about another country. That's kind of what I call adventure reasons.

KLEIN: [01:46:41] But giving a very broad definition of adventure?

LOPES: [01:46:43] Yes, absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:46:44] It's a good one.

LOPES: [01:46:45] Yeah, yeah. You know, I don't need I don't need somebody who has to has to bleed do-good-ism. I mean, I don't need that. But somebody who's willing to say, hey, I'm going there and I'm going to make the best out of this thing as I can and I'm going to try to contribute as much as I

can, learn as much as I can. That kind of person I would urge like hell. Somebody who's going in it for reasons of career, I think they're disappointed and they're unhappy. They themselves are unhappy.

KLEIN: [01:47:16] Yeah. So if you had it to do again, you would.

LOPES: [01:47:21] Oh, yeah, no question.

KLEIN: [01:47:22] Yeah. Have you, you haven't maintained close ties to Colombia?

LOPES: [01:47:29] No, I have not. I have not.

KLEIN: [01:47:32] Have you visited back through the years and all?

LOPES: [01:47:35] Yes. When we lived in Ecuador in 1976, I took my wife and kids back to my site. And Thomas Wolfe is wrong. You can go home again. It was wonderful.

KLEIN: [01:47:53] They remembered you?

LOPES: [01:47:54] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. That was the good part. They not only remembered me, but they had a sewer system. They had a high school. They had electric lights. And they made a point of saying, you didn't do this, but you started this. There's nothing better than that.

KLEIN: [01:48:19] Oh, that's great.

LOPES: [01:48:20] There's nothing better than that, you know?

KLEIN: [01:48:23] So it wasn't a discouragement going back. I mean, for many people it is.

LOPES: [01:48:26] Oh, no. Absolutely was not discouraging. It was not discouraging. They had made progress. And they, you know, because, you know, we were cheerleaders for Acción Comunal. And when I went back, you know, several people would say, when they would talk about

these projects, they'd say, viva Acción Comunal, because that's what we used to say. So yeah, no, it was it was good. It was good for my wife. It was good for my kids.

KLEIN: [01:48:54] And in your career here back in the U.S., have you maintained communications with any of the people you worked with?

LOPES: [01:49:05] Colombians?

KLEIN: [01:49:06] Yeah, Colombians.

LOPES: [01:49:07] No, no.

KLEIN: [01:49:13] OK. Briefly, what was your Peace Corps career? That really should be another interview, but you went back to went to Brazil on staff.

LOPES: [01:49:22] I went to Brazil on staff. I started off as the assistant to the project director.

KLEIN: [01:49:30] Who was?

LOPES: [01:49:31] A guy by the name of Leo Fanning. Country director was George Coleman. Then Warren Fuller came. I was assistant project director in the San Francisco Valley project, which was a big Tennessee Valley Authority like project on the San Francisco River. Had volunteers all up and down there, so I was the single guy. I traveled all the time. I didn't even have a place to live. I just traveled all the time. And then we opened up a project in western Brazil, and I went there to do all the setup work and greeted the first volunteers. But then shortly after the project started, maybe even before that, right after the volunteers got there, they contracted it out to Arizona State University to run the program. So I stayed there for a while the ASU people were there, and then I went on to Brasilia and became the regional director in Brasilia for the central part of Brazil. And that's where I met Pam.

KLEIN: [01:50:34] Right. And she talked some about that. After you're, after you both came back from Brazil.

LOPES: [01:50:42] Well, I came back first. I went back to UCLA. Got a bachelor's degree.

KLEIN: [01:50:47] Oh, thank goodness.

LOPES: [01:50:48] Finally. And then she came. I came back in September of '65. We got married in March of '65, she came back in September of '66. We got married in March of '67. I graduated in '67. She worked as a social worker at L.A. County. And after I graduated, I went to Wisconsin to go to graduate school. And went to graduate school, got a master's degree in anthropology. Wanted to go back overseas because that was always my intent. I wanted to get into international development work. But when I graduated in 1969, you know who was in the White House? Tricky Dick. And I didn't want to do anything with the U.S. government and there wasn't much going on, so I said I'd better do something else. But while my while I was in graduate school, I had worked at the Peace Corps training center. And the shrink at the Peace Corps training center had come here to Tucson to help set up a brand-new community college. So he contacted me and said, you want to come and teach anthropology? I said, hell yes.

KLEIN: [01:52:04] Who was that?

LOPES: [01:52:05] A guy by the name of Ernie Oppenheimer. And that's Pima College.

KLEIN: [01:52:09] Yeah, that's great.

LOPES: [01:52:10] So I came in June of '69 and we start. I worked for them that summer. And then in the fall, 26 of us got graduate student stipends and worked for that whole year, just setting the place up before we had any students. Did all kinds of things. Hired faculty, designed the catalogs, developed courses, did all kinds of fun stuff. And a lot of them were ex-volunteers. So then.

KLEIN: [01:52:48] You went back out again?

LOPES: [01:52:49] Then I went back in '76. Because I, you know, I quit Pima and I was running. I haven't had a career, I just do jobs here and there. And at one point I thought maybe I wanted to go back overseas. So I sent an application to Peace Corps and never heard a thing. Then out of the blue in '76, early '76, I got a call from somebody who I had known before, who had gone back to work at Peace Corps as the deputy director. And she said, I was sitting at my desk and I get this application across my desk and it's from you. She said, you want to go be the country director in Colombia? And I said, in a New York minute. And so we went through all the rigmarole we went through. We'd gone all the way through our medical exams. All of my family had gotten their medical clearances. And then one day I get a call from the Peace Corps, a hell of a guy by the name of John Dellenback.

KLEIN: [01:53:45] Mm hmm.

LOPES: [01:53:46] He had been a congressman from Oregon. And he said, I need to have you come in. I need to talk to you because you're not going to Colombia. And he says, I won't tell you until you get here. So I flew back to Washington, met with him, and he says, I'm going to give you two versions, he says. I'm going to give you the official version. He says, you're not going to Colombia. I'm going to give you the official version and I'm going give you the unofficial version. He was this kind of guy. So the official version is people around here are very skittish about bringing early volunteers back on the staff. They're not quite sure what you guys are made of. So we're hesitant. We're skittish. So the official reason is you're not going to Colombia because we're skittish about you. The real reason is some mucky-muck in the Peace Corps' son-in-law was a Cuban refugee. He was at George Washington University on the faculty and he was going to Colombia. But as it turned out, that poor son of a bitch, I got to know him quite well. He spent his entire two years there dealing with the wife of a kidnapped, of the mother of a kidnapped volunteer. And he that poor bastard had to have an armed guard in front of his house every night, and I was in Quito having a great time.

KLEIN: [01:55:19] You finally went out to Ecuador then.

LOPES: [01:55:21] Yeah, I went to Ecuador. Yeah, I just got switched and went Ecuador.

KLEIN: [01:55:24] Were you and Pam co-directors?

LOPES: [01:55:26] Not in Ecuador. Not in Ecuador. Because that whole concept of co-directors didn't come into being until about that time.

KLEIN: [01:55:35] Ah, OK.

LOPES: [01:55:36] And so she didn't speak Spanish, so it would have been difficult to do that in Ecuador. But after we'd been there for two years, got another call saying the guy, the country director in Brazil, has just been diagnosed with cancer. He's been medivaced. We need help. So in that negotiation, we negotiated Pam being the co-director. So we went to Ecuador, uh, to Brazil as co-directors.

KLEIN: [01:56:00] Great. Let's, we can. Is there anything else you'd like to put on the tape? It's going to end up in the archive.

LOPES: [01:56:10] Probably not. I don't. Uh, I think we've covered the waterfront. I guess I get, and I alluded to this earlier, I get irritated when people talk about the early days being so unorganized and, you know, just volunteers kind of running around doing whatever they wanted to. That was not our case.

KLEIN: [01:56:32] Yeah, that certainly doesn't sound that way.

LOPES: [01:56:34] It was a balance between letting us do our thing but being there to support us. And having those assignments with those Colombian organizations was the key.

[END OF INTERVIEW]