David Fryar Arnold Oral History Interview

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Biographical Note

David Fryar Arnold served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia from 1964 to 1966 as a secondary school teacher.

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Oral History Interview

with

David Fryar Arnold

September 10, 2018
Washington, D.C.

By Patricia Wand

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

WAND: [00:00:06] Today is September 10th, 2018. This is Patricia Wand, and I am interviewing my friend David Fryar Arnold, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia. David served from June 1964 until June 1966 in the Ethiopia III group, which was an education group. First, David, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. I think your story is extremely important, especially since frankly, you were part of a married couple that went to Ethiopia, and not very many volunteers in those days were married. But this interview is about you, and I'd like to start with the question why did you join the Peace Corps?

ARNOLD: [00:00:58] Well, first of all, thank you for inviting me to this. I realize how important it is to be able to get these stories down. Why I joined the Peace Corps. There are two names that come to mind. One is Sargent Shriver and the other is Joe Roberts. We all know who Sargent Shriver was. I was attending Washington University in St. Louis at the time and went to Graham Chapel and heard Sarge speak. I, frankly it's been so long ago, I

don't remember what he said, but I was very impressed with the way he said it and the impact he had on the entire audience as well as myself. Joe Roberts was my father-in-law, and one time, well I think it was before we were engaged, Courtney and I were visiting his family and Joe said, had you ever thought about the Peace Corps? Well, we had.

ARNOLD: [00:01:51] And when I did graduate from college undergraduate school, I was looking for a job and I went to New York and Washington, D.C., looking for publishing jobs in New York. Found that I couldn't afford New York, at least at the salaries they were willing to pay and the jobs which were simply selling paperback books up and down the East Coast for Scott Foresman or one of the other publishers. So I went to Washington and found the Peace Corps office, where we had applied more than a year before and had never heard anything. And so I went up to the counter and asked where our applications were, and the woman said, well, if you applied that long ago, let me look in the file. And so she came back and said, would you like to go to Ethiopia?

ARNOLD: [00:02:45] And so I called Courtney and asked her if she were willing to go, and that would have been about a week following our planned wedding. And she said yes, and I said yes. And so three days after our wedding on June 20, we ended up in training at UCLA.

WAND: [00:03:05] 1964. That was one of the early years.

ARNOLD: [00:03:09] It was, and I think that because Courtney grew up in a little town in Missouri and I grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis, we are very much Midwesterners. So I think the difference between being Missourians and being in California in Westwood Village and at UCLA for three months and then going to Ethiopia, the biggest culture shock was going from Missouri to California.

WAND: [00:03:38] All right. Before we talk about training, which is important and we do want to talk about it, but tell us a little bit about your personal background. Where did you grow up and what was your family of origin? Did you have siblings? And you know, what was your situation as a child and in high school, for example, and on into college?

ARNOLD: [00:04:03] I was born and raised in St. Louis in a suburb of Webster Groves, a very white, middle class community. My father was a lawyer, my mother a homemaker, and would have been an artist if she hadn't been a mother. And I had two older brothers, two and four years older. One of them became a lawyer. One of them tried to and ended up being a consultant in computer data processing they called it at the time. And I was the youngest of the three. A little more sensitive, a little more artistic, and not as good a student as my brothers. But then I went to University of Missouri for two years and then returned to St. Louis to go to Washington University and worked in a bookstore called the Book Nook. So I had a very middle class Midwest background for going to UCLA and then on to Ethiopia.

WAND: [00:05:03] So your mother would have been an artist, but I'll bet she did a little of that artwork because frankly, I've seen some of your artwork and it's significant.

ARNOLD: [00:05:14] Well, you've probably also seen a little bit of hers too. She grew up in Illinois and went to a couple of colleges, ended up at Northwestern. And when she married my father, they moved to Colorado, where he went to law school and she got a master's in fine arts. And while my two brothers were very, very young, she was doing quite a bit of art at home, had some exhibitions at the St. Louis Art Museum, along with other amateurs in the community. And throughout her life and later after my father died, she did pursue her art through a study group. She also taught later as a widow in high school.

WAND: [00:06:02] So I'm not surprised now, now that I know of where your talent emerges.

ARNOLD: [00:06:10] Thank you.

WAND: [00:06:11] Right. So there you are. You and Courtney are newlyweds and you immediately go off to Peace Corps training at UCLA. So tell us about that.

ARNOLD: [00:06:22] We had no idea what we were getting into. We took a night flight to Los Angeles and I remember the sun rising as we landed. And we have been on the plane with a gentleman, a scholar from somewhere in the East who bragged about his 40 cartons of research and books that he was transferring to a library at UCLA where he was going to be a guest speaker and professor. But when we got off the plane, we didn't know whether, when we found Westwood Village and found Hershey Hall the dormitory, we didn't know whether we'd be able to stay together, either in training or even in the Peace Corps. And so we made a pact that if we ever split up, we were going to quit.

ARNOLD: [00:07:14] The training was the third year that Peace Corps had training and it was still in the United States, which always has been a problem, and I very much appreciate the fact that pretty quickly Peace Corps discovered you better do the training in the country where they're going to serve. But we had about 25 or 30 Ethiopians, I think most of them were Amharas, who were giving language training, and there were several very renowned scholars, Wolf Leslau and an Ethiopian whose name I cannot recall right now, who was an anthropologist who ended up living in Eritrea, although I think he was born and raised in Ethiopia. The language training was difficult.

ARNOLD: [00:08:02] Courtney and I did, in fact, get to sleep in the same room in the dormitory, along with 19 other married couples in a Peace Corps program of, I think it was about 300 trainees. And our room was on the second floor of Hershey Hall. The men, the other men were on the first floor of Hershey Hall and the women were on the third floor of Hershey Hall. And outside of our window was the fire escape. So we experienced a lot of traffic going up and down that fire escape in our own little dormitory room. The physical training was interesting. We had to tread water for a long time, which didn't prove difficult for anybody. We did a lot of running, which was good for all of us. I was able to do some track and field, which I've never done since then. The classes were amazing. We were learning so much about a place we knew nothing about, and some of the best scholars in the country were there to teach us.

WAND: [00:09:12] Right. Right. So you were learning about the history of Ethiopia or the culture?

ARNOLD: [00:09:19] History, culture, the ethnic groups, health, how to deliver a baby. But most of all, it was how to speak Amharic, which was the language of about 40 percent of Ethiopia, but it was the ruling class. So we did learn some Amharic and learned it fairly well. But by the time we got to Ethiopia as English teachers, I don't think our language improved a lot more after that because we felt our obligation was to use English with our students and we were with our students, not only throughout the class day, but just about every evening we would have students over just out of curiosity. They wanted to see who we were. See our kerosene generated refrigerator. Learn about America and see if maybe we would take them with us when we went home.

WAND: [00:10:19] So you're jumping into Ethiopia and understandably. And that's all right. Let me. Before I let you go from training and we might have something more, you might have something more to share about that. But I'm curious. So married couples, there were how many married couples in the group?

ARNOLD: [00:10:37] 20.

WAND: [00:10:38] 20 married couples. And so you each had a little dorm room of your own, so they didn't put you in a communal space.

ARNOLD: [00:10:48] No.

WAND: [00:10:48] So you did have some privacy.

ARNOLD: [00:10:50] Right.

WAND: [00:10:50] Oh, that was civilized. OK, so and your training was, um, it was thorough it sounds like, and it had still had that physical training dimension, which was characteristic of the early years of Peace Corps training.

ARNOLD: [00:11:07] Yeah, I don't. What I've learned since then, I think probably the first and second years, particularly for those going to Latin America, was a lot more difficult. And from some people that I've talked to since then, it was a much more modified program. The physical demands were not great. It was mostly just a lot of class time learning about Ethiopia and how to work there and how to be teachers, frankly, because I think most of us were simply college graduates. So we did do some, uh, we monitored some classes in Los Angeles and did a lot of practice teaching. We had teachers trying to teach us how to do that. I think they did fairly well and we did the best we could.

WAND: [00:11:55] What was your own personal preparation in terms of college major?

ARNOLD: [00:12:00] I had several majors in college. French history, Russian history, art. Ended up with English literature, having no idea how I would apply that in the real world. But I wanted to be a writer or a teacher of English.

WAND: [00:12:20] OK, so this education was a new, a new bent for you.

ARNOLD: [00:12:25] Mm hmm. Very much so.

WAND: [00:12:27] Sounds like very much for other people in the group as well.

ARNOLD: [00:12:29] Yeah.

WAND: [00:12:30] So, OK. So we're at the end of training and you're raring to go, no doubt, to get to Ethiopia at long last. So tell us about that transition.

ARNOLD: [00:12:45] They gave us shots before we left UCLA. One of them is gamma globulin, which makes it virtually impossible to sit on a plane to fly from California to St. Louis and Kansas City. And before we left, one of the major concerns I think a lot of trainees had was the term selected out. There are several people who were selected out, one of whom was a man named Conrad Hirsch, who was probably one of the brightest and most creative of the volunteers. I don't know firsthand why he was selected out, but there were three, two or three reasons given in rumors around the

campus. One was that he went to Reed College, which was quite liberal. Another was that he had a beard and none of the rest of us did in those days. I later did.

ARNOLD: [00:13:44] And the third was that he had actually lived with a woman he was not married to. So my understanding was that he was selected out because somebody decided he wasn't going to be a desirable volunteer. When we finally got to Ethiopia, it was several days later, Conrad was already there and he became one of the best volunteers. I don't know how he got back into the Peace Corps, but it worked. When we left UCLA and flew to St. Louis and Kansas City to say goodbye to our families, we sold my car, which was a car that I'd inherited from my family, a little Ford Falcon. And we used the money while we were in New York to go to Boston to the Parker House, to spend the night and have Parker House rolls before we went to Ethiopia.

WAND: [00:14:37] Tell us about Parker House rolls because not everybody knows that.

ARNOLD: [00:14:41] Well, I'm sure that they're better than what we were buying in the grocery stores, but I don't remember them frankly, it's been so long.

WAND: [00:14:51] Obviously, it was a destination you wanted to get to.

ARNOLD: [00:14:55] It was one of the few things we thought we could afford to do and had time to do before we all got on the plane to fly TWA to Addis Ababa. The flight, I recall we ended up in sitting in Khartoum for several hours before we could complete the flight. Other than that, it was fairly interesting. We did stop in Athens and watched a new king's marriage I believe it was. It was the first time we pledged to ourselves we would never, ever again stand on the street corner for royalty. It was an exhausting, embarrassing experience and we actually missed most of it.

WAND: [00:15:40] So this wedding was taking place in a public outdoor area?

ARNOLD: [00:15:45] Yeah, it was. Athens was celebrating. I believe it was the wedding of the king. And all I remember about the hotel because they,

when we landed in Athens, everyone had, I think we had two or three rooms. You could just kind of catch a nap, but most people wanted to go out and see things. It was the first time I ever saw a bidet and I thought it was the place where you brush your teeth. So I think I can fairly say that both Courtney and I were very young, very naive, very impressionable, and we were about to enter a country that was not naive and was very impressive and in some ways very frightening.

WAND: [00:16:44] So you're on your way now. You stop over in Greece and then you catch another flight on to Addis Ababa. So tell us about landing there and what did you do when you got there?

ARNOLD: [00:17:00] What I remember about Addis Ababa was that we were in a dormitory room again. I just remember a photograph I took of Courtney. It was very cold and wet, and she was in bed with this sort of military dark green brown blanket over her. And she had a brown bottle that she was holding in her hand. It was a bottle of niche gas, not niche gas. It was a bottle of water. And we took the photograph on a camera that I had received from my father and we didn't develop it. I think we sent the film back home to be developed. And my mother, when she developed the film, was a little curious about that photograph of Courtney in bed with a brown bottle. And I had to explain to her in a letter that that was just bubbly water.

ARNOLD: [00:18:03] I don't remember much more. I think we spent probably a couple of days on the Haile Selassie I University campus getting some orientation and learning where we were going to be spending the rest of our two years there. We did. And every volunteer was a guest at the home of an Ethiopian. Courtney and I went to dinner at the home of Tomyskin Gobena, who was some middle level official in the Highway Department of the government of Ethiopia. And that's when we first ate native food and realized not only how hot the *wat* could be, the sauce that you use to dip your injera in. But also *tella* is a barley beer that traditionally is served in a large glass with a lot of barley seeds floating on top.

ARNOLD: [00:19:00] And I couldn't figure out where there was supposed to swallow the barley seeds or kind of strain them through my teeth as I drank this

sort of bitter, dark brown homemade beer. They also served something called *tej*, which is a fermented honey, which is a little too sweet for me. But it was a very impressive dinner, and it really showed us how we were in a totally different country. Very gracious hosts. I think only to Tomyskin spoke English. I think he had children, but I don't remember whether they were speaking English or not. It was kind of an awkward dinner. It was our first exposure to a home in Ethiopia. But we learned a lot.

WAND: [00:19:47] So you've got a bit of a picture of what your life might be like in Ethiopia.

ARNOLD: [00:19:54] And the next thing I remember was that we were on a train from Addis Ababa to Dire Dawa. Dire Dawa was a desert town near the Ogaden desert. And the train is an old French railroad, which we found we used quite a bit throughout our two years to get back to Addis. When we arrived in Dire Dawa, we met Fuller Torrey, the doctor for the region. He and his wife and children were living there, and we were in the company of probably five or six other volunteers from our training program. Checked into a little hotel. And I think the next day, Fuller in a Land Rover drove Courtney and I and two other volunteers to our town, Asebe Teferi.

WAND: [00:20:46] And when did you find out what town you were going to be living in?

ARNOLD: [00:20:52] Only after we arrived in Addis, within that two or three days of orientation. And I think that Courtney and I were placed in this town and we didn't. We had met the two volunteers in training, Eileen Sonata and Pat Swetis, but we didn't know either of them very well. So that we not only learned we would be in Asebe Teferi but with two other volunteers. At that time, Asebe Teferi was sort of a remote site in the legends of Peace Corps volunteers. There were two or three other couples who were placed in even more remote sites.

WAND: [00:21:39] But this was considered a remote site.

ARNOLD: [00:21:42] It was. In order to get there from Addis, although we went to Dire Dawa to take a Land Rover to Asebe Teferi, generally what you'd do

is you get on the train and ride about seven hours to a little desert town called Mieso, which is about halfway to Dire Dawa. And you get off the train in Mieso and you wait for a bus, a little, you know, a 20-seater bus that has a lot of loud music. And that bus will drive you up into the mountains to up to Asebe Teferi. And that's about maybe 45 minutes or an hour ride.

WAND: [00:22:24] And that's the way you had to travel when you were on your own, when you didn't have the opportunity to meet the Peace Corps doctor.

ARNOLD: [00:22:32] Right. And usually in order to get from Asebe Teferi to Addis, we would take the bus back down to Mieso and get on a night train. And that's one of the more exciting experiences of life in Ethiopia. There were three classes of train and we took the third class car and I generally ended up tucked under a bench along with some trussed chickens. People sitting above us on the benches were Ethiopian women taking their chickens to market. And when I wanted a little fresh air, I would go to the end of the car. And I don't recall that there were doors on these cars. You just kind of grab on to a railing before you would step off the train. But this train is going quite fast through the dark and the desert, and you could just hang on to that bar and sit on that lower step and just feel the cold desert air running by and in the darkness see little lights off in the distance.

WAND: [00:23:41] And that's how you got fresh air.

ARNOLD: [00:23:43] Yeah. Good fun.

WAND: [00:23:46] Right. Memorable. And so why did you end up under a bench along with the chickens?

ARNOLD: [00:23:53] They were always crowded, particularly third class. I don't think that first class had many customers. And we just, I don't know what, I don't remember what the price was for first class. But it seemed ridiculously high.

WAND: [00:24:07] And not in your budget as a Peace Corps volunteer.

ARNOLD: [00:24:10] No.

WAND: [00:24:11] Right. Did any of the Ethiopians ask you why you weren't riding first class since you were obviously an expat?

ARNOLD: [00:24:17] I don't think we had many conversations with Ethiopians on the night train. Most of them on third class didn't speak any English, and we were just absolutely strange to them.

WAND: [00:24:34] Subjects of observation and puzzlement. Right.

ARNOLD: [00:24:39] Or they really didn't care.

WAND: [00:24:41] That's, yes, a possibility too, isn't it? So tell us about your life in your village.

ARNOLD: [00:24:52] We, the four of us, Pat, Eileen, Courtney and I, were driven to a seven-room house that was directly behind the school, which is called, uh. Let's see. Uppaseitom. I've remembered this all of my life. Let's see. In Amharic it's [inaudible], but this particular one's [inaudible]. No. [name in Amharic] And it was a school for probably kindergarten through eighth grade, and we were to be the four teachers that would augment the current Ethiopian staff so they could start a ninth and then a 10th grade in the school.

ARNOLD: [00:25:47] And I think that most of these students had very good support from their parents because they wanted us to. They wanted these children to learn and stay in their own town instead of having to, uh. Many of these students came from little villages all around and even down near Mieso in the desert. So they were able to come to this school rather than go way down to the larger, much larger town of Dire Dawa at a school where many of them would get into trouble. So because we were able to offer additional grades in the school, which after we left became a twelve grade school. We got a lot of support from the parents about making sure the children were there and very committed to their studies. And most of those kids were very good students and tried very hard.

WAND: [00:26:50] So it sounds like this was a new school then that was being developed by the government or by the local community? Who was behind it?

ARNOLD: [00:27:00] Asebe Teferi was a fairly new town. I don't know how long before we arrived, maybe 10 or 15 years before. The emperor had this as a planned community and it was on the road that he would occasionally take from Addis in his Mercedes Benz to visit a place called Kulubi, which is a religious site which was near his birthplace. And I think this is one of the reasons they had put in this brand-new crushed rock road and built this town of Asebe Teferi. So when we got there, as I say, I think it was probably about a 10 or 15 year old town. The school was only those first eight grades and it was a new school, the only. There was one other school in the town, but that was a religious school where very little children were learning to memorize the Koran. And in Ge'ez, an ancient language of Ethiopia, which is sort of related to Amharic.

WAND: [00:28:07] So was the town primarily Muslim?

ARNOLD: [00:28:10] No. Well, we didn't know. And this is the strange thing that it has something to do with our Peace Corps training. The man I forgot, whose name is Asmaram Likoset. Asmaram was a brilliant anthropologist who had done a, written a book that I thought was titled The Gurage. And so the place where we ended up for two years of our lives was in the center of what we thought was the Gurage people. Most of our students were Amharas, the sons and daughters of Ethiopians who had settled in Asebe Teferi, either as the children of government officials or traders, merchants, and in some cases, military and large landowners.

ARNOLD: [00:29:01] But the native population of that area was what we now identify as Oromo, and the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. They predominate in the south where Asebe Teferi is, and they have been. The conflict between the Oromo and the Amhara has been the genesis of a lot of the unrest and, fortunately for recent events, possibly a way forward for a very multi-ethnic country to develop. But the Oromo at that time were very misunderstood, even apparently by the anthropologist who had

written this book about what he called the Gurage. Gurage, it turned out, is a pejorative for farmers in that region, and they were not Gurage, they were Oromo. So that was one of the lessons that we didn't actually learn for a long time during our two years.

ARNOLD: [00:30:05] Most of our relationships with the students, most of whom are Amharas and Christians, members of their families raised in the Coptic Church. There were a few who were Muslim. One of them, Mahadi Hamid, turns out much later in my life I learned was an Oromo. But I just knew that there were a few Muslims in the town. Some of the merchants who chewed *chaat* and sat in the little alcove in their shops, selling fabrics and dry goods. But most of the people in the town, I believe, were Amhara and therefore a Coptic Christian. And the homes we visited as the students would take us home to meet their parents and have a dinner were, I believe, Amharas.

WAND: [00:31:00] So the Muslim population was more quiet, it sounds like.

ARNOLD: [00:31:04] At least in the town. The Oromo, a large number of them in many years, over many years became Christian. There are a lot of missionaries were working in Ethiopia at the time. And I think they, the missionaries, Christian Western missionaries, probably had more success with the Oromo than they did with the Amharas.

WAND: [00:31:34] But for the most part, the Oromo were Muslim.

ARNOLD: [00:31:38] Mm hmm. Sorry. Yes.

WAND: [00:31:42] Yeah. Right. So, all right.

ARNOLD: [00:31:45] Could I tell you a story about the?

WAND: [00:31:50] Absolutely.

ARNOLD: [00:31:50] The difference, the religious differences and the ethnic differences in Harar province, which is the large province that Dire Dawa and Harar, a very old famous town in Ethiopia and Asebe Teferi are. We

were not very far from the Ogaden desert, which has been a point of conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia for many, many years. Some of the students in our school were Somali, and two of them lived with us. Mohamed Taher and Mohamed Haji. There was a teacher in our town, Otto Tahir, who for whatever reason, I don't know, refused to speak to Courtney or I, or to either Elaine or Pat to any great extent. And he was, I believe, an English teacher.

ARNOLD: [00:32:57] But one time he went missing and he was brought back many weeks later. And the principal of the school, Otto Nagatu, announced one morning that he wanted all his teachers in the school to lead their students down to the market. Because Otto Tahir had been arrested and had been charged I believe with treason, and that we were to lead the students down there and create a, surround this area where we would then watch and did watch the military whip 21 times Otto Tahir on the ground in the center of the market. It turns out, at least according to other teachers, Otto Tahir had been in a bar one evening and it said something negative about the emperor and he was arrested.

ARNOLD: [00:34:00] He was in the bar and he was complaining because he and other teachers had not received their salaries for some time. And so this ended up to be his punishment. And I don't know whatever happened to Otto Tahir, but he never came back to teach in the school again. It was one of the shocks we had about corporal punishment that occurs in the country and the ethnic divisions, certainly between ethnic Somalis who are citizens of Ethiopia, such as our own two students, and as well as later the Oromo. So it was one of the. One of the awakenings we had to what was a very, very stressed culture in Ethiopia in addition to being a very poor economy.

WAND: [00:34:55] And you worked there and began to learn about these conflicts, the deep divisions?

ARNOLD: [00:35:03] Yep.

WAND: [00:35:05] Right. What did this man teach when he was teaching?

ARNOLD: [00:35:10] I believe he was teaching English, but I think every teacher had several classes. They taught different classes. For example, I taught English, social studies, math. And Courtney taught English and geography and a couple of other courses. She also got to teach in some of the lower grades, but mostly for the four of us as teachers in the school, we were teaching in seventh and eighth and ninth and then tenth grades.

WAND: [00:35:47] As the year went on or as the two years went on? Because you were adding a year each year.

ARNOLD: [00:35:54] Right.

WAND: [00:35:56] OK, so tell us about your experience of teaching. We've already talked about how education as a methodology and as a discipline was new to you. You were trained, you were introduced to it in training in terms of how you would, how people learn and how the best way to be a good, effective teacher. And then you were dropped in this village and asked to teach, assigned to teach in a high school.

ARNOLD: [00:36:28] Mm hmm.

WAND: [00:36:28] What kind of resources did you find and how did you put together your, the content of your curriculum?

ARNOLD: [00:36:36] Well, we had a Gestetner mimeograph machine, which produces an awful lot of ink and is a very messy operation. And as the four of us were preparing our classes every morning, we'd get together with our work and I would crank out the copies so that they could distribute to the students questions or examinations or lesson plans. But we had no original texts. There was a library in the school. It was locked. And also Nagatu eventually would allow, allowed us to go in and organize the Dewey Decimal System and open the library for the use of the students. And that was mostly the work of Eileen and Pat and Courtney.

ARNOLD: [00:37:29] But we did find in that closed library a copy of a social studies book published in the United States, probably in the 1940s. And one of the things I recall from the book was a photograph of an Afrikaans holding a

stick or a rod of some kind in a field as a South African was working in the field. I don't know what kind of crop it was, but the caption underneath the photograph addressed the South African as a coolie. And we generally decided that we would not expose the students to this anything in this book. So I quickly sent a letter to Parker Lad, who was one of the people who I'd interviewed with in New York. I think he'd worked for Scott Foresman, I'm not sure, but he sent us some brand-new copies, at least for teachers, reference of some social studies books that were more current and a lot more appropriate.

ARNOLD: [00:38:38] And Courtney and I were looking through our letters recently and realized how much we depended on our families for other books and Cub Scout uniforms, Boy Scout uniforms, and more books for the library and more books for us. Mostly to be able to get good information to use for teaching math, social studies, geography, and English.

WAND: [00:39:05] So you gradually over time got some resources on at hand that you could use to build your curriculum.

ARNOLD: [00:39:12] Yeah.

WAND: [00:39:14] And what were the Ethiopian teachers using, if they. I'm assuming they had no textbooks either.

ARNOLD: [00:39:22] Technically they were supposed to be teaching in English after the sixth grade, but I don't think that all of them did. So they might have been relying on textbooks in Amharic from the government school system.

WAND: [00:39:40] And some of those were available at the school?

ARNOLD: [00:39:43] Yeah.

WAND: [00:39:43] Or in the personal libraries, perhaps, of the teachers.

ARNOLD: [00:39:46] I think as is probably the habit with many teachers who taught for several years, they developed their own little curriculum and their own

set of information to use over and over each year. We didn't have that kind of experience, so we needed some fresh material.

WAND: [00:40:05] Right. Was there a prescribed curriculum that you had to cover?

ARNOLD: [00:40:08] Yes, I'm sure there was. I don't remember what it was, but it was. For example, a Courtney was supposed to, in geography, teach each continent separately. And, you know, one semester you taught North America and another you taught Europe and another Asia and then Latin America. And she thought it. What she experienced was a little bit of a backlash from students who resented having to spend an entire semester on North America. Because at those times we were having, even before the Vietnam War, there were many issues about U.S. involvement in other countries in Africa and. While they really were interested in what we had to say, they were being, they were very suspicious of what our views were about Elvis Presley or Cassius Clay or any of the conflicts in the world.

WAND: [00:41:10] So they were curious, right. And opened up these conversations with you.

ARNOLD: [00:41:17] They did. And one of the challenges was Mahdi Hamid, who I mentioned earlier, and I want to jump ahead a little bit too, in a minute. But Mahdi was one of the brighter students, spoke English very well, turned out to be Oromo, but I really hadn't quite figured that out. But he was definitely a little different than the Amhara students. And he had mentioned that he has a brother that worked at the U.N. for the Ethiopian Embassy, and I don't remember much about that. But I would have characterized him at the time as being very, very proud and very confident of his own interpretation of the information he had received over his life.

ARNOLD: [00:42:14] And at one point we had a disagreement about something, and for some reason he and I agreed that we would just not speak to each other for a long period of time. And before we left, Courtney and I left Ethiopia, he gave us a handmade out of plywood guitar that he had made, which was incredible and we were very touched. I didn't, we didn't have any contact with Mahdi after that until about ten, eight or nine years ago

when as a supervisor of broadcasting for Voice of America, I was supervising Amharas and Tigrays and Oromo, who were broadcasting to Ethiopia for Voice of America in a department called the Horn of Africa. And one afternoon we realized we had some reporting that a group of American students from a program in California had been traveling this summer in Ethiopia, and in fact, not far from where we had lived.

ARNOLD: [00:43:24] But they were in a very politically and militarily sensitive area near the Ogaden. And for some reason, the local police and military arrested all of the students and took them to Addis Ababa and deported them. There was a gentleman, an Ethiopian, who was their guide. He was a U.S. resident who had taken these students over for this California program. And we were concerned about reporting about the deportations until this Ethiopian was able to get out of the country safely. When he did, I received a phone number for him. He was living in Atlanta. He was a high school teacher and I called him and I introduced myself and he said, Mr. Arnold! And that's me.

ARNOLD: [00:44:23] And I was shocked to find out this was Mahdi Hamid, who now is Hamid Muudee and is the author of a two volume English to Oromo dictionary, which he has inscribed to me and sent to me with photographs of his family. And I haven't, I have yet to meet him. I still hope that we can. But it was incredible to, after decades of not seeing Mahdi and knowing that we'd had this difference of opinion at one point in my short teaching career, that we would meet again on the phone. And it was a wonderful sort of aural reunion, I will treasure it and I hope that we get to meet again.

WAND: [00:45:09] I hope so too, and you should know, those of you listening to this, that David has in front of him a hardcover book, Volume 1, English to Oromo. And this is the set of a product of this man's work.

ARNOLD: [00:45:32] Yes.

WAND: [00:45:34] Right. And so because he had a different name in the United States, you did not know with whom you were working up until. And I wonder if he knew. Did he know your name?

ARNOLD: [00:45:47] No, he didn't.

WAND: [00:45:49] In your Voice of America capacity?

ARNOLD: [00:45:50] As far as I know, based on the telephone conversation we had after he'd returned to Atlanta, he was not aware of who I was or who the person was that was supervising the broadcast, because I didn't go on the air. I was just an administrator. I would work with government officials in Ethiopia and occasionally travel there to try to negotiate more licenses for stringers. But other than that, I was not a presence on the broadcasts.

WAND: [00:46:22] Other people were speaking and broadcasting. Uh huh. Right.

ARNOLD: [00:46:25] Mm hmm.

WAND: [00:46:26] And it wasn't until you telephoned him that he knew your name.

ARNOLD: [00:46:32] Right.

WAND: [00:46:32] Heard your name and he remembered you.

ARNOLD: [00:46:34] Yes.

WAND: [00:46:35] And what about this guitar he made? Do you and Courtney still have that by chance?

ARNOLD: [00:46:40] No, we don't, and I don't know what happened to it. As with many decades of life, there are some things that we have lost and that's one of them.

WAND: [00:46:48] Yes. Well, you've had several moves across the country and things get lost in that. Wow, so that's a great story of a former student who has made a major impact to record this language that otherwise had never been written. Is that?

ARNOLD: [00:47:05] No. In fact, when later in my life on an AID contract to propose a media training center in Addis for Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, and

Tanzania. The U.S. government was interested in creating this training center in Addis and wanted me to explore the possibility and interview people in each of those countries to see if it was possible and propose a curriculum, a way of funding it, which I did. But while I was there, I did run into, uh, I didn't run into. I actually had an appointment to meet with Mingesha Woltom McHale, who was another one of our young students. Mingesha was one of the most earnest and dedicated students that we knew. Very, very young.

ARNOLD: [00:48:13] All these boys, the younger boys, were barefoot and wore torn shorts and torn shirts. They were all from very poor families and Mingesha was one that was almost every afternoon at our house and just so curious about who we were and how much he could learn. He may not have been the absolute most, the brightest student in the class, but he was the most dedicated to learning. And he did become quite a good friend of ours over the years, although he never came to the United States and died several years ago.

WAND: [00:48:55] Did you get to find him when you were in Addis Ababa?

ARNOLD: [00:48:58] And when I was in Addis, we met and he actually stayed with me for several weeks during the time that I was there. And that was one time Mingesha and I got on the train to go from Addis to Mieso and ride the bus up to Asebe Teferi. And that was the first time I was able to see the town and maybe 20 or 30 years. And unfortunately, he became very sick. We did get to at least see the school, see the house where Courtney and I had lived, but we had to get Mingesha back to the capital city because he had fallen ill and actually died about a month later.

WAND: [00:49:38] Really. What year was that?

ARNOLD: [00:49:44] 1992 or ‘93 maybe. I tried to call him one day after I had returned about a month later and the gentleman at the other end of the line when I spoke in Amharic to him and asked him for Mingesha, he said in Amharic that he had died and I could not get any other information from him about why. It was either AIDS or pneumonia.

WAND: [00:50:12] Right, right. Wow. So two examples of students whose lives you impacted through your teaching in Ethiopia.

ARNOLD: [00:50:27] The one, the interesting thing about being a teacher. I don't think I was an excellent teacher. I had limited experience before I got there and it was totally within the context of the Ethiopian education system that I think all of us learned how to be teachers. It's difficult to say how much we had an impact on any individual. It's certainly true, and I think most Peace Corps volunteers say that we're never very sure how much we contributed to the country or to the community we served in. But we know how much of a difference it made in our own lives. There is one person among this all the students that I recall in that school that was probably the most successful in her later life.

ARNOLD: [00:50:27] Her name is Debrework Zewdie and Debrework was in my English class and it was eighth grade. All the girls sat in the front row, and they were all very, very quiet, very shy, and did very good work. And Debrework was one of these students sitting in the front row. And she did excellent work, not always, but she was a very sincere student. I didn't see her after she left for many, many years. But when I was returning from Ethiopia maybe 10 years ago and arrived at Dulles International Airport, Courtney was waiting for me and standing next to her was an Ethiopian gentleman. And we soon discovered that he, his wife, had grown up in Asebe Teferi. And just after that, this Ethiopian woman came up behind me. She was on the same flight that I was. And we discovered that it was Debrework Zewdie.

ARNOLD: [00:52:28] And I won't take a lot of time to read this, but I just googled her name. She is a an immunologist, former director of the World Bank Global AIDS program, and deputy executive director and chief operating officer of the Global Fund. So I'm very impressed that I had this, at least for one year, this little girl in my class. But what is more interesting than that is that when we met at the airport and I explained who I was, she didn't remember me. So that makes me continue to be very modest about my achievements as a teacher.

WAND: [00:53:18] Well. It's a wonderful story about how you found one another again by chance and that you've been able to learn what she's making, what kind of a contribution she's making.

ARNOLD: [00:53:31] Yeah. And we have met two or three times since then, and I believe she's in Geneva now. She did ask. I kind of teased her about the grades that she received in school, and so she wanted to see the grade report. So I gave her my little red spiral bound teacher's grade book to borrow, and I haven't gotten it back yet, so I do need to meet her at least one more time.

WAND: [00:53:58] You do need to be in touch with her because that little grade book needs to go with your papers when you deposit them in an archive.

ARNOLD: [00:54:07] Good idea.

WAND: [00:54:08] So when you. We've talked quite a bit now about your teaching experience and the students, some of the students you interacted with and remember. What about your and Courtney's social life in this town? What kinds of things did you do outside the classroom? You mentioned the students coming to your home often in the afternoon or off hours. Were there are other kinds of social activities that?

ARNOLD: [00:54:42] Not much. Because we were inexperienced teachers and had, at least in the beginning, very few resources to prepare for classes, we spent just about every weekday evening sitting at a little table in our house with a Chinese macho. It's called the Aeroplane, A-E-R-O-P-L-A-N-E, was the brand of the kerosene lantern from China that had a very large hood over it. And we would sit on either side of the table from this macho lantern that gave us our light and do our lesson plans and just do all of the work that a teacher is supposed to be doing at night. Friday nights, we would often go to a bar called the Rocket Bar, and this would all at that time be spelled in the particular alphabet of the Amharic language.

ARNOLD: [00:55:53] And incidentally, when I went back many years later. After the one particular government, the Derg, was replaced and there was more of an effort by the new government to create ethnic diversity within the

country, the Oromo region, which we lived in, decided to adopt the Roman alphabet. And so when I went back to visit the Rocket Bar with Mingesha, I could spell it because it was all in English.

WAND: [00:56:26] Uh huh.

ARNOLD: [00:56:27] Not in the Amharic language.

WAND: [00:56:29] Right.

ARNOLD: [00:56:29] It was interesting the very change that had occurred.

WAND: [00:56:35] So the same bar was there, the same name, but inscribed in different alphabet.

ARNOLD: [00:56:43] Very little changed in the 20 or 30 years since we were teachers there. And with the exception of the fact that there was a brand-new school a little further up the valley. Not a very modern school, and unfortunately, because of Mengesha's illness, I wasn't able to see it. But did see my old school, which was at the time, I think, abandoned.

WAND: [00:57:12] Hmm. So it wasn't operating then.

ARNOLD: [00:57:17] No.

WAND: [00:57:19] Very hard.

ARNOLD: [00:57:21] What was your question? I think I might have missed something here.

WAND: [00:57:24] No, I think. I asked about your social life.

ARNOLD: [00:57:28] Oh. The social life. On the weekends we would go hiking and the mountain at the end of our valley was called Jelo Mountain, which in English we were told either means crooked finger or crooked penis. I don't recall whether anyone argued better for one translation or the other. But it was a beautiful mountain and we would take a couple of donkeys and

some students and we would hike up to the top of the mountain and camp. And we did this at least once. And one night Muhammad Tahir and I were out trying to corral the one of the runaway donkeys. But it was exciting to him. It was a beautiful country. Most of the trees were eucalyptus, which was an imported tree from Australia.

ARNOLD: [00:58:19] And in fact, when I went back many years later to Asebe Teferi and I mentioned that almost nothing had changed. The one thing that had changed was that they had adopted a new tree that people there called the Truman tree, which is a smaller, less magnificent tree, but apparently has something to do with reducing the population of flies.

WAND: [00:58:41] Hmm.

ARNOLD: [00:58:41] Flies were something that Courtney and I became very aware of before we got to Ethiopia, when we had, uh, let me go back a bit. When I called Courtney from Washington, D.C., and announced that we'd had an invitation to go to Ethiopia, and she said yes, we were at her parents' house either before or after the wedding and were watching a television show. Ironically, it was showing Peace Corps volunteers. And they were talking about their work, and they kept waving their hands in front of their faces, trying to keep the flies away. I don't think flies were that big a problem in Ethiopia, but for some it did. And for the town of Asebe Teferi, it was very, they were very grateful to have their Truman trees because they thought it reduced the fly population.

WAND: [00:59:40] But you don't know that for a fact?

ARNOLD: [00:59:43] I'll never know.

WAND: [00:59:44] Right. In your own house, did you have screens on your windows and doors?

ARNOLD: [00:59:48] No, they were wooden shutters. There's no glass. There were no screens. Our bed was actually two single beds, metal frames, put together with a very large mattress that was directly under a window with a beautiful view of the mountain on the other side of the valley. But there

was no way of other than closing the shutters of allowing wild animals in. We did have cats coming through the house quite often, and our cook, Ammina, spent a good deal of time working in the kitchen preparing meals for us. And one of the sounds that I will always recall is that chickens and roosters that came strutting through the house. It was, we had a very open house.

ARNOLD: [01:00:45] Ammina was Somali also, very young. I think Courtney told me the day she figured out she was probably 14 years old when she came to work for us. She had many, many younger sisters and often some of those younger sisters would come with her to watch and gape at us or help her with some of her work. But Ammina and Mohammed Tahir, one of the two Mohammeds who lived in the house, had a room at the back of our house, struck up a very strong friendship. Later after we left and he graduated from high school, they married and Mohammad Tahir worked for, I believe it was Save the Children in probably Dire Dawa and further into the Ogaden for many years. And we have kept in touch with he and his children occasionally as Mohammed and Ammina grew older.

WAND: [01:01:48] Mm hmm. So this is a friendship that persists. And is Ammina still alive?

ARNOLD: [01:01:54] Ammina and Mohammed are, at least as of today I believe, in very good health. Older. They have many sons, I think one daughter. And during the course of raising their family, they offered to send any one of their children to our care in the United States, but we didn't accept the invitation.

WAND: [01:02:21] So, all right. Before we talk about sort of your close of service and leaving Ethiopia and your next phase of life, are there other stories or events that you want to include?

ARNOLD: [01:02:38] No, I think that's it.

WAND: [01:02:39] You think you've covered a lot of the things about your years of service.

ARNOLD: [01:02:43] Some of it.

WAND: [01:02:44] Some of it, right. Some of it. All right. What about now as you approach the end of your two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in the village? What was your feeling and how did you proceed towards your departure?

ARNOLD: [01:03:07] We were. We had enjoyed our two years. I think both of us were concerned about what was going on in the United States at that time. Many things had occurred and in fact later we've always felt a little hole in the history of our hearts about not being able to experience some of the things that went on in the United States during that time. We were eager to come home, but Peace Corps was looking for experienced volunteers to serve in Micronesia. And we considered it but decided it was really time to go home. So when we left, we did the obligatory travel through Europe and go to Istanbul, Beirut, Athens, Munich. Buy a Volkswagen in Munich, have it shipped home. Then go to France and England and then go to New York and wait for the car to arrive.

WAND: [01:04:16] And how long did that take? How many weeks did you travel?

ARNOLD: [01:04:21] We probably had four or five weeks traveling in Europe and then waited for two weeks in New York City at the Diplomat Hotel, which was favored by, I think, a lot of people from the Caribbean. It was very inexpensive. And when we finally. That also gave me an opportunity to look for a job. I had imagined at the time I was a teacher in Ethiopia, writing curriculum or textbooks of the very much what I had learned about teaching and about social studies while I was a teacher in Ethiopia. But when we got home, I decided I really needed to get a real job. And the probably the most appropriate thing was to look in a trade magazine for journalists and found a job in Sandusky, Ohio, as a reporter.

ARNOLD: [01:05:20] So when we left New York City in our brand-new little VW Bug, green with a sunroof and a luggage rack, we ended up in Sandusky. I interviewed and got the job. Courtney got a job teaching in Norwalk, Ohio, which is in fact where we ended up living, not far from Sandusky. And that's where I became the Huron County bureau chief for the Sandusky

Register. Did that for two years. Went to the University of Missouri to graduate school and finished a master's degree in journalism. And then took, there are three jobs since then working for newspapers. And ended up freelancing magazine writing for a while.

ARNOLD: [01:06:17] The journalism was intended to be an introduction to writing books, writing novels, because I had so much enjoyed so many good writers that I had studied in college. But it ended up being a very permanent job, journalism did. Freelance magazine writing in Eugene, Oregon, for a considerable amount of time. What that ended up being, because I met you and Beryl Brinkman and several others who were returned Peace Corps volunteers living in Eugene, became my introduction to the National Peace Corps Association and to in a sense, embrace strong commitment to international issues. We had several major events that we hosted in Eugene, one of which was the national conference for the National Peace Corps Association.

ARNOLD: [01:07:20] And through my friendship with you, I learned about the Fulbright program and received a Fulbright to study in Pakistan teaching journalism at the Quaid-i-Azam University in Lahore, the second oldest city in the world. It was quite an exciting experience that I directly attribute to not only my friendship with you, but just, we were Peace Corps volunteers. And we were always interested in other countries and issues that reflected on those countries. The Fulbright in Pakistan was quickly terminated due to the first Gulf War. We ended up in Kenya for the balance of two years.

WAND: [01:08:04] What year again was that?

ARNOLD: [01:08:07] 1990 to '92, I believe. And finished up in Kenya as the, uh, creating a public relations department in a development program for the national museums of Kenya, working briefly with Richard Leakey, the son of Louis S. B. Leakey, and meeting a lot of very interesting journalists and scholars and scientists at the national museums. From there, we, and Courtney was teaching at the International School of Kenya during that two-year period in Nairobi when we, I had not only the Fulbright, but a Ford Foundation grant to help with that work. But when we realized it was

really time again to come back to the United States, I heard from Beryl that Chic Dambach, then the president of the National Peace Corps Association, which was then called the National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, was looking for an editor of a four year old magazine they had called WorldView, and I ended up editing WorldView for the NPCA for about 15 years.

ARNOLD: [01:09:25] During that time on an AID contract, I went back to Ethiopia to do some consulting and journalism, as I mentioned earlier. And after about 15 years at the NPCA, I took a job with the federal government at Voice of America, and that's when I became the supervisor of Eritrea and Tigray, Amhara, and Oromo speakers broadcasting to Ethiopia and supervising them. I got to go back to Ethiopia two or three times. And to argue with government officials who had a very different view of free press than we do in the United States. And after eight years at VOA, I retired from the government and am now on contract editing WorldView magazine again for the NPCA. So I think that all of that is certainly directly attributable to our Peace Corps experience in Ethiopia.

WAND: [01:10:33] Absolutely. It certainly is directly related to that, isn't it?

ARNOLD: [01:10:38] Mm hmm.

WAND: [01:10:38] Right. Well, before we close this wonderful, lively interview. Thank you so much. Are there any other final comments you would like to make?

ARNOLD: [01:10:54] The one about the term Peace Corps applies to everything we have done and did. But my feeling about the experiences. I'm extremely grateful to the federal agency for the opportunity to spend that two years in Ethiopia and to open my eyes to the rest of the world. But I think what had the greater impact to me was Ethiopia and the people who lived there and the students we worked with and what we learned about ourselves as a very young couple trying to be schoolteachers in a faraway country.

WAND: [01:11:38] An enlightening.

ARNOLD: [01:11:40] Mm hmm. Very much so.

WAND: [01:11:42] Right. And one last quick question here to bring us up to date. So you and Courtney were married just before you went into Peace Corps and when you came back I know you had two children. Will you tell us just a bit about your children?

ARNOLD: [01:12:02] We have two children, Chapin and Tim. Tim would have been older now had it not been for the fact that as Peace Corps volunteers the federal government frowned upon your having children while you were in service. So Courtney and I were introduced to the concept of the birth control pill. When we returned to the United States, we had, uh, Tim was born in Norwalk, Ohio. He now lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, as a husband and father of two children, one of whom is now a sophomore at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. The other is a senior in high school. Our daughter Chapin was born a year later. She now lives in Fairfax, Virginia, with her husband, Ray, and their two children. And we see them not often enough because they're all very busy families.

ARNOLD: [01:13:01] But neither Tim or Chapin chose to become Peace Corps volunteers. And we know that many of our friends and colleagues from Peace Corps do have children who had that same experience. I think our children, because we raised them in Eugene, Oregon, it was a very counterculture community and they had their own little experience with learning cultures. And probably had a little too much of our history of the Peace Corps to really want to follow in our footsteps. They had other things they wanted to do. Chapin became a very accomplished ballerina in high school. And Tim, Tim's drumming was exceptional, and his ambition to be a rock drummer sort of transcended any other obligations he had to life for several years.

ARNOLD: [01:14:05] It was fascinating to watch both of our children develop skills that were very much appropriate to the community they lived in. Tim, in fact, moved on to Seattle and became very well-known with a couple of good bands that toured the country. They were on major record labels. And he is now working for a web design company that serves nonprofits like Planned Parenthood. Our daughter Chapin works for a direct mail

company in Washington, and they're both very successful without Peace Corps experience.

WAND: [01:14:46] Right. But you expose them to lots of international opportunities.

ARNOLD: [01:14:50] Certainly.

WAND: [01:14:50] As I recall.

ARNOLD: [01:14:51] When we were, we did when we were living in Nairobi. Both of them decided they wanted to come over and live with us for six months or a year. So they had their own international experience in that way. And it was wonderful for all of us.

WAND: [01:15:05] Absolutely.

ARNOLD: [01:15:06] Probably the best time in our lives.

WAND: [01:15:08] Wonderful. Thank you again, David, for a very, very interesting conversation.

ARNOLD: [01:15:14] Pat, thank you very much for the opportunity.

WAND: [01:15:16] Yeah, my pleasure. Bye bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]