

Deena Lawrence Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Deena Lawrence (then Krumdick) served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Lesotho from 1987 to 1989 in an education program.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Deena Lawrence

October 30, 2019

Washington, D.C.

By Charlaine Loriston

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

LORISTON: [00:00:01] My name is Charlaine Loriston. I served in Guinea as a health volunteer from 2016 to 2017. Today is October 30th and I have the pleasure of interviewing Deena Lawrence, who served as Deena Krumdick in Lesotho from 1987 to 1989 as an education volunteer. Hello, Deena.

LAWRENCE: [00:00:27] Hello.

LORISTON: [00:00:28] First of all, thank you for agreeing to share your Peace Corps story.

LAWRENCE: [00:00:32] My pleasure.

LORISTON: [00:00:33] And before we begin, let our listeners know where are you from and where did you come from? And you can tell us more about your family or your educational background before Peace Corps.

LAWRENCE: [00:00:46] Well, I was born in Stuttgart, Germany, because my dad was in the Army there, but only lived there for about six months. Otherwise, I grew up pretty much completely in the Chicago area, mostly in the suburb of Arlington Heights. I've got two younger sisters. I went to elementary, middle, high school there in Illinois and then went to Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa, for four years for a bachelor's, for a liberal arts degree. I majored in psychology. And Grinnell is a very progressive, social justice oriented school. And I think even before that, I already had a very much of a social justice bend. But Grinnell certainly nourishes that in people. So while I was there my senior year, I applied for Peace Corps.

LORISTON: [00:01:39] How did you find out about the Peace Corps?

LAWRENCE: [00:01:42] Hmm. There must have been a recruiter that came to campus or something. I don't remember for sure but, or something in the career development office where I went in to supposed to be writing resumes. And I knew I wanted to go to grad school, but I knew I didn't want to go right away. I'd had 16 years straight of education and I wanted a break. I wanted to do something else for a while and then specialize. That's why I got a liberal arts degree thinking, okay, I just want a very general education background first, and then in grad school I'll specialize in a real specific field. So Peace Corps was a perfect two year interlude.

LORISTON: [00:02:26] So what was the impetus behind you actually picking up the phone or picking up the paperwork in order to apply?

LAWRENCE: [00:02:36] Yes, because it was not online at that point in the eighties. Um. I really think, this is going to choke me up. But I'd always felt like I knew I had a, I mean, I didn't grow up rich or really spoiled or anything. But I had it, I already knew that even as a kid that I had it better than most people on the planet. You know, I had a loving family, wonderful parents, my sisters, a wonderful house to live in, always plenty to eat. Great educational opportunities. And I thought, you know, not everybody gets this. So I want to try to even things out a little bit. And

obviously, I can't give, magically give everybody else in the world what I had, but to give at least what I could at least for a couple of years to help. Can I say thank you for all the privilege I had?

LORISTON: [00:03:36] And so here you are sitting at a desk filling out your application. What was that process like for you?

LAWRENCE: [00:03:43] Hmm. It was a lot of pages, I remember, of application. Oh, yeah. Pages and pages of things to fill out. And then they wanted, yeah, a medical background to make sure that I was healthy and ready for this. It was funny, my senior year in college as I was applying, they said, oh, well, we might want to send you. I was partway through the application process, you know, as my senior year of school was going on. And they said, well, if we want to send you as an education volunteer, as a math and science teacher, you need more math. I said, um, I've already had calculus and everything else. I can't imagine I'm going to go to a third world country and be teaching something more advanced than that. And they said, oh no, if you are going to go as a math teacher. I had a lot of science already, but they said you need more math.

LAWRENCE: [00:04:32] So they said I had to take linear algebra and differential equations my senior year. I was a second semester senior. I was like, um, I'm really not very into this, you know. I really don't think I need this. I was not motivated. So I eventually dropped it, I think, to a pass fail or something. And that still satisfied Peace Corps that I'd technically taken it, but sure enough, yeah, I got to my village and I was teaching basic arithmetic, not differential equations, and it was kind of funny.

LORISTON: [00:05:00] So back then, Peace Corps actually made recommendations for your education, wow.

LAWRENCE: [00:05:06] They did.

LORISTON: [00:05:06] And so what was, um, after you've submitted your application, how long did it take for you to actually receive a response?

LAWRENCE: [00:05:16] Hmm. I am sure I had it before graduation, so it was sometime during my senior year, during that same nine month process.

LORISTON: [00:05:28] Okay, about nine months. And when you were given your country of service, how did you feel? Were you excited, were you concerned?

LAWRENCE: [00:05:41] I was, I admit, a tiny bit disappointed because they had first told me I would be going to a country without malaria. And the countries at that point were Vanuatu in the South Pacific, way out past Australia out there, and one other tropical island up in the middle of an ocean somewhere. Tuvalu, I think. And Lesotho. And so I'm like, oh, most likely I'm going to some exotic tropical island with palm trees and beaches and all that. And, you know, because those were the countries that they'd narrowed it down to for me. And so then when I actually got my invitation to serve and it was for Lesotho, I'm like, oh, I am not going to a tropical island. There are no beaches. There's not even a coastline. There's no palm trees like, oh well, oh well. So I didn't even know, I'd never heard of Lesotho, did not know how to pronounce it.

LORISTON: [00:06:36] So you had no choice in the matter, in terms of where you served?

LAWRENCE: [00:06:41] Correct.

LORISTON: [00:06:42] And so now here you are, you've received your invitation. But actually, let me back it up. While you were applying and even after, how did your family or your friends respond to your decision to skip graduate school in order to serve in the Peace Corps?

LAWRENCE: [00:06:59] Hmm. People thought I was a little crazy, um. A few of my closest friends who knew me well and had very similar value systems were really supportive. My parents were a little nervous, I think. You know, it's really, really far to send your firstborn and Africa sounds

scary. You know, most people have never been there, don't know much about it. And yeah, I know my mom was worried at least. My dad maybe too, but he doesn't show it as much as my mom did. And plenty of friends, yeah, thought it was pretty crazy. They're like, why don't you get a job where you'll actually make money or something like that?

LORISTON: [00:07:46] What was it about the Peace Corps that made them reluctant, I guess, to support your decision?

LAWRENCE: [00:07:54] Yeah. Hmm. That's a good question. I guess just the overall idea that people have that it's dangerous and hard to do, which, it's definitely hard, can be dangerous certainly. So those are somewhat valid points, but I guess that's more of a deterrent for other people than it is for me. I've always liked, in some ways I think I intentionally do things outside the box, because staying inside the box can be kind of boring and limiting.

LORISTON: [00:08:29] So nine months, you finally received your invitation. How soon after that were you, I guess, on your way to your Peace Corps service or?

LAWRENCE: [00:08:43] Training.

LORISTON: [00:08:43] Yeah, training and all of that?

LAWRENCE: [00:08:44] Well, if there's one thing I guess I could back up and mention, I was really surprised they weren't sending me to a Spanish speaking country.

LORISTON: [00:08:50] Why is that?

LAWRENCE: [00:08:50] Well, I had studied Spanish through middle school, high school, college, had studied in Colombia, had studied in Spain, was fairly fluent enough. Um, certainly spoke Spanish better than I spoke Sesotho, like most people, because nobody speaks Sesotho if you don't live there. Um, but again, for medical reasons they had limited me to non-malarial countries. So I was like, okay, we're not going to use

my Spanish skills. So it was a little bit odd. But, um, see I had, I'm sure when I was graduating college I already knew what I was doing. So otherwise it would have been very scary to graduate college and say, I don't know where I'm going next, you know? So sometime during my senior year I must have had my invitation to serve and accepted.

LAWRENCE: [00:09:40] But then there was about an eight, six month lag? Graduation would have been in May or June. And based on the Lesotho school calendar, their training schedule was that training started around Thanksgiving. So I had the, the summer and the part of the fall before I was going to report for training.

LORISTON: [00:10:05] And where was your initial meeting with your future group, service group, and the Peace Corps?

LAWRENCE: [00:10:13] We started in Atlanta. There was about a week there. It was called Crest, C-R-E-S-T, at the time.

LORISTON: [00:10:20] Do you know what it stood for?

LAWRENCE: [00:10:23] No, I'm sure I did at the time. Peace Corps has got so many acronyms. I bet the S-T is stateside training. Probably. That's my guess. I know it was CREST and it was about a week in Atlanta. So that's where I first met up with everybody. We did about a week there of training, learning a little bit about the host country, a bunch of sessions to talk with other people about, okay, why am I doing this? And it was a real good chance, I think, from Peace Corps' point of view too, for people to back out before they actually get sent on a plane to the other side of the planet.

LORISTON: [00:11:03] And how many of you were at that initial meeting, do you recall?

LAWRENCE: [00:11:07] Around 40 total. There were around 40 in our group that started.

LORISTON: [00:11:11] And how many actually got on the plane?

LAWRENCE: [00:11:14] All 40. Yeah, everyone did. There was a young man named Terry. He was the other psychology major in our group. So we hit it off well. He got to Lesotho and started the training there. And after, I don't know, maybe just a couple of weeks or something, he had had a very serious girlfriend back in the U.S. and so he left at that point. He was the first to leave, but all of us who met in Atlanta did fly over to Lesotho and start training there.

LORISTON: [00:11:47] So describe what was that feeling like as soon as you landed in Lesotho?

LAWRENCE: [00:11:53] Oh, we cheered. It was great. Even when we landed in Johannesburg after that flight, there were plenty of us on the plane. And it was, yeah, it was very emotional and exciting. Um. It was fun to be with a group getting there. Flying to Atlanta I was scared because I was alone, you know? But then you bond really fast even that first week, you know, as you're getting your first vaccinations and starting to train together. Um. Yeah. I mean, we were all nervous. None of us had done anything like this before. Even the two older volunteers in our group who were retired, you know, and doing it after their careers instead of before like most of us, even though they had a lot more life experience, they'd still never done anything like this. So we're a little scared and not really knowing what we're in for, but excited.

LORISTON: [00:12:43] And so what was the environment like as soon as you walked out of their airport? What do you remember?

LAWRENCE: [00:12:53] Hmm.

LORISTON: [00:12:54] Sounds, smells. What did you see?

LAWRENCE: [00:12:56] Yeah, I remember everything was, it was greener than I expected, since Lesotho is a very dry country for the most part and very mountainous. And I know, yeah, on the bus ride from the airport to Roma, the town where our training was, it's not a very far bus ride. The airport's really close to there. But looking around and saying, yep, it's

really poor here. I knew to expect that, but it confirmed it, how very, very different it was from Chicago.

LORISTON: [00:13:29] What was it that stood out to you?

LAWRENCE: [00:13:33] I guess mostly at that point just driving by, seeing the houses that they were either the traditional rondavel made out of rocks and a mixture of cow dung and soil together with a thatched roof. Or the, quote, modern houses in Lesotho, which were cinder blocks with a corrugated tin roof. But either one being fairly humble compared to most housing in the United States.

LORISTON: [00:14:00] So you said you went to Roma, which was the training site. Was that R-O-M-A, Roma?

LAWRENCE: [00:14:07] Correct.

LORISTON: [00:14:07] And what did you do when you finally arrived in Lesotho? How much of additional training did you receive?

LAWRENCE: [00:14:16] We had two months of training there, six days a week. Um, it was pretty intense. It was pretty intense. I know that they'd. The groups before ours had had even more intense training with more sessions and it burnt people out and people had started to skip sessions and everything. So they were a little easier on us, but it was still living in pretty close quarters, you know, four women to a room or so. It was a, like a Catholic mission that Peace Corps was also using. The Peace Corps was kind of helping support it and had the ability to use the facilities. So there was like a dining hall where we had our meals and we had people who did our laundry, which was very nice. And we had language training and then what they called technical training.

LAWRENCE: [00:15:08] So for those of us who are educational volunteers, they were teaching us. A lot of us didn't have an education background. So they're teaching us how to write a test, how to plan a lesson, you know. How to make visual aids when you have almost no resources at your

disposal. And then the agriculture volunteers had their own technical training in terms of agricultural stuff. So yeah, language training and then cultural training.

LORISTON: [00:15:32] So of the 40 of you, you were either in the education or the agricultural program? Or was there another sector that arrived with you?

LAWRENCE: [00:15:43] No, those are the two groups. The majority of us, probably 25, 28 of us or something like that were education volunteers. And then there was a, maybe a third or so of the group were, they were called AFSI at the time. I think it stood for African, I don't know. AFSI. African Food System Initiative possibly?

LORISTON: [00:16:06] And what was your technical training like? What did that entail in addition to the curriculum development and testing? Can you describe what that was like to help prepare you for your next two years?

LAWRENCE: [00:16:23] Um, yeah, not much was on subject matter because they figured we already knew about science or math or whatever. We were there to teach. Maybe knew more, like I said, more math or science than we were actually going to be able to teach. So it was more, yeah, what would someone, say, who had been an education major would have learned. Again, yeah, curriculum planning, how to write a lesson plan, you know, how to plan out an introductory activity and a wrap up. And so how to present material, how to create a test that is fair and reasonable. Things like that.

LORISTON: [00:17:04] And how was that for you, that situation, or rather that, that training and how did you take to it?

LAWRENCE: [00:17:11] It was, it was pretty good, actually. It really helped because it was, not having been an education major, I didn't, it was information I didn't really have.

LORISTON: [00:17:20] And do you feel like that training actually prepared you for the work you would be doing in your community?

LAWRENCE: [00:17:27] Fairly well. Fairly well. Yeah.

LORISTON: [00:17:29] Now, let's go back to cultural training or language training. How was your language training?

LAWRENCE: [00:17:37] It, it was good in that we had native speakers training us. That's very important. And they were very patient. But it was based on a model that was very auditory. And I'm not an auditory learner. I'm a visual learner. I didn't really know that at the time. I think I was figuring it out, though, because they, for some reason had this policy where the trainers really were not allowed to write anything down for us. We were supposed to just listen, you know. Whoever had designed this curriculum or this methodology was apparently an auditory learner. And they're like, oh, maybe everybody is an auditory learner. People should just hear the language, which is fine if you're a baby or a toddler, you can just hear a language and you soak it up. But as an adult, not so much, not for some of us at least.

LAWRENCE: [00:18:34] Luckily, I was 22 at the time. The volunteers that were older had a much harder time learning the language. And I didn't need to become fluent since secondary school education, which is where I was going, is officially taught in English in Lesotho. So even if I didn't really speak Sesotho, it technically didn't matter. But to get around in the village, it, it certainly was helpful.

LORISTON: [00:18:59] So your language training was only in Sesotho?

LAWRENCE: [00:19:03] Um. They could speak English with us. They just weren't supposed to write anything. And I just needed to see it to learn it, to remember it. Whether it was spelled phonetically or spelled properly didn't matter so much. I just needed to see it. So finally I started, they would say something and I would write it out phonetically for myself and make myself little mnemonics. Like I remember I had, um, the phrase that we needed first was *ha ke bue Sesotho*, I don't speak

Sesotho. Because they, they taught us all the traditional greetings which you need at any time you're walking and you'd meet someone and you needed to say in the native language, hello, how are you? I am fine, thank you. How are you? So once you say that to somebody, though, in their language, they think, oh, you speak my language. And they go, ba ba ba ba, you know, and start speaking to me. So the next thing you had to know how to say was, I don't actually speak Sesotho, so stop.

LORISTON: [00:19:57] So you said that was *ha ke*?

LAWRENCE: [00:19:59] *Ha ke bue Sesotho*.

LORISTON: [00:20:02] Can you?

LAWRENCE: [00:20:03] I'll just close this door.

LORISTON: [00:20:04] Can you, at your best, spell *ha ke bue Sesotho*?

LAWRENCE: [00:20:09] Sure. Yeah. *Ha* is the no part which is H-A. And the next word is *ke*, which means I, K-E. And then *bua* means to speak. So *bue* is the negative. So B-U-E. And then Sesotho, the name of the language there, S-E-S-E-T-H-O. No. S-E-S-O-T-H-O? I'm not writing it. See again, I'm very visual, so I'd need to be writing it. And I apologize to speakers of Sesotho who are better than I am if I'm saying or spelling any of these things wrong.

LORISTON: [00:20:45] So *ke*, that means to speak?

LAWRENCE: [00:20:48] The *ke* is the me part or I. Yeah. So basically it's no, I don't speak Sesotho.

LORISTON: [00:20:56] And the second following phrase, when you said, well, I actually don't speak Sesotho?

LAWRENCE: [00:21:02] Oh, that was the main thing that I remember asking the trainers because they, they taught us the greetings very well. And so it

was great. We'd go walk around the village or something and we'd greet people properly. But then we said, please, please, please teach us how to say I don't speak Sesotho. So they taught us that. And I was like, okay, well, how am I going to remember this? You know, again, because I couldn't see it. So I made myself a little mnemonic of a hockey player because it sounds like hockey. So hockey players skating on ice, but the ice was actually a pond. And in the pond sticking up out of the ice was a big buoy, because I could remember the Sesotho part. You know, the country's Lesotho, the language is Sesotho, the people are Basotho, one person is a Mosotho, so that was all pretty easy.

LORISTON: [00:21:47] But can you explain that, Mosotho and Basotho?

LAWRENCE: [00:21:51] Oh sure. So Basotho, B-A-S-E-T-H-O [sic], are, is what the people are called as a group. And then, um, actually, M-O probably, M-O-S-O-T-H-O then is singular one person. Because a lot of the words in the language, you change it by changing the beginning of the word, as opposed to like in English we would add an S or take off the S from the singular to plural. But in Sesotho you often change the beginning.

LORISTON: [00:22:26] Okay. So you quickly learned about your learning style and you created something that worked for you.

LAWRENCE: [00:22:34] Mm hmm.

LORISTON: [00:22:34] And would you say that when you got to your village, it was very helpful?

LAWRENCE: [00:22:41] It was helpful, I. Yeah. I did not learn the language as fluently as a lot of other people. Um, partly, I think, because my village was close to the capital. So there were more people in my village who spoke English than in some of the more remote parts of the country. Um. And again, as an education volunteer, I technically didn't need the language skills to do my job. But of course you do need the language skills to go to the shop in the village and buy something or to talk to your neighbors if they don't speak English and things like that.

LORISTON: [00:23:16] So what about your cross-cultural training? What was that like for you and what did it entail?

LAWRENCE: [00:23:24] Oh yeah, I don't remember a lot of details, but I think kind of some role play about, you know, how people interact, you know, how to show respect to the village chief and the headmaster of your school and things like that. And they made sure we learned that, I mean, at that point in Lesotho women did not wear pants. Absolutely did not wear shorts. But even pants was not acceptable. Once in a while in the capital, say, you'd see a woman wearing pants. Otherwise, prostitutes wore pants. That was it. You women didn't wear pants. So whether you were teaching or climbing a mountain or cleaning your house or anything, we wore skirts. So that was a pretty important cultural thing.

LORISTON: [00:24:13] And how did your group, how did the women of your group adjust to that? And how was it, how did it affect those who came with a lot of clothes?

LAWRENCE: [00:24:24] Oh, I'm sure they told us ahead of time so we didn't come with suitcases full of pants and no skirts and then be up a creek. So, yeah, we knew what, what we were getting into and that it, you know, kind of like if you go to a Muslim country and you need to keep your head covered or whatever the customs are, it's like this is just the way it works here. And it's amazing what you get used to. Yeah, I could do anything in a skirt. Yeah, really. Climbing mountains and whatever.

LORISTON: [00:24:56] Ride a bike.

LAWRENCE: [00:24:57] Yeah, I didn't have a bike, but I would have certainly done it. Absolutely. Um. yeah. And it's pretty nice actually. A skirt keeps you cooler in the summer, I think, and can keep you warmer in the winter, especially with a slip under it and everything, since you're being really modest. So, yeah, it was, it was fun.

LORISTON: [00:25:15] So what were some of the other things in terms of the way you live your life? The way you, for example, eat? The way you use the

restroom. What were certain things that you had to adjust to? And how did you take that adjustment?

LAWRENCE: [00:25:34] Oh yeah, that was huge, but very cool. Luckily, I like to camp and, you know, could handle it, but that was about as different as life could be. There was no running water anywhere in the village. Even the chief I don't think had running water. So there were a couple, two, three pumps, boreholes, scattered throughout the village, and it was the type where you'd pump. Kind of like your arms were riding a bike, that kind of pumping. And often we ran out of water, which is kind of ironic because Lesotho has big dams now and sells water to South Africa and all that. But a lot of places, yeah, there was no river nearby. And so when the, when the pump was dry, the pump was dry. And by the middle of most days, depending on the season, it would run dry.

LAWRENCE: [00:26:23] And so I would set an alarm for like 3 a.m. to get up, especially the second year when I had a different house that was close enough to a pump that you could walk to it safely in the dark, and get up when the reservoir, you know, the well would have refilled with groundwater. And get up. And I still had to pump a long time. So I would sing myself different songs, you know, sing the ABCs. And I had some songs in Spanish I would sing. And I just this little repertoire of songs just to kind of pass the time as I pumped and pumped and pumped and the water would trickle out into my bucket, but I'd get enough that I could get by. Yes, yeah, no running water, no plumbing. I had an outhouse. Peace Corps did have a rule that volunteers had to be provided with an outhouse at your school. It was one of the things the school had to provide as part of your housing.

LORISTON: [00:27:13] Was it private?

LAWRENCE: [00:27:15] It was, which was ooh la la. Luxury to have a private outhouse with walls and a little tin roof, you know. But most people did not have that. They either didn't have any type of outhouse or if they did, they shared it with lots and lots and lots and lots of other people. So I had to share mine just with a black widow spider that was in there one time. But yeah, there was a little lock on it because otherwise the

whole village would have been using it, you know? So that was a little different. Yeah, you get used to that. And it gets cold in Lesotho, so it's, that was an adjustment too, living without heat.

LORISTON: [00:27:56] So can you describe this outhouse to your listeners?

LAWRENCE: [00:28:00] Oh.

LORISTON: [00:28:01] Was it a toilet you could sit on?

LAWRENCE: [00:28:04] Yes, actually, unlike a lot of countries, you didn't have to squat. You could sit, there was a little shelf type seat over the hole and there was a pit dug down however many feet. I don't remember if there was a lid that closed or not, but it had. So it was maybe a little room, oh, probably three feet by three feet, two and a half feet by two and a half feet, something like that. A little tiny box with a little door and walls and a little roof to keep the rain and snow out.

LORISTON: [00:28:35] That was. Snow?

LAWRENCE: [00:28:36] Oh, yeah. Lesotho is very high in elevation. It has the highest low point of any country in the world. The lowlands of Lesotho are not low at all. It's a little bit like Denver, where even if you're not in the mountains, you're still up really high. So, yeah, it snowed. It snows in Lesotho in the winter.

LORISTON: [00:28:56] And so this was your, I guess, your living arrangement when you finally got to your village.

LAWRENCE: [00:29:02] Yes.

LORISTON: [00:29:02] Was it the same in Roma?

LAWRENCE: [00:29:06] In Roma, we actually had flush toilets. They were not the nicest you've ever seen. But yes, Roma had. There were even showers that sometimes had hot water. So training was a good

transition. You know, we were kind of roughing it but not at all like once we got to our villages.

LORISTON: [00:29:26] So for the entire two months, were you only at this Christian, excuse me, Catholic mission facility? Or did you all ever go to a host family to help break you in?

LAWRENCE: [00:29:39] We did, yes. So probably three quarters of the way through training after, say, six weeks or something. We did something called the village live-in where we spent a week living in a village. And it was a good, yeah, breaking in where it's like, okay, this is what it's like to really live in a village and not have a flush toilet and not have a shower.

LORISTON: [00:30:00] And this was a village in Roma?

LAWRENCE: [00:30:05] Um, nearby. Some, not too far away, but yeah, outside of the village of Roma, but some other village nearby hosted us. And it was still pretty posh because we weren't totally alone. We were most or all of us in the same village and pretty much, I think two of us per household, say. So you still had somebody else right there with you, you know, one of your friends, one of your fellow trainees. But it was, yeah, eye opening, like, oh, this is what village life is really like. Okay.

LORISTON: [00:30:38] So let's think more about the time you had in training before you went to your village. What were some of the things that you did or found yourself doing once you became more comfortable in your environment? Did you explore the community? Did you go out dancing? What were some of the things that you did during training?

LAWRENCE: [00:31:03] We made our own fun basically. The truth is there was no place to much to go. We could walk into the village, into town, to buy beer mostly. And then, yeah, pretty much just on the campus where we were training, we had parties, had our own little Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations and, and things like that and really, really bonded. I mean, it's amazing the bond we all formed during those two months. Priceless.

LORISTON: [00:31:35] And this is your first year really now away from home during these holidays. How did you all take that or handle that?

LAWRENCE: [00:31:47] Hmm. It was probably a little sad for all of us. Again, most of us were 22 right out of college. 22, 23 was probably the average age with just a few, couple of people in their thirties maybe. Two couples probably in their thirties, two married couples, and then a couple retired volunteers that were older. But otherwise, yeah, we were young. It was our first time, for a lot of us, probably not spending Christmas. Thanksgiving some of us had maybe stayed at college, but, but Christmas not being with our families. So it was perfect in a way. The training fell over that major holiday because we all had it together, you know.

LAWRENCE: [00:32:26] And we, one of the volunteers dressed up as Santa and a bunch of us dressed up as elves, and we used a big agave flower stalk as a Christmas tree in the corner. And we made ornaments. I'm sure Barb and Cindy and other elementary school teachers that were very crafty helped us with glitter and crayons and whatever. And we had a lot of fun. We did a Secret Santa.

LORISTON: [00:32:55] And so now your training is all over.

LAWRENCE: [00:32:59] Hmm.

LORISTON: [00:33:00] Let's talk about the steps that we're taking in terms of the next 24 months of your life. Did you have a choice in the matter as to where you would be going?

LAWRENCE: [00:33:12] I thought I did once we were in country, yeah. And during training they were, you know, talking to each of us and getting to know us and figuring out where, which village we'd each go to. And I very much requested to go way out in the mountains and live in a hut and be way out there. And I remember being very disappointed when my village was really close to the capital city in the lowlands which, like I said, are not low, but still not way out in the mountains where I'd be

roughing it and, you know, away from roads and all of that. I'm not sure why. I'll probably never know why they placed me where they was, where they did. I'm sure it's, you know, partly they had so many schools that were approved for volunteers and wanted volunteers and all that. And they had to match those of us up with those schools.

LAWRENCE: [00:34:12] And if everybody wanted to be way out in the mountains, everybody couldn't be, you know, because not all the villages were way out there. Some were in closer to Maseru, the capital. Um. But still, I kept wondering, well, do they not think that I can handle it being out there? Or was it just a lottery? I don't know. It was, it was disappointing to not get out. But I got to live in a neat rondavel with a thatched roof and it wasn't a circle. My first one was a rectangle. And my landlord was a witchdoctor, which was pretty cool. He would do traditional ceremonies right in the compound there across the other side of the path. And when the, the, so the school was, the school had to provide housing. And so they were, I'm sure the school was renting that little building for me from the witchdoctor.

LAWRENCE: [00:35:07] And I'm not sure what happened because I was not privy to all the inside stuff. But for some reason, the school thought that, hmm, we need to get her a different place to live. So during the second half of my first year, the school built me my own brand new little house, which was round, and all traditional stone with a brand new thatched roof. And even they knew I was fairly private, so they even made me a little reed fenced courtyard, which was so nice, very thoughtful of them. It was right on the primary school grounds. And then I would just walk from there over to the secondary school grounds where I taught so. So I was happy about my living situation that way.

LORISTON: [00:35:53] What was the name of your community that you were assigned to?

LAWRENCE: [00:35:57] The village is called Ha Moruthane.

LORISTON: [00:35:59] Can you spell that please?

LAWRENCE: [00:36:00] Sure. The Ha is H-A, the first word, which means like the place of. And then Moruthane, M-O-R-U-T-H-A-N-E, which is the name of the chief's family.

LORISTON: [00:36:17] And earlier you mentioned the capital name as well. Can you repeat that name and provide a spelling before we continue?

LAWRENCE: [00:36:25] Sure. The capital of Lesotho is Maseru. M-A-S-E-R-U.

LORISTON: [00:36:31] Okay, so now you're here in Ha Mahtani?

LAWRENCE: [00:36:36] Moruthane.

LORISTON: [00:36:37] Moruthane.

LAWRENCE: [00:36:38] Very good.

LORISTON: [00:36:41] Can you describe what was the environment like there and how did the people receive you upon your arrival?

LAWRENCE: [00:36:47] Oh boy, um, it was crazy. The, the. The chief called me Dr. Deena. I kept trying to explain to him I have a bachelor's degree, not a PhD or an MD or anything like that. I'm not actually a doctor. Oh, but you are so well educated, Dr. Deena, we are so honored to have you here. And, yeah, even with just my little liberal arts bachelor's degree, it was much more, much more educated than anyone else in the village had, master, chief, anybody. So, yeah, they were really amazing to me and treated me with so much respect. And I was like, I'm just a 22 year old kid, you know? But it was really beautiful.

LAWRENCE: [00:37:43] They threw me a big welcome celebration. They killed a cow for me, which is a big deal. You know, people don't eat meat most of the time. You slaughter one of the cows once in a while for a wedding or a funeral or some other big, big deal. And they killed a cow for this. And everybody pitched in and made this big feast and had a big ceremony. My APCD, associate Peace Corps director, for education came to this big event and the chief presented me with a blanket, a

traditional wearing blanket called a kobo, K-O-B-O, which I still have and will treasure always. And a traditional Basotho hat, that kind of triangular cone shaped hat. Yeah. And made speeches and it was incredible. Very humbling. Quite an honor.

LORISTON: [00:38:45] Describe that festival, festive occasion.

LAWRENCE: [00:38:50] Can't find the words.

LORISTON: [00:38:51] Yeah. You know, it was humbling, yes. But how did it make you feel to, to have the respect of the people? And what was going through your mind at the time, if you recall?

LAWRENCE: [00:39:05] Yeah. I just kept thinking, I really don't deserve all this. You know, I'm just, again, a kid right out of college who doesn't exactly know how to be a teacher. But I can try and, yeah, I really felt like I don't deserve all this, but you can't say that to people, you know. I kept trying to tell them, really, okay, I'm not a doctor, but it's nice. They, it was part of the culture, you know, to show that much respect to somebody. And they were honored.

LAWRENCE: [00:39:40] I mean, they, from a practical standpoint, were getting an almost free teacher. They didn't need to pay me, you know, a salary the way they paid the other teachers because Peace Corps paid that. You know, my living allowance was paid by Peace Corps to match approximately what the other teachers were getting. All the school had to do was provide me with a house and an outhouse. A little bit of basic furniture, a bed and a table. And that's about it. So they were, they were happy. That was the first part of it, I think, maybe is that I was the first Peace Corps volunteer ever at that school and in that village.

LORISTON: [00:40:16] How was the environment of the community? We know it's in the low high point for that area. But was it very green in that community? What was, what, what did you see?

LAWRENCE: [00:40:32] Hmm. It was really interesting in the village how all the paths are just where people walk and the houses are just kind of scattered

around that. So it took me quite a while to learn my way around, even though the village wasn't real big, because there was no grid system, say, like we're used to the streets here where there's 90 degree intersections and streets actually cross and some are parallel. But you learn your way around. You know, you wander around enough times. People were confused and curious. You know, again, we were close enough to the main road that runs through the lowlands and close enough to the capital that for the most part, no, I was not the first white person people had ever seen, um, but I was certainly the first one who had ever lived among them.

LAWRENCE: [00:41:21] And yeah, the little kids were, you know, so confused by the fact that my hair is straight and a different color and, you know. So they'd want to touch it. And of course, no matter how much I tried to fit in and no matter how much cultural training we'd had and all that, I. My clothes were just funny to them, you know, my kind of crazy fashion of, okay, well, you're going to wear a skirt with everything, with your hiking boots, with whatever, you know? And then trying to dress appropriately for the weather given that it got really cold and there was no heat. Um, it. Yeah, some of it was pretty comical, but they, they accepted me. I'm sure inside they're laughing like, whoa, boy, she's crazy. But.

LORISTON: [00:42:14] So compared to Illinois's winters and Lesotho, what was the difference for you and how did you have to adjust, if any?

LAWRENCE: [00:42:26] Yeah, luckily it does not get as cold in Lesotho as Chicago might. But it does get plenty cold, yeah. And again, without central heat or really any source of heat, it was tough. It was really cold. You learn to pee in a bucket at night in the winter if you, yeah, don't want to go out to the outhouse because there's snow and it's really cold. And also people train their dogs to be guard dogs. So once it's dark out, you really don't go outside or walk around. The dogs are just beaten with rocks and everything to make them pretty vicious because that's everybody's alarm system.

LAWRENCE: [00:43:09] So when you walk, even during the day, you usually in Lesotho carry a rock in your hand. There's lots of rocks, luckily. So you

just have a rock. And if a dog starts to come at you, you have to throw the rock at the dog to keep it from biting you because they're just, they're guard dogs. No, there's no concept of a pet at all because that's such a luxury, you know.

LORISTON: [00:43:31] Can you explain the purpose of the guard, guard dogs? And what exactly were they guarding?

LAWRENCE: [00:43:37] Just to be guarding. Especially if there was a shop or anything of value that other people might want to steal. Because, again, it's a very poor country and most people work together beautifully, collaboratively. But in any place in the world, there's some people who don't. And so, yes, the guard dogs would be pretty nasty. So especially at night, you really had to be careful walking around. So even to go out from your own little rondavel to your own outhouse, yeah, not so much really.

LAWRENCE: [00:44:12] The great thing with having a thatched roof is that that's such incredible insulation. And if you live in a very, very, very small house, just a little rectangle or a little circle that's only 10, 20 feet across at the most, it's a small space. And one candle can heat your house, the heat of the candle, because it's not, again, not very big space and it's so well insulated. It would warm up from just that amount of heat, thank goodness.

LORISTON: [00:44:42] So here you are. You're now in your village, in your home and school is about to begin.

LAWRENCE: [00:44:51] Hmm.

LORISTON: [00:44:52] How did you, I guess, prepare for the school year and how was your first day?

LAWRENCE: [00:45:00] Hmm. I can't specifically remember my first day of school. I do remember my first day getting to my village. The headmaster and chief had come to the swearing-in ceremony at the ambassador's house in Maseru, in the capital. And then after the ceremony, we all

grabbed our luggage and loaded it into the truck of each of our headmasters or whoever had come for us from our village and off we went. And, um, got to the village. They dropped me off by my little, my little house, and helped me carry my stuff in. And some little girls brought me a bucket of water because they knew, well, she doesn't know how to get water yet or whatever. So they brought me a bucket or two of water and then they left.

LAWRENCE: [00:45:53] And I remember sitting there going, oh God, what have I done? I guess it was, I remember the cloudy day. I can picture sitting there going, this is surreal. Here I really am. And I probably a couple of days after that before school started. Um. I know that I was, I said, well, I'm supposed to teach English and, excuse me, math and science. That's what Peace Corps officially had sent me for. And they said, well, guess what? You're the only native English speaker, so, uh, you're teaching English too. I said, okay, that does kind of make sense.

LORISTON: [00:46:25] So three subjects.

LAWRENCE: [00:46:27] Yes. Yes. So. Of different grade levels. I mostly taught the older students because the younger ones, their English really wasn't good enough for them to receive instruction in English. So the older ones theoretically understood if I was teaching them science or math content in English.

LORISTON: [00:46:47] You mentioned that it was secondary education. What age group is that?

LAWRENCE: [00:46:52] That varies a lot because a lot of the kids don't just go straight through the educational system, the way they might in a country where they don't have to raise their younger siblings or work as herd boys. Especially the system with the herd boys in Lesotho, the wealth is measured not so much in, um, in dollars or maloti, the unit of currency, or whatever. M-A-L-U-T-I, I believe. But in cows, cattle. So that's how people keep their wealth. So you need one of your sons to watch the herd. So a boy would be watching the herd until he had a

younger brother old enough to take over for him and then he could go to school.

LAWRENCE: [00:47:43] So depending on the birth order and how many siblings of which gender each kid had, boys often started school a lot later than girls. So my female students were a fairly conventional age for what would be kind of between middle school and high school here. So between, say, 13, 14 and 18, somewhere in there. The boys, some of them were quite a bit older. It varied. But some were definitely young men and not just boys. So that was based on the herd boy system.

LORISTON: [00:48:24] So it was mostly middle to high school aged individuals that you taught the English to, or did you also, I guess, have a secondary project where you taught adults?

LAWRENCE: [00:48:39] Um, no, not teaching adults. I know that's sometimes a side project, that adults will want lessons. My secondary project was setting up a library at my school. So there was no library at all. So there was, uh, I don't remember the exact organizations, if it was the African Library Project or something else back then, that had books that you could request and they sent. They sent boxes and boxes of books and I worked with the school to have shelves built and to attempt to set up a checkout system, which had limited success. But I did get a small library set up at the school as my secondary project.

LORISTON: [00:49:24] Going back to your classroom, how would you describe your first year of school versus your second year of teaching?

LAWRENCE: [00:49:32] Oh, there's an epic difference between the first and second year. Yeah, thank goodness.

LORISTON: [00:49:38] In what way?

LAWRENCE: [00:49:38] Well, the first year, the whole first year I think was really a learning experience. And the second year I felt like, okay, now I've been through everything once, every season, every holiday, every start and end of the school year, and exams. And all the different parts of it.

And so the second year doing everything over again, I'm like, okay, now I really know a little at least what's going on, what's coming, how to do things. And I felt so much more mastery. Yeah, I felt like the whole first year I was figuring things out. And if I'd left after that first year, I would have felt like, no, I did nothing. All I did is, you know, learn more than actually teach. Um. So yeah, two years is a perfect amount of commitment, I think.

LAWRENCE: [00:50:27] The classroom was very basic. We were lucky if we had chalk. We usually had chalk. Sometimes we didn't have chalk, but that was as high tech as anything got. It was a chalkboard that was not the best quality, but chalk board and usually chalk. We had a simple type of mimeograph machine that used ink that you could actually kind of make simple photocopies on to, you know, to have paper copies of a test. So the students pretty much had notebooks and we could make copies of a test or worksheets or something a little bit. We made some posters and I try to make visual aids to put on the walls.

LAWRENCE: [00:51:16] But the school was built of cinderblock with a tin roof. There were lots of silverfish, though, the little insects that lived, yeah, on the walls. I think those are very common and they like to eat paper. So I'd put up a map on the wall. Or, you know, I'd get other, I'd make a big poster of, I don't know, the reproductive system of a flower, the whatever we were studying about. And then the silverfish would eat it and there'd be, you know, it would gradually disappear from the edges, all chewed up. I'm like, ew. Isn't that nice. One other interesting thing about teaching in that school was that when it rained, you really couldn't teach because the rain on the roof is so loud.

LORISTON: [00:51:54] It was a tin roof?

LAWRENCE: [00:51:56] Mm hmm. Yes.

LORISTON: [00:51:58] And so how did your students receive you your first time around?

LAWRENCE: [00:52:06] They at first were really attentive because it was so novel having me as their teacher compared to their other teachers. Um, and then as they got, you know, as we get to know each other more, they loosened up a little bit and some would misbehave a little of course. I found that even though I did teach in English, mostly because I had to, not being real fluent in Sesotho, and I was supposed to also. But every once in a while to get their attention, I would sneak in some words in Sesotho, and they'd be like, oh, Me Deena spoke Sesotho! Pull everybody's attention back so.

LORISTON: [00:52:47] What's Me Deena?

LAWRENCE: [00:52:47] Oh, Me Deena, um. Me, M-E, literally means mother, but it's the term you use to address an adult woman.

LORISTON: [00:53:00] So it's Me Deena. Ah! With your name.

LAWRENCE: [00:53:03] Right.

LORISTON: [00:53:03] I understand. Okay. Me Deena.

LAWRENCE: [00:53:04] So if you were there, you'd be Me Charlaine.

LORISTON: [00:53:07] Okay. And so, um, how? I guess the way I should word this question is, did you have any successes or accomplishments with your students at all? Did they have to take exams?

LAWRENCE: [00:53:22] Mm hmm.

LORISTON: [00:53:22] And how did that go for you?

LAWRENCE: [00:53:24] Yeah, it went pretty well. Um. Pretty well, yeah. And some students especially that were very serious. I mean, primary school at that point in Lesotho, primary school is not very expensive. Schools were pretty much all private. There was really no. There's now public lower level primary school education. But back then, even primary school people had to pay for it, but not very much. But secondary

school was pretty expensive. So anybody who was there was really motivated. Pretty much it meant they had a dad or an uncle or an older brother or something working in the mines in South Africa, providing actual cash back at home to pay for the school fees and the uniform and all that. So they didn't goof around too much, you know? They knew their family was sacrificing a lot for them to be getting this education. So compared to students in the U.S., I think they were much, much more motivated, much more serious.

LAWRENCE: [00:54:24] And I had a few that were quite brilliant. And I can remember one. I wonder if I can remember her name. Hmm. I'm not remembering her name. I had one student. Well, this is a side note. I had the hardest time learning my students' names because almost every name in Lesotho begins with the letter M. And I know I learned things very much by the first letter. And so all of my students looked very similar, similar skin tone. A lot of the cues I was used to using in my life, you know, hair color or eye color, things like that. It's like, okay, there's no redheads. There's no blonds. You know, everybody's a brunet. And they were wearing uniforms because students wear uniforms there. So you couldn't judge anybody by dress. Of course, there's different heights and body types.

LAWRENCE: [00:55:23] They're all individuals, which I got at first. But then all the names, starting with M also, I was like, oh no, I'll never be able to tell my students apart. They all look the same. So you learn to use different, different clues. And yes, they're each amazing individuals with their own personalities. And some were smarter and some had other strengths and, you know, some were much more serious about their education. But especially the ones that really did want to learn. They were thrilled that, especially in terms of English, they had a native English speaker they could practice with. And that's priceless when you're trying to pass these standardized national exams that you need to pass. So I think I really did, yeah, help a good number of them.

LORISTON: [00:56:08] Second year around, you're still teaching the same grade levels, correct?

LAWRENCE: [00:56:12] Correct.

LORISTON: [00:56:12] And did you teach the same students? How did their, um, I guess, their progression system work there?

LAWRENCE: [00:56:22] Yeah, the, there's forms A through E in the secondary school.

LORISTON: [00:56:28] What do the forms represent?

LAWRENCE: [00:56:30] A and B are the younger secondary school students. And then if I remember correctly, after form. No, I believe there's exams at form C and form E. I, it's been a long time. Need to go back and reread my journals and all that to remember those details. But there's one set of exams and then there's a big set of exams after form E, the lower, the upper levels. So and then there's exams each year to move up. And so some of the students moved up. Some didn't. Some would vanish for whatever reason. You know, the family didn't have the money to keep paying school fees or they needed to care for younger siblings or who knows what. But yeah, our school was not certainly the best in the country, the highest academic, but neither the worst and so the students did okay. Some of them actually passed those exams and moved on.

LORISTON: [00:57:31] Did you develop any close relationships with members of your community, and if so, can you describe those relationships?

LAWRENCE: [00:57:41] Hmm. I think partly, because I'm an introvert and kept to myself a lot. Partly the language barriers, um, and then also partly that a teacher could only have female friends, a single teacher. It would have been scandalous if I become friends with, say, one of my, one of the male teachers at the school or a male neighbor or something like that. That would have been.

LORISTON: [00:58:08] Can you explain the cultural, um, the cultural I guess reason for that?

LAWRENCE: [00:58:17] Yeah, I. Thinking about it now, I guess it would have been assumed that there was an affair going on if a man and a woman who were not married to each other were actually spending time together. Um, yeah, there wasn't really the option of a friendship like that.

LORISTON: [00:58:36] And so your headmaster, how did you then create a relationship with him for your, for the purpose of your job?

LAWRENCE: [00:58:48] Hmm. Pretty much we would only see each other at school. And yeah, so it was, there was no, like after some jobs or whatever. Hey, everybody at work, let's go out for happy hour or let's have a company Christmas party. That's a social thing. There was nothing like that. I think the only social event really in the village besides, say, my welcome banquet, was the. Sometime during my service, I think it was early into my second year, the headmaster of the school married one of the teachers at the school. So there was a whole wedding that was a social event. I was the only one with a camera or who knew how to use a camera, so I was the official photographer. And the chief was the chaplain or whatever his title would have been.

LAWRENCE: [00:59:40] So we did have that one social event, but otherwise things were pretty much just you went to school, taught, maybe stayed around a little bit for a staff meeting or something like that. But then otherwise everybody pretty much just went home to their each little house and not really other socializing. Which I guess is a lot of the reason that the, all the other volunteers, we would all find ways to gather at different people's places or gather in the capital or something and socialize.

LORISTON: [01:00:16] And with regards to family dynamics, what did you observe as it pertains to family relationships there?

LAWRENCE: [01:00:28] Hmm. Um. It. I'll have to think about that. For a large. In general, there were not that many adult men around because, again, they were working in the mines.

LORISTON: [01:00:49] In the mines.

LAWRENCE: [01:00:50] Yeah, in South Africa, because that was the only way to actually have money as opposed to subsistence farming. So there were some men around, but mostly boys or older men. And so it was largely woman dominated households, but still a male dominated society. So if there was, you know, if a woman had a brother or whomever around, he still officially had the say. Although the Lesotho women are very, very tough. They're very strong. So just because it may on the surface be a patriarchy doesn't mean actually that the guys always had the last word.

LORISTON: [01:01:37] Can you explain what you mean by that? Or give us an example?

LAWRENCE: [01:01:42] Yeah. Um. Well, a funny tradition or superstition in Lesotho that it reminds me of is that it's bad luck for a woman to hit a man with a broom. I believe it's, I don't remember, it was never explained clearly what would happen to them. I think it was kind of implied it would cause impotence or something. And women were always sweeping interestingly. The thing that changed in me certainly was you sweep the inside of your house, the brooms don't have handles because there's not many trees, so there's not a lot of wood. So the broom is just straw. So basically the bottom part of a broom, 2 to 3 feet long. And so you bend over to sweep. And I'm like okay, I'll bend over to sweep inside my house.

LAWRENCE: [01:02:29] But people also sweep the dirt outside the house to make it nice because you do live a lot outside the house. And I thought, what? A broom with no handle and I'm supposed to also sweep the dirt around my house? Like, no way. I'm never doing that. That's ridiculous. Why would anybody do that? Well, guess what? I learned to love sweeping the dirt outside my house. It made it nice and it brushed off a little leaves or twigs or whatever. And it's, it's funny. It is the things you say, I'll never. And then.

LORISTON: [01:03:06] You end up doing.

LAWRENCE: [01:03:06] You end up doing. You kind of embrace that part of the culture and realize, oh, it is kind of a nice thing to do and it's not that hard. And you just, you do it. Yeah. Become, become a part of that, getting absorbed into the culture, you know. Um. But yeah, the women are, are pretty tough. They tend to be bigger than the men too. Basotho women just, for the most part, are pretty big boned. And they're not small people. And somehow the men are always thinner and maybe not always shorter, but just part of that I think, just size. Might makes right. And they're just, they have to be pretty tough. It's a hard life.

LORISTON: [01:03:51] What did you do for fun during your time in your village when you did not see your other volunteer colleagues?

LAWRENCE: [01:04:01] Yeah, um, I listened to the BBC on my shortwave radio. Yeah, there were no cell phones or anything back in the day, so I wrote letters. My mom had the really good idea to number our letters, so each of the numbers that she sent me was numbered, so we'd know if they came out of order or if some went missing. And so I wrote numbers, letters that were numbered back to her. So, yeah, good old snail mail and. Really the BBC international broadcasts were the main link to the world otherwise. Um.

LAWRENCE: [01:04:44] It was very fun every holiday throughout my entire first year, I had a gift from my mom. Not because she could easily send anything, because it's very difficult to send a package, you know, even just a letter. It was tough to get there. But packages may or may not arrive, you know. But she had this great idea. It was so sweet. I will always be thankful for it. She had come up with a little gift. It had to be very small. She'd asked as I was packing to go, what can you take with you? Can I send you with whatever? I'm like, no, mom, I have no room. I'm allowed to bring two suitcases. You know, I was bringing a big duffel bag and a big suitcase and like, that's all I can bring for two years. So, no, I can't. Thank you. But you can't send extra stuff. She's like, well, just a little something. I'm like, okay, but it can't be very big and it can't be very heavy and it can't be fragile and it can't be perishable, da da da.

LAWRENCE: [01:05:38] So bless her how she came up with something tiny, you know, just a few inches in size that was light and non-perishable, non-fragile. Some kind of little gift for every holiday. And then she wrapped them in this concentric blob starting. So say I was leaving like around Thanksgiving. So the last thing was. So how am I going explain this well? So I opened it from the outside in. And so, yeah, so the outermost one would have been probably some little thing for Thanksgiving. And then the next layer in, in this concentric layered ball, was something for Christmas. And then the next was maybe a little New Year's thing and then something for probably Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, in and in and into the center. So she had to wrap them in the reverse order with a little layer of wrapping paper around each one. And it was so sweet. Thanks, Mom, if you listen to this some day. It was fun every holiday, you know, getting through that first year at least too, to have that to look forward to.

LORISTON: [01:06:43] Did you participate in any of the cultural activities, weddings, funerals, childbirth celebrations that took place? And what was that like?

LAWRENCE: [01:06:56] Um, really the only one of all those was the wedding that I mentioned. Otherwise, I was not. If I would have stayed many more years, perhaps I would have been a more integral part of the community, more trusted. Have, you know, closer relationships where I would be invited to something, yeah, like a birth or.

LORISTON: [01:07:20] Why did you say that by, um, with the more trusted? What did you mean by that?

LAWRENCE: [01:07:26] I think it just takes a long time. At least in, in my case and probably in every case too, for the community to really get to know you. Especially being such an outsider. Like I said, you know, they had never had another Peace Corps volunteer or anyone else who was not Mosotho living there. We had one other teacher who was from Nigeria, so he didn't speak Sesotho either or spoke. He spoke less than I did, even, so very little. But he at least looked like he fit in. And I certainly

didn't. So yeah, I think it just with time, you know, people get to know you better. My language skills would have been better. I would have become more nuanced in all the subtleties of the culture and probably quit unintentionally offending people by just not knowing.

LAWRENCE: [01:08:26] You know, there's so many unspoken rules. And even though they tried to train us really well, excuse me, there's countless things in any culture that some people don't even know is one of the cultural rules, you know? But you just with time, realize, oh, you don't say this in this way to this person or in this situation and whatever. Um. The wedding was neat, though. It was neat to be a part of that. There was a beautiful part where the chief performing the ceremony took his robes and used them to tie together the two hands of the man and the woman getting married and then bless it. And then, of course, a big feast and party.

LORISTON: [01:09:13] Going back to food then. What was the food like and did you have any favorites? And yeah, so what, what was your reaction to the new tastes?

LAWRENCE: [01:09:27] Well, there's not a lot of variety in the diet there. *Papa*, which is just spelled P-A-P-A, is the staple starch food. It's made out of millet or corn, and it's just a white starchy grain, kind of like very stiff mashed potatoes. That is what most people eat three meals a day every day of their life. At least then, maybe things have changed a little. Traditionally, you eat it with greens, which would be, could be something you grow in the garden, you know, some kind of spinach type green or wild greens, whatever wild greens you can pick. So that's the greens are called *moroho*. *Moroho*, M-O-R-O-J-O [sic].

LAWRENCE: [01:10:14] So *papa* and *moroho* is what you eat most meals. You've got your starch, you've got all kinds of good nutrients and vitamins and minerals in the greens. And cook it with a little bit of oil and salt and, um, you get used to it. It's not my favorite but. The greens were often quite bitter. But again, that's what there is. School provided lunch every day.

LORISTON: [01:10:45] To you or the students?

LAWRENCE: [01:10:47] Both. And so there was a simple little kitchen building on the school compound with a big fireplace and a big cauldron, like a picture of, you know, a Halloween witch's cauldron, this big metal thing. I didn't know they really existed in real life. It seems like, you know, now in Harry Potter or a traditional Halloween thing, you'd see them. Like they really make those, this giant metal cauldron that you could almost take a bath in. And the ladies in the kitchen would make a vat of *papa* for everybody. And then most days it was *moroho* with it. But there was some food aid that was donated from some developed countries. I don't remember who had sent it in, but canned beans were part of it and canned fish. The fish I chose not to eat. They knew I was a vegetarian, even though they didn't understand that concept.

LAWRENCE: [01:11:47] But the beans were really good. And honestly, I'm not sure if the beans, *linaoa* they're called. L-I-N. How do you spell it? Dinal? All right. The L is pronounced like a D so L-I-N-A-H-O [sic]? I don't know. Something like that. That was actually delicious. Really good. It was a little bit like eating beans and rice, but it was kind of beans in this other starch. It was funny, speaking of food things. They, most people eat with their fingers because, of course, traditionally you're not going to have utensils and the *papa*'s starchy enough that you can kind of use it to scoop up the other part of the meal.

LAWRENCE: [01:12:35] But they knew, oh, she's from another place. She's from America where they have silverware, so we better give her a utensil to eat with. But there was not a normal sized fork or spoon or anything in the kitchen. So one of the students who was in charge of bringing the staff their meals, a little girl of course, she'd bring me my big plate of *papa* and *moroho* or *papa* and *linaoa*, and they'd bring me a spoon. But it was a giant mixing spoon because that's what the kitchen had. So everybody else was just eating with their fingers and I would have this giant spoon. It was so funny.

LORISTON: [01:13:15] So did you use it?

LAWRENCE: [01:13:15] No. I said, you know what? I can do this. I learned to eat with my fingers like everybody else because it was honestly easier than eating with a spoon that would not fit in my mouth. But it was very thoughtful of them to bring me a spoon because they thought I needed one.

LORISTON: [01:13:31] How did they react to you using your hands?

LAWRENCE: [01:13:38] Oh, I got laughed at a lot because even if I thought I was doing it like everybody else, you know, in some subtle way I was doing something wrong. Probably always, you know. And so they thought it was funny. And, you know, you just have to learn to laugh at yourself too, because what else can you do?

LORISTON: [01:13:57] Did you ever incorporate some of their fashion into your wardrobe while you were there?

LAWRENCE: [01:14:10] Hmm. Besides the just wearing a skirt, um. A little bit, I think unintentionally. I remember a very funny time. So like I said, water was very limited. Excuse me. So I could not, well, and I had no shower or bathtub or. They gave me a big, big metal container. It was probably three, four feet long, it was a big oval, by two, three feet wide, by 18 inches deep that you could have taken a bath in if there was enough water. But water was very, very limited so it would have taken all the water for a week to fill that thing. So I never took a bath in it.

LAWRENCE: [01:14:52] My parents sent me a solar shower that you could fill with water. It's like a black, a black, big black bag. The plastic was like a really heavy duty plastic. And you could theoretically, if you're camping or whatever, fill it with water, put it out in the sun. It's black, so the water should get hot, and then you could hang it from a tree or something. And it had a little hose attached to it that the water could come out and theoretically you could take a shower. But that requires enough water, first of all. It requires warm enough temperature that the water is actually going to get warm and not be cold. It requires a tree from which to hang this or something. And there's not hardly trees in Lesotho. And it would require privacy somewhere. And I did not have a

shower stall or any place I could have stood there naked under running water, private. So that was a bust. But it was a nice idea.

LAWRENCE: [01:15:51] So I did a lot of sponge baths. And usually there was enough water to, I'd wash my face and wash under my arms. And with that water then I could wash one limb of my body. So one day I'd wash my right arm. And then the next day after I washed my face with the water, I'd wash my left arm. And one day I'd wash my right leg. And then the next day I'd wash my left leg. So I remember walking to school and whichever body part I had just washed was all like fresh and clean and tingly because it had just been scrubbed with a wash cloth. And we were walking along like, my right leg feels so clean! And the rest of me, of course, is filthy. But you know, one part at a time. I would just cycle through. And then every once in a while I would wash my hair, but not very often because it takes at least two, three cups of water to wash your hair in a bucket, you know. There's just no way to do it unless you've got, you know, yeah, at least a few cups.

LAWRENCE: [01:16:49] So my hair would get really greasy in between washings. There was just no choice. And I was pretty embarrassed, you know, being blond. As it got greasier, it would turn just like a darker brown kind of color from just all the oils. I'm like, oh, this is kind of gross. I haven't washed my hair in, I don't know, a week, two weeks, whatever it's been, you know, depending on how much water there was. Well, I have no choice. And I'd put it up in a ponytail and it's just the way it was. And I'll never forget, I was. One of the, actually that teacher who had got married, she complimented me. Oh, Me Deena, your hair looks so nice. And this was like at one of the times when it is at its greasiest, because in terms of style, you know, incorporating.

LAWRENCE: [01:17:44] So this was an unintentional way I adapted their style, because men and women would both wear like some hair gels or oils or something to keep their hair really, try to make it more smooth. Mine was very smooth when it was that greasy. When it was clean, it would kind of fly all around, being very fine and straight. And so, yes, one of the most sincere compliments I ever got was because my hair was incredibly, incredibly greasy.

LORISTON: [01:18:16] So tell your listeners, what is a story that you have, probably the funniest thing that happened to you, that made you realize that you were very different from the people, other than your hair story? And did you have any somber moments while you were there as well?

LAWRENCE: [01:18:37] Hmm. Well, one time I can remember that was very humbling and embarrassing that showed me that I was not as good. Well, two things showed me. Well, many things showed me I was not as good as living under those situations, those circumstances, as the people who are used to it. The poor headmaster at one point had to tell me my jacket was too dirty and he, I could just tell he was mortified to be having that conversation with me. But again, water was really limited, so doing laundry was tough. And I had this denim jacket that I wore all the time in the winter because it was cold. And it got dirty of course. You're living in dirt, in a house made out of dirt. And washing that denim jacket was really hard. It wasn't like, you know, I could wash my other clothes more easily. But and also in the winter, if you washed it and it's wet and it's not going to dry for a while, what am I going to wear? I'm going to freeze.

LAWRENCE: [01:19:40] So it had gotten kind of dirty and the Basotho don't walk around in dirty clothes somehow. I don't know how they do it. It's incredible. But they could be living in conditions way worse than mine even, very humble, overcrowded, whatever. Somehow they managed to have their clothes spotlessly clean, perfectly ironed, all the time. It's amazing, but that's a part of the culture. That's what you do. It shows your self respect or something.

LORISTON: [01:20:15] How did they do their laundry then?

LAWRENCE: [01:20:18] I don't know. Somehow, in a very tiny amount of water, they managed to make everything clean and hang it up to dry on a line. Of course we were washing everything by hand. There's no washing machine and, you know, you can't even imagine that. And then ironing with a, you'd call it the type of iron that you just put on a heat source. It's not electric, of course, because there's no electricity.

LORISTON: [01:20:45] Was it a coal iron?

LAWRENCE: [01:20:47] Um, the iron itself was just a chunk of metal, like a triangular chunk of metal. So the heat wasn't in the iron. My stove was a little like five gallon or whatever it is, um, propane cylinder that you can screw a little burner, one burner, onto the top of it. And so you'd turn that on and then set the iron just right on top of the flame to get hot and then iron with it, you know, just on top of my little table with a towel on top or whatever, you'd iron. So I think that's pretty much what everybody had. But even though, yeah, they were incredibly poor, things were incredibly simple. Very, very humble lifestyle, all that. People would still make all that effort to keep their clothes really clean and ironed.

LORISTON: [01:21:38] So thinking about that and some of the fears or concerns that, or even the biases that people had here in the States, how did that change your perspective to see this and to experience the living there?

LAWRENCE: [01:21:57] Hmm. It shows, well. Certainly you learn that fundamentally we are all so the same all over the planet. You know, even the people with whom you can't communicate and their life is so, so, so different than yours. They get hungry, they get tired, they get jealous, they're happy, they're sad. You know, all the basic human things are still the same. And I learned that, yeah, with enough practice and just out of necessity, people can do amazing things.

LAWRENCE: [01:22:36] I will never forget the little girls. They're called *bo ausi*. *Bo* is the plural, B-O. And then *ausi* means sister literally, A-U-S-I. But it's also used to mean any little girl. So the *bo ausi* were the little girls who were usually in charge of fetching the water for their family. First of all, they were so strong. They'd often have, even if they're five, six, seven years old, they'd have their little brother or sister tied to their back in the blanket, they're carrying around their little toddler brother or sister. And they've got a five gallon bucket, which is really heavy, yes, when it's full. And they're carrying it on their heads, not even with a mat or a

hat or anything, just up there. No hands. Incredibly strong, incredibly strong, incredibly hard working.

LAWRENCE: [01:23:30] So anybody who says anything about any of they're, they're being lazy. Oh, no, you can't be lazy. You would just die. You can't get away with it, you know? And one time I had a really, really, really dirty bucket. We don't want to think what I'd use it for. But it was really dirty and I needed to make it clean. And I'm at the pump and I'm using all this water and trying to scrub it and make it clean. And they just looked at me like, you're an adult. This is really pathetic you don't know how to do this. They're not, they didn't say that. But I'm sure inside they're thinking, wow, this is crazy. She doesn't know how to do this. But I had never had to. So they took it for me and they're like, Me Deena, we will help you.

LAWRENCE: [01:24:13] And oh my goodness, these little girls like, you know, kindergarten age, they take it and just using the sand and gravel and whatever's around as they're scrubbing, abrasive scrubbing material. And these few little ounces of water that they're managing get out of the pump, they made that bucket spotless, like new. I, it's, it's just incredible. I know it's like, so they cleaned a bucket. But to be able to just think, okay, this is what I've got, this is what I'll do. And yeah.

LORISTON: [01:24:45] You know, as you're speaking, it brought a question to mind. You know, here you are, a Caucasian woman in a black country. What was that like for you?

LAWRENCE: [01:25:00] Um. After a while, I kind of forgot. I mean, I didn't have a mirror. So for the most part, I didn't know how greasy my hair was. I could kind of forget that, you know? Yeah, okay, I really stick out. But, and at first, I probably felt it, you know? But after a while, yeah, you settle in and I'd go to the pump and get my water and I'd go to the little shop to buy a couple of candles or a bit of kerosene, paraffin or. Okay. I think I really noticed how different I was only when I saw another volunteer, because then I would look at them and I'd be like, oh. They don't look like everybody else.

LAWRENCE: [01:25:50] You know, I forgot that I didn't look like everybody else, but I'd see another volunteer, assuming most of the other, well, everyone else. There was a couple people of different ethnic backgrounds in my group, but most of us were Caucasian and, and the other group, like the group before mine or whatever. So the other volunteers in my area. And that's when it would mostly remind me. You know, I'd see them and I'm like, wow, they really stick out. Like, oh yeah, I mean, I guess I would stick out too, but you kind of forget after a while, which is nice, to just be another person.

LORISTON: [01:26:26] And here you are, you're done with your, your 24 months. How did your community respond to the fact that you would be leaving them?

LAWRENCE: [01:26:37] Hmm.

LORISTON: [01:26:37] How did it make you feel and what was that like? Was there another festival for you or a fete I should say?

LAWRENCE: [01:26:46] Right, yeah. No, it was less dramatic certainly leaving. Um. It was. I think I left with mixed emotions. You know, I thought about, well, should I extend for a third year or not? Yeah, I mean, things were going fine. And staying, you know, in hindsight, staying for one more year, it might have been like, okay, I didn't just do 50 percent learning, figuring out what I was doing, and then the other 50 percent of my time actually feeling like I did something. I could have changed that to one third and two thirds and stayed for another year once I was actually in a groove and doing things. But I guess I thought, well, two years is a standard service. It's time, you know, done.

LAWRENCE: [01:27:40] And in some ways I guess I'm kind of glad most of my group COSed, closed our service, at the same time. So it was kind of nice to have that. I mean, because we were such a tight group, and still are actually. We still, there's still some of my best friends on the planet and we still have a big reunion every five years, and most of us show up even 30 years later. So, um, closing our service together was nice closure.

LORISTON: [01:28:13] So how was it like when you returned home? What was your adjustment like?

LAWRENCE: [01:28:20] They warned us that the reverse culture shock would probably be harder. Yeah. Than the culture shock when you went, which, at the beginning you're like, what? That can't be. I know how to live in America. It's hard getting used to living in Africa. And it was, of course, hard to get used to living in Africa. But you expect things to be different when you're going to wherever you go. And you think, oh, coming back, no big deal. It was a big deal, I mean.

LORISTON: [01:28:50] In what way?

LAWRENCE: [01:28:53] Um, I was surprisingly patriotic when I got back. I remember my youngest sister was still in high school and I went to one of her band concerts, it must have been, or a choir concert or something. And sitting there and it started with the national anthem and I just sobbed. It was interesting how much it hit me. And the other most salient reverse culture shock moment was going into a supermarket in this country where the excess is just ridiculous. The number of choices we have, of course, for anyone who's ever lived really anywhere else or even traveled anywhere else. You know, kind of realizes, oh, this is crazy.

LAWRENCE: [01:29:47] And the craziest aisle was the popsicle aisle. Because a popsicle is something no one needs. And yeah, you come from some place where I didn't even have refrigeration, you know. My cheese, eggs, butter or whatever, milk, were not refrigerated for two years because no one has a refrigerator, because you don't have electricity. And so you don't have a refrigerator. If you don't have a refrigerator, you for sure don't have a freezer. So you don't have ice cream or ice or have popsicles.

LAWRENCE: [01:30:20] And then to get to, yeah, to walk into a supermarket in the United States and just see freezer case after freezer case after freezer case of all these different flavors of popsicles and ice cream. I just

stood there going, oh man, this is just crazy. That was reverse culture shock.

LORISTON: [01:30:41] How did you eventually adjust?

LAWRENCE: [01:30:44] Having grown up here, you're like, okay, yeah, there's a lot of popsicles. This is just, people are pretty spoiled here. We, even people without much money can have a popsicle, you know? And it, I think, helped confirm for me why I signed up in the first place, that the giant, giant economic imbalance that we have in the world. I was like, yeah. I thought, oh, two years, I will have somehow rebalanced it, you know? But I got back and like, well, no, that was the tip of the iceberg, Deena. That was just the way you start. It's not the end.

LORISTON: [01:31:25] How did your Peace Corps experience change you?

LAWRENCE: [01:31:33] Hmm.

LORISTON: [01:31:33] And how did it affect your career after?

LAWRENCE: [01:31:38] Oh. Um. Well, I mean, it's. There's no word. I don't even know where to start with how it changes you. Because no matter how many months any of us serve, whether it's a few months, you know, and you end up leaving early, or you do the standard two years, you extend for a third year, or you stay for decades. I mean, no matter which of those it is, it's such a profound impact. It's. I bet, I don't even know where to start. Certainly, yeah, appreciating. I mean, you end up starting to take for granted again popsicles and electricity and hot showers and everything, but never as much as before. You know, I still, I'll stand in a hot shower. I'm like, this is such a luxury, you know? Yes, electric lights, everything. Having a vehicle. Countless things. Countless, countless.

LAWRENCE: [01:32:39] Just having enough water, you know, just, that's the most fundamental thing. I could live without electricity. That'd be fine. But water, you gotta have water, you know so. The fact that you can anywhere turn on a tap. And people may complain about the water

quality, you know, in a certain city or whatever, or there's Flint or whatever. But you know what? We've got almost limitless running water for almost no money. And for pretty much everybody, it's, yeah. Even simple things like that, you don't quite take for granted the same anymore. I try, I try not to. I try to still be really, really appreciative.

LORISTON: [01:33:17] And how would you say your Peace Corps experience and you recognizing how privileged we are here in the U.S., how would you say that affected you, whatever you did after returning? How you, um, how your choices and your decisions were changed? And, you know, in terms of your career, you know, did it change your career trajectory or?

LAWRENCE: [01:33:46] Um, yeah, I mean, I didn't, again, I went right out of college, so I didn't really have a career or anything. I did come back and start grad school. I did my grad school applications from Lesotho on a manual typewriter and mailed them over and got into some good grad schools, into PhD programs. But didn't end up finishing that because I, basically my main career for the main, for a good 15, 20 years of my adult life was being a mom. And Peace Corps was priceless, I think, in terms of that because. Well, they say Peace Corps is the toughest job you'll ever love. But so's parenthood. And so I think the really tough parts of parenthood, Peace Corps had prepared me for. Just like okay, whatever it is, bring it on. I can do this. You know, I did that. I can do this.

LAWRENCE: [01:34:46] And it also really showed me that I wanted my kids to not just take everything for granted. So I tried to give them a good international perspective about what the rest of the world is like. Eventually took them to Lesotho, and showed them my village and all that. They'd been hearing stories their whole lives. So I finally did that. But it really motivated me in terms of language too, because I saw how much harder it is to learn a language as an adult than a kid.

LAWRENCE: [01:35:19] So I made sure that my kids had an opportunity while they were still young enough to be immersed in a foreign language. So Spanish is much more practical than Sesotho in terms of being able to

communicate with a lot of different people. So I made sure that they got that, moved the family to Mexico and put them in a Spanish, Spanish school for a year while they were still young enough to really absorb the language, but also the culture, to have, you know, to be surrounded, immersed in another culture. Not quite as different as Africa, say Mexico is certainly more similar to the United States, but it was still, it's still a different culture in many, many, many ways. So I'm glad I could give them that.

LORISTON: [01:36:02] So you went to listen to with your family and you went to your village?

LAWRENCE: [01:36:06] Yes.

LORISTON: [01:36:06] Did they remember you?

LAWRENCE: [01:36:08] No. Well, for a number of reasons. It had been many years. It's not like I came back after just a few years where there would still have been some of the same people. And tragically, I'm sure very, very many of my former students, the teachers I taught with and everything, have perished with AIDS. The AIDS epidemic just destroyed Lesotho. It was not there yet when I was there. And it's getting better now that there's antiretrovirals and all of that. But it absolutely ravished the country. So I have to face the fact that probably a very large percentage of the people that I knew there are no longer here.

LORISTON: [01:37:00] How did your, your children respond or react?

LAWRENCE: [01:37:06] It was fun. They were like little celebrities, even though a lot of years have gone by. Still the kids in the village were not used to white people walking around. And my daughter, with her long, long, very blond hair, it was just like, whoa! You know, you're just, it's just so different from what they're used to, that the kids were following her around. It was very fun.

LORISTON: [01:37:33] So did you actually stay for a few days there with your children?

LAWRENCE: [01:37:38] There's no place really to stay in the village, you know, unless you knew someone and could somehow stay in their home. But we were staying in Maseru, the capital, which is not too far away. And we rented a car and all that. So we were in Lesotho for a number of days. But then just one day drove out to the village and walked around. And the school had fallen down. They'd rebuilt it in a different location. And then I think even in that location it has fallen down. But we could walk out to the, the remnants of the school. I could see, you know, the walls were still partially standing. The first house I lived in, I could not find any trace of it, but that's kind of the beauty of the traditional home. The stones are just stones that were gathered from that area. The mortar is just mud and cow dung mixed together that can just fall back into the earth and the roof is just thatched, so it just biodegrades after a couple of years.

LAWRENCE: [01:38:34] And so I couldn't even find where that was, partly with the streets not being streets, just being kind of footpaths or cow, wildlife, donkey paths, you know, occasional horse, not hardly fit for vehicles. So the paths just changed too over time. So I couldn't even find really where it had been, but I could find the remnants still of the second house, the house that they'd built for me. It had also fallen down, but I could find the walls and I knew where it was and. It was neat. I'm really, really glad we went.

LORISTON: [01:39:10] How, um. So you ended up going to graduate school and you chose parenting over that. Has, have, has your Peace Corps experience affected you in any other way when it comes to what you're doing to give back to your community here? Or has it affected any decision like that for you, would you say?

LAWRENCE: [01:39:36] Yeah, I think, you know, just having seen first hand how different different parts of the world are. Um, yeah, I still try to give back as much as I can and volunteer in all different ways. Um. And yeah, again, just maintain that appreciation. Keep trying to do the third goal of Peace Corps, bring the world home. You know, share information about the rest of the world with people back here that just

otherwise really still don't have any idea. And there's a pretty good chance I'll sign back up again if they'll take me back and do another stint.

LORISTON: [01:40:18] And are you currently involved with the Peace Corps at all?

LAWRENCE: [01:40:23] Not really. There was a point where I was maybe going to help with a couple interviews or something, years and years and years ago. And otherwise, yeah, just been to reunions with my small group, but then also some of the big national like the big 50th anniversary one here in D.C. and things like that. I've given a few talks. A Girl Scout group invited me to come talk about Lesotho when my kids were still in school. I would, like on that day in March, the share the world day or whatever it's called. I would go and talk in their classrooms.

LORISTON: [01:41:10] I wanted to ask you about your Peace Corps experience and as a person today. Um. Did you have any regrets during your time there or any things that you were, anything, excuse me, that you were particularly proud of?

LAWRENCE: [01:41:39] Hmm. If I could do it again, I would work harder to learn the language because it opens a lot of doors. You can communicate more deeply with people and communicate with more people than if you've got very limited language skills. Um. So yeah, if I could redo that service or if I go back to wherever, most likely not Lesotho. But if I do another term, yeah, I'll work harder on the language.

LAWRENCE: [01:42:16] And also I was already a vegetarian before I went into Peace Corps. And like I mentioned then, that is just not a concept. You know, if pretty much everybody is vegetarian most of the time, not by choice, but that's all there is to eat. Meat is a luxury. That once in a while, when there is meat, well, of course you eat it. You know, it's just their brains, it's like, you know, it's just a concept, again, like some concept that we can't conceptualize if there's just no reason for it and your brain can't wrap around it. So they really, they just didn't get it. And there was no point in me being strict about it. You know, it wasn't a food allergy or a digestive issue or anything.

LAWRENCE: [01:43:00] So times like when they slaughtered a cow to welcome me with that big banquet, I should have eaten some. It would have been the appropriate, culturally sensitive thing to do, um, because, yeah, they just didn't understand why I was refusing. You know, you can offend people that way and I did not intend to offend. I tried to explain, but yeah people just can't get that concept, then they're not going to get it. So if I could do it over again, I would eat a little bit of meat when it was appropriate just to be culturally sensitive.

LORISTON: [01:43:35] Now, hindsight of course, today it's 2019 and we're talking about over almost 20 years ago now, actually.

LAWRENCE: [01:43:45] Thirty.

LORISTON: [01:43:45] I just realized the time.

LAWRENCE: [01:43:46] 30 years ago.

LORISTON: [01:43:48] 30 years.

LAWRENCE: [01:43:50] Way back, it's amazing I remember any of this.

LORISTON: [01:43:52] You know, when. First of all, let me, let me backtrack a bit. When you, when you returned to Lesotho, did anything change? And how long between your leaving and your arrival was that exactly? Do you recall?

LAWRENCE: [01:44:07] Yeah, we. I'd always promised the kids I would take them. And I realized as my son, my oldest, was getting near the end of high school. Like, once he goes off to college he may, yeah, he may or may not be back for summers or breaks or whatever. I'm like, eh, we gotta go, you know, before he finishes high school. So it would have been, well. And the seasons being reversed since Lesotho is in the southern hemisphere. I wanted to go when it was summer there, which meant it needed to be winter here. And so we went over Christmas, the kids' Christmas break. And so it would have been Christmas of 2011, so

eight years ago. So it had been probably 22 years or something since I'd been there.

LAWRENCE: [01:44:55] And some things had changed, certainly. There is now more than one stoplight in the country. When I served, there was one stoplight in the country at the capitol and that was it. But it just, it was so touching how many things had not. You wake up to the sound of chickens running around and.

LORISTON: [01:45:21] Cows mooing.

LAWRENCE: [01:45:21] Cows mooing. Yep. And people are fetching water and, yeah, so much.

LORISTON: [01:45:28] And would you say anything changed with the, um, economic challenges that they had in the country?

LAWRENCE: [01:45:38] I think it's great progress that at least primary school education is covered for all the kids, so everyone at least has that opportunity. Um. There's a big dam. There's a giant hydroelectric project that's been done that, it's controversial of course, the dam. You know, they drowned a bunch of villages. You know, people had warning, but it's like, okay, your village is now going to be under water. You know, you build a dam on the river and it submerges a big area. So obviously pros and cons to it, but it provides hydroelectric power to Lesotho. Ironically, that I kept talking about not having enough water. But water is one of Lesotho's great wealths because being up in the mountains, you know, the water all runs down from there down into South Africa. So hopefully that's helping somewhat with the economy.

LORISTON: [01:46:41] Is there anything you wish to share to your listeners about what your service meant to you? Yeah, just what it meant to you in general?

LAWRENCE: [01:46:51] Yeah. Um. Really overall I would say it was just, it's such a blessing to have had that opportunity. Such a gift that, yeah, I mean, you sign up with the intention of going to help, to give of yourself. But I

got so much more, yeah, than I could ever, ever give. Just, yeah, and what you learn in the incredible generosity of people, people who have essentially nothing but somehow manage to offer things to you, you know. It's just. And again, yeah, that common humanity, that even when you're someplace where things are so different and people look different and they speak a different language and their houses are different and the food's different, da da da da. It's like, like I said before, we're so fundamentally the same.

LORISTON: [01:47:49] You mentioned that you would love to return to the Peace Corps if you could. Where would you go?

LAWRENCE: [01:47:57] Hmm.

LORISTON: [01:47:57] And why?

LAWRENCE: [01:48:01] I don't know. That's a great question and I'll have to think about that, although maybe I won't think too hard because if I get my heart set on someplace and then can't go, then it would be disappointing.

LORISTON: [01:48:19] What about a region, then?

LAWRENCE: [01:48:21] A region? It would. My Spanish skills are even better now than they were then because I use it now for work and all that. So it seems like it would make sense to be someplace where I would already have a decent foundation in the language. Not that great, but could get by. And of course the local dialect and slang and everything would be something to learn, but at least I would have a foundation. So that would kind of make sense. But it's also kind of cool challenge to learn something totally new, you know, to be doing something with a completely different alphabet or whatever. So I'm really open to just about anything.

LORISTON: [01:49:07] You mentioned earlier, um, probably not on this recording, I actually do not recall, that you, you pulled out old journals and you looked at them before this interview.

LAWRENCE: [01:49:22] Mm hmm.

LORISTON: [01:49:22] Is there any story you would wish to share that you did not share during this interview?

LAWRENCE: [01:49:29] Hmm. Um. Hmm. I'll just give maybe a little shout out to Barbara, who was my roommate even back in Atlanta, the very, very first training. The very first night when she got there, we hit it off right away. I was so thrilled. She was a vegetarian. And we both wanted to live in a little hut and not in a modern house with a tin roof. And yeah, we just clicked immediately. It was just luck that we were assigned to be roommates even back in Atlanta. But she became a super, super dear friend.

LAWRENCE: [01:50:20] And people would even accuse us of cheating when we'd play a game, like we'd play, we'd make these homemade Pictionary games. We didn't have one, but we'd use a little slip of papers and write the words and we'd be playing. And be like, you didn't even draw anything! How did she guess it? And we're like, I don't know. We just had this, you know, we would just read each other's mind, one little squiggle. And it's like, how do you know that's South Dakota, you know? So that was really special. A really, really special friendship. But I'll always treasure her.

LORISTON: [01:50:50] Is there anything more you would like to share with your listeners? Anything about your time or how it changed you and or what you're doing today, etcetera, but related to your Peace Corps experience.

LAWRENCE: [01:51:07] Um, no, I think we've been really thorough. Your questions have been fabulous, and I, um. That's, that's most of it. Just again, it's a real, a real wonderful opportunity. And if only everyone in the world spent two years in some other country, the world would be such a different place.

LORISTON: [01:51:31] Would you like to end here?

LAWRENCE: [01:51:34] Yes.

LORISTON: [01:51:34] Okay.

LAWRENCE: [01:51:35] Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]