

Benny Cespedes Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Benny Cespedes served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Pakistan from 1961 to 1963 as an engineering instructor (Pakistan I).

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Benny Cespedes

June 22, 2019

Austin, Texas

By Jeff Liu

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

CESPEDES: [00:00:00] My name is Benny Cespedes. When did I join the Peace Corps? Also, it was like something new and probably it was more a spirit of adventure that I joined the Peace Corps. I do not remember this time exactly what it was all about. I thought I at the first chance I took the what do you call the picture? Let me explain it to us in what was April or May. It was great.

LIU: [00:00:54] When it was created, when the Peace Corps was created?

CESPEDES: [00:00:58] It was established in 1961.

LIU: [00:01:04] Ok, and this is Jeff Liu. Today is June 22nd, 2019. I'm interviewing Benny and his experience in Pakistan.

CESPEDES: [00:01:17] Ok, will you repeat again?

LIU: [00:01:20] So, um, what was life like before the Peace Corps?

C. CESPEDES: [00:01:27, Carol Cespedes] What was life like before the Peace Corps? What were you doing? That's a big question.

CESPEDES: [00:01:35] Yeah, exactly. I was going to school at the time. I was working in the post office during summer camp and I was planning to go back to college and taking my degree in mechanical engineering. I had a major in electrical engineering and that's I was a student. So that was how life was when before I joined the Peace Corps

LIU: [00:02:13] What was your family life like?

CESPEDES: [00:02:18] My family or in the Philippines? Yeah, I was all by myself in the states are going. Yeah, I had a friend in Ohio or my me on Guam, but he was teaching a picture of who you were working and you were working on Guam, I think. Yeah. When you met him. I worked with in Guam.

C. CESPEDES: [00:02:52] Yeah. You were working in Guam.

CESPEDES: [00:02:53] Run that course before I went on the stage, before I went to Indiana to go to school using my GI Bill of Rights, I think.

LIU: [00:03:08] Oh yeah. How did you hear about the Peace Corps?

CESPEDES: [00:03:12] Hmm. I have to remember, I think it was, I don't remember what it was on the television or radio or newspaper. I really don't remember, it was most probably a based on

LIU: [00:03:42] What did you think about the Peace Corps when you heard about it on the television?

CESPEDES: [00:03:50] Oh, I think it was something that people can do to help other people in other countries. And I believe that at that time, I'd like to speak about a group of people who they felt they, despite this, I decided to make a change may mean it will not change.

LIU: [00:04:26] How old were you?

CESPEDES: [00:04:27] Take you to work.

LIU: [00:04:28] How old were you?

CESPEDES: [00:04:32] 61 and 29. I was 32. Medical at 32. I was 31. At that time, I just don't don't granddad, my dad, my the chairman of the electrical department and get my degree in engineering so I didn't have to go back to school, I was stuck at 3/4 hours at that time.

C. CESPEDES: [inaudible]

LIU: [00:05:07] Oh. Can you introduce yourself?

C. CESPEDES: [00:05:10] Yes. This is Carol Cespedes, Benny's wife. I'm sitting here because Benny is hard of hearing. And I was also in Pakistan, although not a Peace Corps volunteer. I just coached Benny or Jeff to say something about Benny's service in the Army.

LIU: [00:05:31] Can you tell me about the application process?

CESPEDES: [00:05:37] Well, application process, like the Peace Corps? Yes, well, I out that I think the best days I took them or whatever. Um, uh. I don't know what I like getting the firms to work experience and so forth in the background, and I forgot all about that actually.

LIU: [00:06:04] Did they interview you?

CESPEDES: [00:06:09] Yeah, when I first filled out the first thing it was in March or April. And I went to work for the post office. And then I got a telegram from Shriver at that time with people that were invited to training. OK, I'm amazed that you are yet accepted by what? Medical training? And by the same time, I had a job offer a technical writer for a company in Silver Spring, Maryland. So I was in a quandary and I asked my friend in Ohio, what's his opinion, what would you do. And he said, take the Peace Corps, whichever one you take, you'll regret it. He recommended that the Peace Corps. So I thought they accepted the invitation, the training which took place to take place in the Fort Collins. And then in Colorado, I mean, University of Colorado in Fort Collins, Colorado.

LIU: [00:07:43] OK. This was in 1961?

CESPEDES: [00:07:47] 1961 August, August. I understand that our group was the number nine to go and training and number seven to go overseas where we were posted.

LIU: [00:08:07] Seventh to go to Pakistan?

CESPEDES: I'm sorry?

LIU: Seventh to go to Pakistan?

CESPEDES: [00:08:13] Yeah, seven to go.

C. CESPEDES: [00:08:14] No, the seventh to leave the US. First group in Pakistan.

CESPEDES: [00:08:16] First number nine to the training and seven to go overseas where I'm at the posting.

LIU: [00:08:25] What was training like?

CESPEDES: [00:08:30] Oh my training was like your language lab. I don't remember this one lavatory about two hours in the language club then classroom work. And we were of course briefed on the history of Pakistan culture. We still have like the Asian fascism, capitalism, socialism and all that good. And then we had the physical training, swimming, and I mean, they poured in and we had a rough riding. At the end of the day, they expect me to care for the stadium, the roads we get run

LIU: [00:09:29] Run up the chairs and down the chairs.

CESPEDES: [00:09:31] I was of the day, you know, stairs. And that was just in for college. And then after that, we had a selection. There were 20 or 30 or 32. There were thirty two of us who were invited between me and four were the same thing.

LIU: [00:10:01] How many?

CESPEDES: [00:10:02] Four, four, three, two.

LIU: [00:10:05] Ok, you were one of four.

C. CESPEDES: [00:10:07] No, no. He was, four were deselected. Four of them were bumped.

CESPEDES: [00:10:11] And after that training we had about one week to go to her home course. My case, I went to high and then after that were we to Puerto Rico for the whole day kind of feeling this very day like this physical conditioning, conditioning.

LIU: [00:10:43] Um, how long was training the first one?

CESPEDES: [00:10:46] The first part of training?

LIU: Yeah. How long was it?

CESPEDES: Hmm. They started in August and we went up to August, September, I think mid-October. Yeah, but the thing about mid October, birthmothers, OK, and we spent one one month in in Puerto Rico, more land restringing and there is a bit less physical conditioning.

LIU: [00:11:32] What did you do in physical condition?

CESPEDES: [00:11:34] Oh, running. And we ran and ran. And I get to do I don't know. But up here, I don't know how long to room. I was going to kneel down and then we will be so quick. Rob. Well, training was a privilege. No problem. I think you need university in your research camp and you know that I consider the premier to your arm. And he swam for two hours.

LIU: [00:12:09] They tie your arms and you swam for two hours.

CESPEDES: [00:12:11] Now, for me, I don't want to examine at least two hours. And then when I think back on my report that I had. And and pick up something, a ring. I want me to come up here, OK. Thank you for the training. Both first time and then of course push ups and they have the game obstacle, obstacles. Yesterday they had the you across this great 100. Are you saying you've got cable cable at that end and pull the girls and women that way and then they zip. Yeah. And the cameras go and they have that like the bauma bridge. I don't know how long the, you know, that that about first before that you swing and it's like you're on the ropes on and on and on the ropes on the side of the ship going into it. And then drop it, go up and then you go to bauma bridge, which is should get that went up and down and then you can I don't remember how fast that is the key thing. And I guarantee you could be a very funny story and really well. But one of the women, a librarian, okay, you know what, she started to walk backwards. She changed her mind I've read this to be a librarian, so say, well, I was just watching. Well, yeah, I always remember that being out there was just about this today and she walked all the way back, oh yeah, they

were going by the baton. So it's OK that you could go, you know, rubber test, you could go ahead and do

LIU: [00:14:24] The rubber tires. Yeah.

CESPEDES: [00:14:26] And the last one you can scroll through the, no, it's Gladiator, and the rule prevent the next day, that's when you swing back up there and this is the hardest part, the rope. You know, we have this week to think and then not there. And I've been that there are two little boys who was perfect for they would be upset because I was see my wedding.

C. CESPEDES: [00:15:03] So you were one who scored perfect?

CESPEDES: [00:15:07] Obviously not when we were young and you were an Army veteran. OK. Oh, yeah, it's one thing also the way they did. What is happening here? Oh, yes, yeah, when you get there and there are people in the growth and poor kind of thing, when we start the woodwork, like we we went and come up and then later on we went on a extended primary and I think they just come back the unit for the women. I has one night, OK? And for the men who went into teams, there would be a percentage time we spend tonight in the jungle camping out there and then go back to the camp, you know,

C. CESPEDES: [00:16:03] But you were given that you tell a funny story, to tell the story.

CESPEDES: [00:16:08] Of get your fanny back to back them is that they are told by school and they did the right. We went to, you know, need my training and my reading that that everyone was saying. I mean, you know, and when we come to practice, it will take this and hit it. But the other guy I the was there and everything. I know I said this is still so. So we were to always talk and I get what I'm going to tell me the wrong way.

LIU: [00:16:48] The route?

CESPEDES: [00:16:49] Yeah, the route. And then I decide where they were supposed to cross the lake where the water was. I guess, like, I don't know what we're going to least it's going to get in the way recently. And when we report that actually when we we're walking back, people in the camp come out and we told them we are. And I said, you are not going to let me walk through that head. Yeah. When we got back to the camp for that, the guy who used to. Have you heard about the Bob? What's that? No, I thought this is a conditioning program that was initiated in England. People up and can make this happen or that they now can cut your own phone. So that Hanaway, he has said how to get you across the lake and the day. But I have the other thing. Why do we cross the lake with across the lake and the guy is done. His face turned red. I'll always remember that. You won't get too many points for this.

LIU: [00:18:18] You didn't cross the lake.

CESPEDES: [00:18:19] They were supposed to take. You know what, if we followed, we were supposed to go on the other side of the lake and cross by boat. Yeah, because we think we've got to be sure. Yes. Have the boat and drinking beer.

LIU: [00:18:43] That's a good one.

CESPEDES: [00:18:46] At that time it was supposed to be dry season. But in November in Puerto Rico was supposed to be the dry season. Let me cut deals. Yeah. Rain, rain.

LIU: [00:19:00] Lots of rain. Yeah.

CESPEDES: [00:19:04] And what are they doing here? Get them back of the plane. Our language instructor in that girl again, she's the Pakistani woman and so freaking. I know. Met her in the swimming pool. I don't know how I and I, she made her job in particular. We did so well with her.

Sorry. Oh sorry. Yeah. Because they don't crazy. Because they are not aware of that culture.

LIU: [00:19:45] What was language training like? What was language training like?

C. CESPEDES: [00:19:56] What was it like? What was it like? How was it?

CESPEDES: [00:19:59] I have to say something totally different of course could have happened, that sound, and it has no relation at all to Amy's or.

LIU: [00:20:20] Ok, why did you think Peace Corps training was like this? Why did you think Peace Corps training was like this during your time?

CESPEDES: [00:20:41] The language. Well, you know why they to stay in power for a while, training the perfect volunteers chase after us. I don't know how certain they were trained. I like to maybe do a quick like in the country where, yes, you're working. Perhaps you'll get trained that way.

LIU: [00:21:10] Yes, I did training in country.

CESPEDES: [00:21:13] And I thought I'd try and make certain that many people are going to be trained in universities that are very familiar with the country. Like I've heard that throughout the program, these parents had to work in the Philippines, were trained in Hawaii, and they know that there are many Filipinos there. So we'll go be closer to the country. Yes. Well, in that case, we have to add to our training in the United States, which another month in Pakistan, in Peshawar, but in the language customs and visiting villages and so forth. And one of the things that I can always remember, one of the things that we were pointing out here is that you don't you don't shake hands with women. And I don't take a position that maybe where we were and we just took a step to that way, to the leaders of cognomen, I think, dataflow daughter. And so I said, man, yes. And when it came to time, I know I should begin by shaking hands. And so when I was married, they said

they didn't know because we were told that you're you don't shake hands with women. Yes. But he was shaking hands with, you know, everybody. So I said quite, quite clearly.

LIU: [00:23:21] Yeah. What when you when you went, how did you get to Pakistan? How did you get to Pakistan? How did you go to Pakistan from from Puerto Rico?

CESPEDES: I'm sorry.

LIU: From Puerto Rico.

CESPEDES: About what?

LIU: How did you get to Pakistan?

CESPEDES: [00:23:40] Yeah, I that's right. We from from Puerto Rico to New York and back every time I wake up and I remember that also that they are not us. They made an announcement on their flag about Peace Corps volunteers or their flight going to Pakistan. Yes, that's America. And we had no you that a lot of us to look had, but that it was raining, you know, in Puerto Rico, we don't have a dry air. And they sang it and they you know, the things that we had. I'd like to have a note also. A couple got married and spent their honeymoon in Puerto Rico and escaping and they separated me, you know, and trading conditions and, uh, they got married. That's not something that we would like to have on your honeymoon. Was that normal for the only night and day in and day out? So, yeah, yeah.

LIU: [00:24:57] So I'm going back to one of the questions. What did you what did you pack for your Peace Corps service? What what did you pack for your Peace Corps service? Luggage?

C. CESPEDES: [00:25:14] Like what did you put in your suitcase?

CESPEDES: And I remember I remember I had one soap, shoes. Talk about the Reagan man, I think is 300 regular people like that, and I'm going to have to have

LIU: [00:25:37] Did the Peace Corps give you anything?

CESPEDES: [00:25:43] No, no, no, really. But I'll post later on that plane in Paksitan.

LIU: [00:25:55] Ok, let's see. What what did you think of Pakistan when you first arrived? Imagine you landed from the airplane, you went outside. What was that like?

CESPEDES: [00:26:18] I think that winning the public was my first impression, and then. Well, I think they need to be. We'll be you get time country that I guess we were there at the time when I read the WTC number, it was called No, we're not doing a great great anyway. And of course, because we are in the mountains close to the Khyber Pass. So and the House is, of course, very different than the one we saw there. Yeah, well, in a country state, medical personnel state that in the middle of my leg

LIU: [00:27:21] You built the

CESPEDES: [00:27:23] Same thing as you know. OK, how about the people?

C. CESPEDES: [00:27:27] Yeah. How about the people that you saw?

CESPEDES: [00:27:31] The people get different caps that they have and you see them say any woman was Muslim. Yeah. Yeah.

LIU: [00:27:45] What did people think of Americans? What did people think of Peace Corps volunteers?

CESPEDES: [00:27:52] Wow. I think we were both like curiosity at that time. We were the first ones and not and that made him famous. I've seen no

Americans, you know. But the people with whom we I see, and that is the one thing like that that any one might do, Dumarey the friendly. Who are basically the delegates, in my case, the people who have contests, curious, yes. Yeah.

LIU: [00:28:40] What was what was your core group like? How many men and women? Education backgrounds.

CESPEDES: [00:28:49] Yeah, let me just tell you that very I guess occurred to demeanor I grew up with we had six veterans, OK? Yeah, one was a nurse in Korea, one one million and got back to the two of us. Are you in the army? I mean, I tell you what, one is certainly Navy and Army. So now and so for us, the special case was a marine was a bricklayer. Well, we had. One librarian, the one who have the birds and we had a lab and nurses and teachers and there are three of us supposedly who are instructors in engineering.

LIU: [00:29:58] Ok, so you went as an engineer instructor.

CESPEDES: [00:30:03] One of them later on went to a different societies in Europe or guy, but I think grow up and go on a tour bus was staying behind in the Lahor politics and in my case and actually there was no need for us at the beginning. So we spent a lot of time getting to talking to our colleagues. And then I had to find something to go. I learned how to the do we classify books using the do we this way testing. So I sit at the library and think they'll find me a class to the piece that were just twice a week. Mm hmm. And so I had to find something to fill my time and the dates were kind of wasting. I was able to get the district to approve the construction of a school for girls instead of one. And then there was another bill is later on. I was able to get their. I call for the suspected killer. So so I spent my time in the village and after and I'm not picture,

LIU: [00:31:45] How did you

CESPEDES: [00:31:46] Our mission is to go the continued once a week. We had a teacher come to our village, which is the biggest nations in order. OK.

LIU: [00:32:08] How did you get funding for, how did you get funding for the school for girls?

CESPEDES: [00:32:14] OK, we were supposed to get money and I was told by says and certainly our colleagues had told her how many troops who are getting what aid annually and at the high school. And let me tell you something I don't know, you know, how much we were getting paid to be held in Washington? No. Eighty dollars a month. OK, yeah. Yeah. How much were you paid in the Peace Corps? Yeah. What was being held in Washington April

LIU: [00:33:04] After the exchange rate collapsed it was two hundred and fifty dollars?

CESPEDES: [00:33:08] Two hundred and fifty.

LIU: [00:33:09] Two fifty.

CESPEDES: [00:33:10] Ok, so that's a big change from eighty dollars.

C. CESPEDES: [00:33:15] But the question was how how did they get money to build a school for girls? Who paid to build a school for girls?

CESPEDES: [00:33:25] Oh you mean. You mean they were being constructed. Yes. Who play always to be funded by the money from the about they and I go I provided I like the political vision, but anyway they got get it done and they had this, that, that's where the money comes from. A little bit like a Lake County.

LIU: [00:33:51] And then you were the engineer for the project?

CESPEDES: [00:33:54] The money doesn't go to the police went directly to the district and the village.

LIU: [00:34:02] But you started this idea. You started the idea to build a school for girls?

CESPEDES: [00:34:08] Uh. I wouldn't take the credit for thinking, but I certainly was a need there was a need for school for girls. So and at that time, the babies can get anything from the district to fund that. And our Peace Corps and the representative that then them take that. My role was like a bridge gate bridge between the Dalit and the and the district. And that's how we get the funds approved for appropriate for the school. But now but without or without my being there, they couldn't have done anything.

LIU: [00:35:00] So what did people think about what did people think about a school for girls?

CESPEDES: [00:35:07] I'm sorry?

LIU: [00:35:08] What do people think about a school for girls?

CESPEDES: [00:35:14] Yeah, and that's to say I think there are not as important my eyes as the boys, but in any time they realized that by having the ability to contribute to the well-being of the village. So these are they were interested in educating children. So we asked them.

LIU: [00:35:47] Did you have any difficulties?

CESPEDES: [00:35:49] That they

LIU: [00:35:50] Have any difficulties on this project?

CESPEDES: [00:35:53] Let people take?

LIU: [00:35:55] Did you have any difficulties with that? With the project?

CESPEDES: [00:36:00] With the People Project project?

C. CESPEDES: [00:36:02] What were the challenges? What were the obstacles were to build it, to do your project, to build the school?

CESPEDES: [00:36:09] I had a time. I had to stabilize good grade. I mean, the rehabilitation with the district commissioner. And so fortunately, there was so much work I was working with who got in touch with the with the commissioner. So I had somebody working with me. What way to get that connection made, we were able to get the commission to approve construction of these two schools and days them out with a name like, of course, in this case, the very poorest, the labor. The only thing that the district had to pay for the materials once

C. CESPEDES: [00:37:17] You were the one who was working with you, I think that was a Pakistani was the guy who are working with you, talked about your work your way some

CESPEDES: [00:37:25] Way. And they don't know. And yeah, I don't know. I met a lot of people that you were working with. Who is who was it? I forgot what I mean when you coming with me to Singapore and a Pakistani delegation.

C. CESPEDES: [00:37:40] Where are you? Where is he from? Lahore. From the village. Was he from Lahore or from the village? You know,

CESPEDES: [00:37:46] From the village where I was from. Yeah.

LIU: [00:37:51] How how did Peace Corps staff facilitate your service?

CESPEDES: [00:37:59] I had a big secret that when I got there, the way I had. I think we had the wonderland of mostly one Pakistani who was working,

and you always thought maturely, and then we have a Pakistani driver driver, but we did our way. We had to be. It's not like it's not like a man.

LIU: [00:38:34] Well, we're crazy, the SUV. Yeah.

CESPEDES: [00:38:38] Oh, I feel that like like like a Van Halen. He hey, I'm driving. Really, really. I'm driving for Bull. I get this call, OK.

LIU: [00:38:48] And to go to class

CESPEDES: [00:38:51] To work in the office.

LIU: [00:38:53] Ok, um, it's. Were you assigned to a specific, I guess, living arrangement,

CESPEDES: [00:39:08] Specific

LIU: [00:39:10] Living space, like a house, or where did you stay?

CESPEDES: [00:39:16] I'm sorry,

LIU: [00:39:18] Where did you stay?

CESPEDES: [00:39:19] In the Peace Corps? Oh, yeah. We were assigned a specific thing. Would you call it that bungalow? In our case, it was a building inside the a college campus, animal husbandry. And and that's when went to the people there. Yeah, but that tree for four rooms and there was a bath and we had a one kitchen and. It's great to remember. He like making poor dining room is a break wall, brick building is called very low headquarters in order to go to work that way up here to go ahead and listen to the Cracklin. Yeah, I think we got to stop people like this. Yeah. You had this little so going and flat growth going somewhere. So I had to get to know Florida and that would be duo.

LIU: [00:40:45] Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting. Um, what's

C. CESPEDES: [00:40:50] The one thing that was very interesting. I was kind of thinking about the living conditions. Everybody in Pakistan has certain what you call servants assigned to them. Yes. This was the kind of animal husbandry, but still they'd have that kind of thing coming, that there was a sweeper and there was a laundry. There will be Wollar. But we they've been able to do his own laundry and that there was a on there was the cook. Joseph Yes. Yeah. It was very, very good guy.

LIU: [00:41:25] What was your typical work and leisure day?

CESPEDES: [00:41:29] Like I say,

LIU: [00:41:31] What was your typical work and leisure day like a normal day?

CESPEDES: [00:41:37] Very typical work. Yeah. I mean, my I say no.

LIU: [00:41:43] You wake up in the morning, you wake up in the morning and

CESPEDES: [00:41:47] Oh, I have a morning in and and personal wealth replaced by my youth center where I cook. What did you eat. I know because I look like a worker but we went to work. What did you do with when we might win.

C. CESPEDES: [00:42:15] He says, what did you eat? What did you eat?

CESPEDES: [00:42:20] Yeah, my family didn't like my dad, but Pakistani Pakistani descent should. They're OK. And but. And I thought it was like like thirty years. OK, and eggs. Milk. OK, and then you're good to go. And I'd like to say something about my. My. Didn't to the point where my mind is student and when my father said to me, my greatest my greatest contribution in the Peace Corps is not so much about my what I learned or takes my schooling, but it's regular explanations and it to

my students and to my kids. But wasting away in the eyes that, you know, you go through that time, the only thing, the only exposure they had to Western women is school, Hollywood and, you know, Hollywood. Sometimes, you know, they do the films to not really depict the morality of Western women are like going out there in the first night. I think it could be a good thing that they asked me if I discover the relationship with black American, you know. You know, we had species before happened, right? Yes. This is in the 60s. Yes. Me a lot about how we have that and the three more open with me and ask me. I'm just going to make it through my skin. Then you would talk to me as an American, your darker skin. Yeah. You know what? I am very you know. Yeah. So they were more open. And I those questions somebody especially about the African-Americans at that time. I don't remember a little, but I'm sure it was difficult to try to explain how, you know, we are creating the black Americans and

LIU: [00:44:54] An unbiased explanation.

CESPEDES: [00:44:59] Yeah, I can explain about morality. Well, I mean, the way I think that was my biggest, but I feel is who am I biggest contribution as a Peace Corps volunteer.

C. CESPEDES: [00:45:13] I remember you had three black volunteers who had three African-American volunteers in an.

CESPEDES: [00:45:20] Well, there are plenty of them, but there's another group like no matter where is the parameswaran there. Yeah.

LIU: [00:45:30] Yeah. How were they treated?

CESPEDES: [00:45:35] Or how am I wrong to think. Well OK. Yeah, I have later on one of the volunteers like we had the first time he was able to expose the, you know, the African-American boys with boy. I'm sure that I don't want to feel that way too, that they're not way that girls in my case have been exposed to African-Americans when I was in the service.

C. CESPEDES: [00:46:06] And they were all stationed someplace else, they were they were scattered all over Pakistan, so they had different kinds of experiences.

LIU: [00:46:18] So you said you said you bike to work on your bicycle, to work?

CESPEDES: [00:46:23] On an antique, and you might be it, because one way they like what the terror of straight people is, that I was wrapping up my Sunday headed guy and at the time that I was hit actually a minute and I got caught. And I just think I'm naming your first date. I can almost hear people. And again, in the Gary days, I got hit there and my my best friend was quick. Yeah. So the good thing about going one time I was riding a stick to walk to work and I could really keep track of those gabbling. What was that again. Sorry about. Of which could mean I get a good time with that.

C. CESPEDES: [00:47:31] Was that with the tonga or with the oxcart?

CESPEDES: [00:47:33] Unless there was a cut cut cut know was going, I would have to but you know, I was going to get that a great you know.

C. CESPEDES: [00:47:44] Right that right there I was there, you know. Yeah. So I had visualizes is different types of vehicles on the street. And you had this horse drawn carriages which were one thing, those controls, the tongas were the horse drawn carriage. And then they had this big bullock carts that were carry the heavy loads and they were just lumber along and you could not stop them. They take the whole width of the street sometimes.

LIU: [00:48:10] How many horses, how many were they motorized or?

C. CESPEDES: [00:48:14] Ok, so they were they were they were pulled by oxen. They were scary. Yeah, they were really scary.

LIU: [00:48:27] So you ride your bike to work?

CESPEDES: [00:48:29] Yeah, no, I was there when I'm driving to work there. That I mean, right. Riding to work

LIU: [00:48:35] And then lunch or what happened at work and what happened at work. What did you do at work?

CESPEDES: [00:48:43] I put what I consider to be Pape's class. And between my drink day with and talk with the guys in English or anything like that. And I'm drunk that completely. And and they pay bills always with me. I can still there. Yes. Yeah. It's interesting as well. Yes. But they always make good when I was making Essentialness and they always with me.

LIU: [00:49:17] What did you eat for lunch?

CESPEDES: [00:49:26] I don't know, and I think I think we go back to the Howard government. I know you also had some last minute make, of course, certain data about the third place. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. So was Pepita and. I'd like to tell you another story, but there are, of course, I mean, if I put an. They're back for the celebration of life coping, go to sleep thinking about me, you know, and they thought that we were having a meltdown and the sadness and

LIU: [00:50:25] That's the guilt

CESPEDES: [00:50:26] You say was sad that God's got me. Yeah. Oh, OK. And and it was it was a lab tech lab.

LIU: [00:50:40] And he said it was going that way.

CESPEDES: [00:50:42] And I said, yeah, they called it because they know you. Yes. But I did this with his Big Mac and then there was this woman. That's would be lamb and then in this case, protect to be goat. Hmm.

LIU: [00:51:02] How many people lived with you?

CESPEDES: [00:51:29] There were five at one time. And then one went to another city.

LIU: [00:51:49] Where is the place?

C. CESPEDES: [00:51:51] Well, it's in those days it was called Lyallpur, but it was an English name. So they changed it to Faisalabad. That's what it's called today.

LIU: [00:52:03] Ok, what was your afternoon like, what was your afternoon like?

CESPEDES: [00:52:15] I work across the country, I'm comfortable. I can assure. I don't know, a typical afternoon. But go shopping.

LIU: [00:52:32] What did you buy?

CESPEDES: [00:52:32] And there will still be a very famous, that famous shopping place, we will go there. And actually it was famous. I'm not going. And there's there's this art and there is a legend about the elaborate world of a princess. Was that appalled by reality or the it that and he was in peace in the war and having this.

C. CESPEDES: [00:53:17] I think you have it backwards. Sorry. I know Anarkali was the princess.

CESPEDES: [00:53:23] Saying he was he was so close to the time that it won't work then Tom and you won't see anywhere near that got very crowded and you can find out and almost with him close spaces and what have you

that you haven't been able to get out of that car when the baby is and got a clothing line, you know, just playing.

C. CESPEDES: [00:53:54] Everything had a price, barter for everything.

CESPEDES: [00:54:01] And certainly the girls there. And that is where they put their show, where it comes and tells me that they were responsible and they didn't have to cut the they say, to make sure we can use that so we can really make them choose to make the time. So, yeah, that Masabumi.

LIU: [00:54:32] How did you guys meet in country?

C. CESPEDES: [00:54:38] Do you want to tell the story or do you want me to? You tell you the story, you're interviewing. How did we meet?

CESPEDES: [00:54:46] I am always telling you to tell. Go ahead. There was a dance that was. Is sponsored by the university with women, or I think it is your paid nanny state some day.

C. CESPEDES: [00:55:08] Well, yeah, whatever it was, it had the US consulate was

CESPEDES: [00:55:12] Involved and I like it. I don't think that the list is going to that. So I said, yeah, it was that's fine now. But anyway, there were three women from the base closure of these. And I was feeling somebody that Danisco going danger, you know, I was one of the I have claimed that it was 13 girls, so they invited me to go. So again, we were doing so. And then, you know, I went home detention center there in San Diego. But know, I told them I was OK. So I will. And I think I quit dancing all over the place,

C. CESPEDES: [00:56:11] Jitterbug swing, you know. But I was there because I had a grant from the East-West Center, University of Hawaii for my Masters. And part of that grant and this was kind of sponsored by Lyndon Johnson as his project, Bobby Kennedy announced the Peace Corps.

So there was a kind of symmetry. But this included a study tour to Asia. For my thesis research. I had proposed a thesis on community development in a village in Pakistan. My background at that time, I ate in Hawaii. I was really studying anthropology, community development theory, all things that seemed applicable. So I went to Pakistan instead intending to live in a village and do a study of community development. But when I got there, the rug was pulled out from under me because the Pakistani government actually abolished their Department of Community Development company. And I was floundering looking for a village where I could live safely. And then Merrill Miller, the head of the U.S., has invited me to to the dance. And that's where I met Benny. And he didn't dance with me. He just noticed. And then afterwards, I wound up at a party at Merrill Miller's house. And that's where Betty asked me to dance. And we've been together ever since. It's funny how things happen in Pakistan.

LIU: [00:57:46] Yeah. Yeah. Uh, what's the two did your language capacity change over time?

C. CESPEDES: [00:57:54] Did your language capacity change? Did your language ability change? And maybe you can explain how good you were.

CESPEDES: [00:58:06] Like to, I don't brag but I have but I have that uh. I think the one thing, the language is so and I go I don't want to brag, but the thing is I was the best speaker and one time I was I had some exams today, exams, and I was told that my score was higher than anybody score for the two days. And I still had last year. And there was also a proud pride, but there were all more than broke and basically anything but I signed me as the one project manager. One always enjoyed, you know, a trailblazer in seventh grade because I and I, I spoke last week, although the best thing. Yeah, I can communicate with the big investigation. Yeah, they they did.

LIU: [00:59:25] What did you do as an engineer on the projects?

CESPEDES: [00:59:36] What did I

C. CESPEDES: [00:59:37] Do as an engineer. How did you use your engineering on these projects.

CESPEDES: [00:59:42] Oh, now they're expressing that they realized that there because it was repairing a bridge at eight a.m. that bridge, and it could be a getting worn out. And so what we were trying to do is replace some of the bricks and mortar. So that's nothing. No, nothing. Engineering, just simply doing something.

C. CESPEDES: [01:00:07] Yeah, this is a bridge that had been built by

CESPEDES: [01:00:09] The model to replace things just so obvious to us that this is our lot. And that was the only a bridge that the to will be able to fold you across the street. And they said,

C. CESPEDES: [01:00:25] Ok, that's a funny story. If you want to tell them, why didn't the village fix their own bridge? Now, why didn't the village fix their own bridge?

CESPEDES: [01:00:35] Oh, yeah, and they believe that all of us depend on them and depend on the government. And that's why we pay. And we let guys, young kids who are coming with us, you know, and then you talk to the relatives and they know that they got to help those who have them. So, yeah, they do that. They they really do so much. So you're saying the government is doing everything for them and they this is a case where you have to have been and they have to convince the delegates to work. And, you know, and I don't think we did we succeeded in my single day thing. So so we do most of the work on that day. Yeah. It was I don't know how how long it must take. I mean, they work away then. Yeah. But they didn't, they didn't know

LIU: [01:01:37] What other projects did you do?

CESPEDES: [01:01:43] That only do so given that the projects that I had um not being indenturing in nature. OK.

C. CESPEDES: [01:01:54] And the library, the library. Oh, yeah, it was kind of strange.

CESPEDES: [01:02:02] Ok, I like doing so now because I have taken some acting so with my children to one of them was both taking on the rugby rugby river and people like him doing the work right from the grave. When school it seemed like them all during all this happened. And I got to talk to them when I get it. Mostly not so much as engineering a school, but it's about social life in the states. Like I said, the two occasions when my my at times when he was, I don't know whether they were awful as they were taking, but anyway Tallboys were invited at least twice one. So it was a Christian college and the other one was he would we would be mostly Pakistan like we were invited to dinner in their homes and you know, like no way, you know what I mean. Yeah. Yeah. So that that is of course that's a exposure to the culture and no way. I mean Indian.

LIU: [01:03:37] Um, did you have vacation?

CESPEDES: [01:03:43] Do I have medication?

C. CESPEDES: [01:03:47] Did you have a holiday?

CESPEDES: [01:03:57] Oh yeah. There's one one holiday. The second day in the end of the first Ramadan, there was the head is the one that I can think of. There's a big celebration and our children get candies and I don't know what else they call the first ever food that we had. We went to the mosque. A thousand or so hundreds of people are going to be watching and wanting to celebrate the end of this thing. And he did figure it out. Understand that, of course, there were probably I don't know how it is like a holiday. And I don't remember when because I did called Acadia Some Day, which is the founder of Pakistan. And I can remember, just like there were festivities in why we were there, that's

when Jackie Onassis visited Pakistan and they had big say, oh, sure, yeah. Yeah. Because the hotel. Yeah. And in Lahore today. And I said, because at that time and the Pakistan president was, you know, like I was there, I was to they are great entertainment.

LIU: [01:05:32] Did you travel for fun? Did you travel for leisure?

C. CESPEDES: [01:05:40] He is asking about your vacations, your travel vacations. I know what they were, the mountains.

CESPEDES: [01:05:51] Oh, yeah. Yeah. I guess we had we had vacation. Well, first speculation, I can remember the were going to the mountains, yeah, they name the one, they called me up and they are gone and I'm telling them my little. And it is to see what kind of work there is, one place where I think we when we went to places that did this, what we call the Switzerland of Pakistan, which is a valley, by the way, I should say, up in the mountains. And at the time, there's only one one one way that group. And so in order to contain that, they would make that one place so they can change direction. And how many places do you have any particular places where they were going to change? Because they said it's only one week the there was not registering one week go on one side, which, as far as. They had beautiful mountain scenery in Pakistan.

LIU: [01:07:21] Did your work or life change in the second year?

CESPEDES: [01:07:34] Second year, no. It was the same.

LIU: [01:08:15] How long was your service?

CESPEDES: [01:08:20] Two years.

LIU: [01:08:28] Looking back at your service, looking back at your service,

CESPEDES: [01:08:33] Was I invited?

LIU: [01:08:34] No, um, what were you main accomplishments?

CESPEDES: [01:08:47] Oh, I celebrate my contribution to the yeah. Is there something physical? I think this year, like I said, social, my greatest contribution is changing the mentality, I mean, the attitude of what they think about women and the African American. To me, that was my biggest contribution. Nothing physical, OK. I don't think I made any physical change, OK. It's just the nurses, you know, help people who are sick. I take issue with people and in so far as actual changes in the way they labor. Oh yeah. There is probably a slight. I mean, I think probably the biggest one day kind of thing, yeah, something more subtle.

C. CESPEDES: [01:09:59] Yeah, I just have a especially especially

LIU: [01:10:08] Do you have any regrets?

CESPEDES: [01:10:49] I had know we had to measure the success or failure. I only wish that I had and I would have had more teaching. I send me an. I don't really I think the fact that I was when I was in. Able to finish this call because I was not there long and I don't know if that happened, pair the girls.

C. CESPEDES: [01:11:28] Yes, but it was finished.

CESPEDES: [01:11:31] It wasn't around that simply because it was I didn't I didn't have the time, the day to finish it.

LIU: [01:11:43] Do you mean develop it or which school?

CESPEDES: [01:11:46] I the school.

C. CESPEDES: [01:11:48] The schools that he was building.

CESPEDES: [01:11:49] Was going to go out to get the respect and that neither one is better than somebody. Is that the one I that I like the harmony. Spacing and framing. They got to the starting gate and I don't know I said that damnable. Why my colleague who is so very intent, will heavily establish when with the bang and they started working so much. Yeah OK. But we got to study ok. They got to study. So it's all so my only regret is that I didn't stay there long enough to finish.

C. CESPEDES: [01:12:38] I had just had sort of comment because I thought it was Benny who came up with this observation, but it may have been somebody else in his group or in the group right after him that I knew that the impact of the Peace Corps at that time in Pakistan was as a kind of catalyst. OK, because you saw the situation that the district commissioner was here and the village people were there and they never talked to each other. Or if the D.C. went to the village, everybody put on their best face and they would talk to him. So the Peace Corps came from out of the mold. And this happened with Bennie, with his work with the girls schools and also happened with the park two group that came right after him that I lived with in the village that they call Let Something Happen. The potential was already there in the village where the people were not communicating or doing it. So it really started the ball rolling.

LIU: [01:13:35] Ok, how did your Peace Corps experience influence your plans for the future?

CESPEDES: [01:13:58] I don't know about her, my plans, but the way I live the way I interact with other people is not really about my plans, but by my attitude, my understanding, just like you, I think you probably have a better appreciation of how deeply you have a better appreciation of how you live and what your mom. So is that accurate or not have happened so far? In my case, it did not, because I already have. I've got a camera. I so I came back and I started working as an engineer. So in so far as career and then changed in any way by any so far as my thinking, my overview, not just look, I get to open at night and I

become Internet again. Yeah. Different culture. And of course in my case I probably had better start than those who were born in the States, having been raised in different kinds. I had a hard time adjusting to the Pakistani culture or an adequate job. And I also I had that I had a greater appreciation for those young kids who were there. A lot of them were decent, tweenies and eager to change the outdoor game that came back that I don't know. Would they like their support in that or not really. But realizing that the can change things where they called to say they were not open yet, I'm just trying to get better.

C. CESPEDES: [01:16:16] I think it's important that you volunteered with Habitat for Humanity Global Village.

CESPEDES: [01:16:20] So, yeah, I have a character like, yeah, I had volunteered to go into the Habitat for Humanity in this place. Are you familiar with Habitat for Humanity?

LIU: [01:16:38] Yes. Can you describe it?

CESPEDES: [01:16:40] Ok, I took place there to me, a character work project in many countries. I have always thought that that what I'm doing is like extension of my Peace Corps service. Yeah. As I said, that when when you get the evaluation, I will say this is an extension of my Peace Corps experience.

LIU: [01:17:09] Mm hmm. OK, um, so number 11 overall, how. How do you assess your service in the light of the three goals of the Peace Corps. So let's do A - to provide technical assistance where requested.

CESPEDES: [01:17:31] I think that be is worth. And I know. I know. But I'm very concerned, man B and C, I don't know very much about that A, B and C, so I B is the more important for them understanding of the Americans by the Pakistanis. Yes. Like I said, to have greater exposure to American Western women is just by Hollywood. Yeah. Hollywood is not the real thing.

LIU: [01:18:13] What about C? How did you do C? To promote better understanding of people

CESPEDES: [01:18:19] I had thought when we come back, Carol and I go to the closest thing, but like then with that, we had a few times the Peace Corps here. And my dear, I'm sorry, during the like, March, March, April. Bigger picture. Yes. Yeah, I am a nipper style. And I would talk to the students about Pakistan in the classroom.

LIU: [01:18:51] Yeah, OK.

C. CESPEDES: [01:18:53] That's one small way. Yeah. Great. But you then you also have long friendships with Pakistanis based on your, your knowledge of the culture and the language.

LIU: [01:19:07] Do you still have contact with people in Pakistan?

CESPEDES: [01:19:13] I don't know. But that got them watching a huge earthquake in 2005. And, you know, I don't mean this guy an end to them by Pakistan and Darro establishing an organization to help the people. And he says the friends of Pakistan, you say. That's how we are,

C. CESPEDES: [01:19:42] We're still active for sure.

CESPEDES: [01:19:59] Where are you from? Houston?

LIU: [01:20:06] Houston. Ok, this is the brochure.

C. CESPEDES: [01:20:09] Yeah, that's the Benny's roommate up there in the top.

CESPEDES: [01:20:14] And they were saying, yeah, this is our first trip over there the day die. And this is just a guy I work with, a guy wearing. He is he and I were invited, this guy over there. OK, so Nick engineering here.

LIU: [01:20:38] I'll take a picture of this one over.

CESPEDES: [01:20:40] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LIU: [01:20:45] Well, this question should be easy. How what has been the effect of your Peace Corps service on your life?

C. CESPEDES: [01:20:52] What has been the effect of your Peace Corps service on your life?

CESPEDES: [01:21:01] You know what, second to my marriage, I think as the Peace Corps is probably one of the most influential in I don't know, it's hard to sit in between. I believe, you know, the my peaceful could be a little more like family to me. And I'm and that's why, you know, all these core competencies. Mm hmm. This is my big confidence thing. Well, yeah. And take your girl and I don't know, you ask a lot of people, they haven't done that many. So that's how I always felt for a good people when Dre. And it is when you have something in common. Yes. OK, so that's how this could affect my life, you know, and where I go, where they are Peace Corps. I talk to them and I tell them we were in Mongolia, then we could be school volunteers and an area in Madagascar. Yeah, yeah, Madagascar. That is great. But I got worried that people might be. Yeah. So many of them who work with us and depending on who's girl in Madagascar. And then when we were I was in Nepal because they, they were there would picture all the time, but I thought of it like and there were many people in Peace Corps volunteers. I mean I service in that group who were working in the Habitat for Humanity, working in Nepal.

LIU: [01:23:07] Nepal opened up not long ago.

CESPEDES: [01:23:08] All my records

C. CESPEDES: [01:23:09] And opened not like that, but that's the last thing. And I probably have more than one in Nepal is operating on Bennewitz.

When we get to Nepal start. I know they had in the nineties, they were probably interrupted. They had a revolution. Yeah. So Nepal. Nepal, he said, no,

CESPEDES: [01:23:26] No you're right. Yeah. Nineteen ninety nine. Yeah. OK.

C. CESPEDES: [01:23:33] Now, I think and I have to give any credit that he was the one who kept his group together because he kept track of everybody and sent Christmas letters, and then after a while, we decided it would be nice to have a reunion. So this Pakistan one group which went and I think the reason that that's worked like this is because partly because of this ridiculous training, they really bonded. And it's just a great kind of the family reunion that we get together is no so or no. We were doing it. We did it probably about 15 years after going away or that little Pakistan one really

CESPEDES: [01:24:19] Make more than that. You get another 15, 20 years. Yeah.

C. CESPEDES: [01:24:24] And that was before that was before the the Peace Corps 25th

CESPEDES: [01:24:29] Where we're getting high from the time I was day like, what, 18 years. And I get the Christmas break there and I'm allowed to go.

C. CESPEDES: [01:24:40] And they were the basis for starting the Friends of Pakistan because I always had the contact information. Then it was off doing a volunteer project in Zambia when it happened. So I got on the phone and called his friend some e-mails and I really responded.

LIU: [01:24:58] Ok, last question, last question. Do you have any advice to current and future volunteers?

CESPEDES: [01:25:10] Ok, I think there when they open my area, that I can. Learn the language, and that's very important. They can learn the languages and they're ready for anything. Say that compared to other people here

that you have, I think this is the job that you're the hardest working the labor movement and that

C. CESPEDES: [01:25:57] The hardest job you'll ever love. They still say that?

LIU: Yes, they do.

CESPEDES: [01:26:01] Say that. Yes. And they were there for the temporary sacrifice. And so far of finances, you don't make money. But for me, this core experience, it is very enriching. So what you don't get financially is the people who make have happen, say spiritually, well, spiritually. Let's play a game of game so they can give and take I. I think people who have taken that. But that I do agree with me, that is it is a life changing experience. I don't know how you play like that. I agree. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Just like my friends in the Peace Corps. What do you think you regret? It is better than. No, I had, I don't think, a very great. And that's good. How many were you in your group?

LIU: [01:27:24] I had seventy nine in my group.

CESPEDES: [01:27:26] Well, how was this big boy, nine year old one time?

LIU: [01:27:33] Uh, I can tell you I'll tell you about this after the recording, but do you have anything else to say?

C. CESPEDES: [01:27:38] Anything else you want to say because the recording's on, anything else to add here?

CESPEDES: [01:27:44] No. And I did find that I am very happy and I am very pleased to see younger people like you do to the same thing that the old guys like me had done before, you know. And encourage the younger people to serve in the Peace Corps. Oh yeah I only have one regret that that neither one of my my daughters followed in my footsteps.

C. CESPEDES: [01:28:18] We're still working on the grandkids.

LIU: [01:28:23] Ok, well, thank you for your time.

CESPEDES: [01:28:25] Ok, my pleasure, thank you.

C. CESPEDES: Thank you Jeff.

[END OF INTERVIEW]