

**Sally H. Foote Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Sally H. Foote  
**Interviewer:** Joanne Roll  
**Date of Interview:** June 6, 2008  
**Location of Interview:** Denver, Colorado  
**Length:** 42 pages

**Biographical Note**

Sally H. Foote served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Costa Rica from 1968 to 1970 on a public health project (Costa Rica IX).

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed July 22, 2008, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Technical Note**

This transcript was created by Sonix software from the MP3 audio recording of the interview. The resulting text file was lightly edited and reformatted according to a standard template.

**Suggested Citation**

Sally H. Foote, recorded interview by Joanne Roll, June 6, 2008, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

## DISCLAIMER

This transcript was generated automatically by Sonix software from the audio recording. The accuracy of the transcript cannot be guaranteed. Only the original audio recording constitutes the official record of this interview and should be used along with the transcript. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy or would like to recommend corrections, they are encouraged to contact the library reference staff.

Oral History Interview

with

Sally H. Foote

June 6, 2008  
Denver, Colorado

By Joanne Roll

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

ROLL: [00:00:01] It is June 6, 2008, and I am going to interview Sally Foote, who was a member of Costa Rica IX. And this is a test to see, first of all, how we are recording. Sally, would you introduce yourself?

FOOTE: [00:00:18] I'm Sally Foote and I live in Clearwater, Florida. I served in Costa Rica from 1968 through 1970. I don't know if I touched over into 1971.

ROLL: [00:00:30] OK. Sally, can you remember back to the time before you joined the Peace Corps, what your life was like, what prompted you to think about the Peace Corps?

FOOTE: [00:00:48] Yes, I grew up in a very broad and deep military family. And as a girl, I knew that I wasn't going to the academies. And so we had lived around the world in different places. It came together in the fall of my senior year at Duke, fall of '67, that I wouldn't be returning to my dorm the

following fall. And I really needed to think about what I wanted to do or where I go. And I had majored in political science, but I took effectively a full double major in French, and my parents would speak French when I was a child if they wanted to tell a secret. So I was always intrigued by languages and happened to have a fairly good ear for them. And I thought about taking the test for the Foreign Service, and I didn't have the confidence that I would do well or pass it. I didn't know I family meant distant family member had served in the Foreign Service, but I really didn't know anything about it. And so I sort of shied away and I think I should have, but I didn't.

FOOTE: [00:02:07] And I thought about going to New York to work for Time magazine as a blue dotter, I think they were called, where you check the facts of every single word and every single article, in those days was, of course, all done by hand, and I was a fairly good writer. So I thought about that and I really didn't know how one sort of went to New York to live, although my parents had lived in New York for a while. So then I thought about going overseas and quite frankly, I joined the Peace Corps because I was saying thank you to America. It sounds quite corny, but I thought that that would be my service to the country. And I sort of spun the globe and wondered about going out into Micronesia because we lived in Hawaii and Okinawa and had traveled through Asia.

FOOTE: [00:02:57] I thought about going to Africa, where, of course, people speak French. I don't recall if I knew whether the Peace Corps was in Haiti at the time or not, but I thought about going to Africa. And quite frankly, having grown up when I was in America, in the South and not really knowing anything about Africa or having studied about Africa, it just seemed like the Great Dark Continent. And although I was intrigued by it, and it was a logical choice, I was a little shy about it. And then I thought, well, Latin America. I went to Mexico when I was in fifth grade, Mexico City for a holiday with my parents. And I thought, well, that would be interesting, and I don't remember the details of how the programs were described or how many were available and when they started.

FOOTE: [00:03:50] But I assumed I would do this after I graduated from college, and that would have been after June of 1968. So somehow it all came

together that there was a program in Costa Rica, and it was a program for rural community development. And in my political science courses, we had talked about mostly international relations, but there had been a great deal of activity, of course, in the United States on what they call black organizing in New York and how effective that had been to bring together disparate people who hadn't known each other, even living in the same apartment house, much less the same block and the same neighborhood, and that they were organizing to lobby and seek services from the city and state governments for improving their infrastructure and their education. So I thought, well, I understand what that is.

ROLL: [00:04:58] Had you worked with any of that or just studied it?

FOOTE: [00:05:01] Read about it, heard about it, read the newspaper, heard people talking about it. I was going to school at Duke in Durham, North Carolina, and my last year of school I did do some voter registration work in the black community. But my parents lived in Sweden and I had my godparents lived in Alexandria, Virginia, and my other family was sort of spread all around. So I just sort of came into this on my own. And as an aside, after I joined the Peace Corps, I heard it described that I was a communist.

ROLL: [00:05:38] And who described you as a communist?

FOOTE: [00:05:39] A cousin of my father. They were very conservative, strong military officers.

ROLL: [00:05:47] How did your family feel about it? How did your father?

FOOTE: [00:05:49] I don't know that my parents felt anything about it. They didn't say yes or no, or it just sort of evolved as I was sort of planning on what to do after I graduated. And I think they understood my motivation as I understood it. And I don't think they viewed it as insurrectionist or whatnot, but I think they, I think they viewed it. My father had been the air attaché in Sweden for three years, and I think they viewed it as sort of a baby diplomatic effort. I think both while I was in Costa Rica and then even before I was going, I thought in the sense of being a goodwill ambassador,

not to promote America, but certainly to bring what we could from America that might be helpful or interesting to people in other countries and learn from them about their lives and cultures. And in a way it would be do no harm, but hopefully do good.

FOOTE: [00:06:57] And I realized we didn't have money as AID did to create infrastructure and we weren't diplomats. I turned in my family diplomatic passport and got my regular green U.S. passport. But we were, I think, expected, I don't know if there were any official rules, but we were expected not to actively promote and be in the forefront of political organizing lobbying. Our job was to encourage and create bridges and information.

ROLL: [00:07:42] Did you have this sense of Peace Corps before you went in or is this what developed during training?

FOOTE: [00:07:48] No, I think my idea before I went was, if I had imagined what my work would be or where it would be, would probably not have been in a totally extremely remote rural area as I found myself. Because that really didn't fit in with the concept of what our group turned out to be in this community development, working in what they call teams where we had one person in our culture.

ROLL: [00:08:14] OK, you're getting ahead of me just a little bit. Talk a little bit about training, what the training was like, what the selection process was like, and how you envisioned after your training what you would be doing.

FOOTE: [00:08:30] Well, the training, um.

ROLL: [00:08:32] Where did you train?

FOOTE: [00:08:32] They really didn't describe it to my recollection at all. We trained in Puerto Rico in a little World War II army camp in Arecibo, actually south and up in the mountains south of Arecibo. And it was very remote and we had, as I remember them, little barracks, you would say. And they were screened, where windows would have been there were screens. And then you had a wooden floor and you had a tin roof and you had the supports

on the side, the little wooden steps. And all the girls slept in one building and the boys, because we had two groups in our camp. One was the fish group going all over Central America, all men. And then our group was men and women. And I don't know how they divvied up the total number of cabins, and I don't remember going into that many of them. They had one cabin for married couples, and I believe we had three, the Newells, the Seligsons, and the Reeds.

FOOTE: [00:09:31] And then we had showers and latrines and some sort of a. It looked like something out of a World War II movie on the Pacific Islands. It didn't really look like Europe, but Pacific Islands. Because although it would be quite cool and cold, especially when it rained and it was very high altitude, it was sort of a lush, tropical feel, except on the very little grounds. They were kind of trampled, as I remember, but they had trees and it was, um.

ROLL: [00:10:00] What was a typical training day like?

FOOTE: [00:10:03] Well, we slept in little cots and we woke up in the morning and we went down. The shower, as I remember it, there was no hot water, so you had to take a shower and it was very cold. And when it was cold or damp, it was really cold. And that was when I decided I never wanted to live without having hot water. Well, of course I lived with no water, so I went down before I came up. Electricity, going without electricity doesn't matter. We had little light bulbs though, I think we had some electricity. That wasn't an issue. We had the little latrines. We got up. And the best part of it was the Spanish classes where we started at two hours a day and we went up to about eight hours a day. And then we tapered off again to, I believe, four or two hours a day. And that over the course of the training, which I think was from maybe the end of August until the first week of November, somewhere in that time frame, I don't have the exact dates. I have a wonderful friend who's got all the details on this, Jennifer Walters. So listen to her tape if you really want to know what happened. And Jennifer Walter Fowler, excuse me.

FOOTE: [00:11:05] And at the same time, when we had the language classes, we had what they call D groups, and I don't think they were deselection

groups. They were D groups for development groups. And part of it, and I'm not very savvy. I don't, you know, I figure things out after a while, but I don't grasp necessarily what's happening at the time, but I thought they were the most. Initially, it was people talked about their lives and their schooling and what they were doing and whatever and getting to know each other. But then.

ROLL: [00:11:46] Let me ask you this. How many people were in a group?

FOOTE: [00:11:48] I want to say somewhere between six and eight, and we sat around in a circle in these little sort of chickee huts. Only they weren't chickee huts with palm thatch like we have in Florida where I live, but they were miniature versions of our little bags.

ROLL: [00:12:02] How long did the group last? How long were the sessions?

FOOTE: [00:12:05] I assume we got there at 8:30 or 9:00 in the morning and we'd go till noon or 11:30 or something. That would be the morning. And then maybe the afternoon was the Spanish class after lunch.

ROLL: [00:12:15] Would these groups be every day during training?

FOOTE: [00:12:18] Yes.

ROLL: [00:12:18] The whole time of training?

FOOTE: [00:12:18] The whole time, except when we had two in particular, extraordinary experiences. I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself, but two times we were asked during training to go away from the camp on our own to find a place to stay. The first time it was for a weekend, and the second time was for a week.

ROLL: [00:12:42] And this would be in the community?

FOOTE: [00:12:45] All over the island, the whole island of Puerto Rico.

ROLL: [00:12:49] What was your transportation?

FOOTE: [00:12:51] They took us down what they called *wawas*, which were little vans, that took us down from the mountain camp to Arecibo. They drove us into San Jose. I don't recall having any money at all or being given money, but we had to have been given something. But I think it must have been like ten dollars. I mean, it was nothing. And the audacity of this still shocks me. You know, I thought, oh, OK, go away for a weekend, you get on it. They said, go to this town. And what they had was a map and they handed you a little slip of paper and it had the name of the place you were supposed to go. And my little town was called Aibonito and Aibonito is probably in the, just on the western edge of the eastern third of the island, about halfway down in the middle of nowhere. And to this day, when I think about it, which is not very often, except when I think about the extraordinary good fortune I came upon. It was absolutely reprehensible to do this.

FOOTE: [00:13:54] I went off in the middle of nowhere by myself. No money, no names, no contacts, no phone. No nothing. And here I am. Was I 21? I think, maybe. Spoke French, but was only learning Spanish, so at some point, as I do now with my Italian, I would speak French with a Spanish accent. Sometimes went all right, sometimes it didn't. But that first weekend. And then, of course, hearing what other people did in retrospect when they got back, although we didn't get together and sort of talk under the blankets about who did what and say, oh, wow, is that what you did? Some people just went to the hotel and spent the weekend, had no intention of going on this thing. But I'm very dutiful. So off I go in the middle of nowhere with nothing. The little van that dropped me off in Aibonito.

ROLL: [00:14:47] Peace Corps had a van that dropped you off?

FOOTE: [00:14:49] No, no, no, no, no. I had to take public transportation.

ROLL: [00:14:52] So you knew enough Spanish to get yourself to?

FOOTE: [00:14:54] Well, I had some little sentences written out in Spanish. I had about five sentences. *Yo me llamo Sarita Foote. Sarita Pie*, which was



easier than Sally Foote in Spanish, in translation. *Soy voluntaria del cuerpo de paz. Necesito per la oportunidad de trespasar un fin de semana. Conoceres.* Well, spend a weekend with you. But who are you and where is this? I mean, you know? So with my five sentences, I was calling upon the good offices and the kindness of strangers to take me in at their expense for two nights, feed me, talk to me, when they didn't even have. I could have been a criminal. It was, thinking about it in retrospect. But at the time, off I get out of the little bus, I stand around and look around. There's nothing there. And I say, oh, and I look up toward a mountain. I felt like Heidi. And I climbed just toward this little mountain because there it was quite hilly in this area.

FOOTE: [00:15:57] And I look up and I see a little building and it turned out to be the local school. And I came and there were no people around. And so I sort of circled around a little bit toward the school. And out behind me came a very kindly faced, plump, tiny woman. Not too old, but not as young as she probably was to my eyes. She looked older than she was. And she greeted me, *buenas tardes*. And I said, *buenas tardes*. And we had my little five sentences. It turned out she was the janitoress at the little local elementary school, and she was sweeping out the wooden floor. There were no. It was very open to the elements because it really wasn't suffering from terribly inclement weather. And with my little gestures and my French-Spanish and my Spanish sentences, she motioned for me to come with her and we continued on up the mountain, like now, Heidi with her charge in tow.

FOOTE: [00:17:03] And we came to her house, a little tiny house with her tiny little husband. And I think there were six or seven children. And you stepped up on the little wooden steps on this platform and all the little chickens ran around underneath and they had a couple of banana trees and just general plantings of the area. All the little children, stair-stepped in age. I think the youngest was still about two, still nursing, and the oldest was probably about eight. And they all slept in the same double bed, at least while I was there. And I slept with them and we all lined up like they do in Williamsburg, where you line up sideways instead of, because there's more room sideways. And bless their hearts, they had nothing on their

walls except a picture of Jesus. And as I recall, they had a, perhaps a calendar, a paper calendar, a small one that had some sort of picture.

FOOTE: [00:18:03] I remember taking a few pictures. I had a funny little brownie camera or something of that sort. And I tried, and I hope I did, mail them with a little thank you note. If I had any money, I left it with them. We ate very simple food. And of course, I couldn't talk very much, but I smiled and it was kind of the children and they sort of walked me around. And they had, I think they had a goat and they had, of course, the chickens ran everywhere. And I sort of played with the children and then went back down the hill on Sunday, presumably in enough time to, I don't remember the trip home, but to get back to San Juan and then off to Arecibo and up to the camp by whatever the o'clock was. And I've thought about it, and I unfortunately, I can't at the moment, I don't have, I have, I think I may have a picture. My pictures are very faded and I have brought the albums for this reunion that we're having here in Denver. And Steve has made copies of pictures.

FOOTE: [00:19:05] But I remember their faces vividly and I remember they had nothing and they shared everything they had with me. And I can't imagine if someone came knocking at our doors in our lives, in America, whether it was 20 years ago or 10 years ago or two days ago. I can't imagine even I, as I should remember, having that extraordinary generosity and so unbounded generosity and kindness.

ROLL: [00:19:40] So it wasn't reprehensible then.

FOOTE: [00:19:42] No, the Peace Corps was reprehensible in its, uh, lack of consideration for the Puerto Ricans. Expecting people of very limited means to add another mouth to feed willingly, without an invitation, without notice. Not necessarily perhaps that there should have been sort of the standard visit, you know? I don't know how many groups trained in Puerto Rico and Arecibo. I don't know how many groups made this sort of a little trip. I don't know what the thinking was. I think it's a form of arrogance that it was shocking and I felt that very strongly at the time and I went on and off.

ROLL: [00:20:27] Was there a place for you?

FOOTE: [00:20:28] No, of course not. The side of the training that was wonderful was to, although my family had traveled widely, I came to learn that I think there are different ages. You have a chronological age, you have an intellectual age. You have a social age, an emotional age perhaps, psychological age. I don't know how many you might have, but my ages were very skewed. And I had a normal chronological age, a very advanced intellectual age, and probably a very suppressed or repressed or undeveloped or whatever emotional age. But I had seen a lot and I had seen a lot of difficult circumstances, and yet I had not met people of different ethnic groups. I grew up when I did. I mean, I'd met up other cultures, but I had not great familiarity with the Italian Americans or with the Irish Americans.

FOOTE: [00:21:28] I had not met people who were bold in their personalities and bold in their, either when it was espousing a cause or personal strength. And sitting around in these D groups and learning the stories and not just the individuals, but their families and their schooling, because that was the most immediate common experience. We'd all just graduated from school or one or two people had gone to graduate school. And what I learned was, and I don't know that this was true for all the girls. But when I said that I was coming in the Peace Corps to thank America and serve, give my service and my talents to the extent I thought I could and hoped I could. Every boy there was there because he did not want to enlist in the military. Some had high numbers, some had low numbers, but not a single one of them was there for the kind of reason I was there.

ROLL: [00:22:28] Ok, now I'm not. I think it's very important.

FOOTE: [00:22:31] It really was.

ROLL: [00:22:33] So why though would you then not speak up about how you felt the Peace Corps had not, had been so inconsiderate of the family that you stayed with in terms of that particular experience?

FOOTE: [00:22:46] There was no one to talk to. The way I remember what was going on in this quote unquote training session. We had Spanish classes and it was a pretty much aural experience. I don't know how much written. And I'm a visual learner, but I have a good ear, so I don't remember what the materials were and how much. But we had wonderful teachers in my particular group. They were, I think they were Colombian or Costa Rican. They had beautiful Spanish and it was really a pleasure. The D group business, I thought, was sort of the preparation for learning about this rural community organizing. But there were really three parts to the training. And the major part of it, certainly as I perceived it looking back, because I really didn't grasp what was going on I don't think in terms of analyzing it, was this.

FOOTE: [00:23:42] Our serving as guinea pigs for a man named Mike Tucker, who was getting a PhD in some sort of psychological area. I don't even know what it was. He was there with his wife. I believe he was from Utah. For some reason, that sticks in my mind. I could be wrong. And somehow he was using us as his subjects for his dissertation. Fine. No one disclosed that. I learned it, or if other people knew it, I don't know why I didn't learn it. Maybe I just not quick enough on the draw, but only toward the very end. But what he did have was the power of life and death over the individuals in the group staying in or being deselected.

ROLL: [00:24:24] Well, now explain a little bit about this selection. I know what you mean, but other people who might.

FOOTE: [00:24:29] Deselection or selection? Well, selection, as I understand it was, you could be asked to join the Peace Corps as a volunteer and you would go to your training. And during the training, somebody would determine whether or not you fit in with either the work they thought you would be doing or they intended you to do, both in terms of your language skills and in terms of the particular quote unquote mission of the work. And I think those decisions turned on the evaluation as I think I glean, certainly at the end of the training. The Spanish teachers were not just teaching Spanish, they were also submitting some sort of review or evaluation of some kind. The D group business, as I recall it, we might be the volunteers or the prospective volunteers. I guess you would say the

trainees would be sitting around a little group and discussing, and I got to get back to that in a minute what we discussed or why, but I don't remember that there was a staff member who sat there.

ROLL: [00:25:43] Ah.

FOOTE: [00:25:44] I think staff members, when I say staff and I'll come back to that in a minute, came by or sometimes participated or gave us topics or gave us scenarios. But I don't think at all times there was a staff person there, and I don't remember Mr. Tucker coming in sitting down with our group. He may have come by or something, but not really participating as I recall it. But what he was sort of this. I thought he was an albino, quite frankly, because of his coloring. But this very strange looking person with a very reserved manner with a clipboard. And every time he wrote something down, it was not good. So you didn't want him to write down anything about anybody or about you or about what you really thought about anything.

ROLL: [00:26:37] So when he was around, you were very.

FOOTE: [00:26:39] Very circumspect, very circumspect.

ROLL: [00:26:42] So you would, this would not be, you would not say how you felt about this particular experience.

FOOTE: [00:26:47] At the same time, I don't think he was the person who organized the training as training, the bigger picture of the training, the elements of the training. So he had his segment of it, which he used to great harm. And then there was the purpose of going in the Peace Corps.

ROLL: [00:27:07] When you say great harm, would you expand a little bit on why you think it was such great? Now there were men in the group that if they were selected out, they would automatically become eligible for the draft.

FOOTE: [00:27:23] Well, some came in with high numbers and low numbers as I mentioned. Some of their draft boards said would recognize Peace Corps

service as service. Some said their draft boards would not, so it was just a matter of when their numbers came up.

ROLL: [00:27:40] So that some had draft deferments and some did not.

FOOTE: [00:27:44] Well, I'm not sure if you would call them draft deferments, but as I understood it, if the number came up, some draft boards would call and did.

ROLL: [00:27:52] And get them right out of training?

FOOTE: [00:27:53] And they took them right back to the draft board and whatever happened had to happen. Others, as I understood, if their number came up, the deferment would be recognized and then they'd be recycled in some fashion. As I recall it, and I am not sure I have the right names or timing of the events. One boy was called back from our group in training and his Peace Corps service would not be allowed.

ROLL: [00:28:26] Didn't have a deferment.

FOOTE: [00:28:26] I don't know if he ended up, where he ended up serving, but I think he did go in the military. One volunteer, whom I hold in extraordinary regard, said that he would not serve. I don't know if he would call himself a pacifist, but he had come to the conclusion that he could not serve in that war. And if he had to, he would go to Canada, and indeed he did. I think he came into country and perhaps then his number came up and he had to make the decision. As I understand it, he did go and I would use his name because I remember who he is, but I don't know, so I don't want to say.

ROLL: [00:29:05] But how does Tucker play into this?

FOOTE: [00:29:07] Well, he is this person who is designing, I guess, or had designed, some sort of process for analyzing each person. And I don't know if his process of analyzing each person really was the ultimate decision making of whether you went into country or not, or whether his analysis was only sort of gathered with, for example, the Spanish teachers

and these other more, to me are not perfectly memorable, people who were more work-based, you know. These were teaching us about what we would actually do in country, which seemed kind of more important than whatever this D group business was. But whatever data was being collected on comments, there was a session at some point where we were supposed to write down comments about other people.

ROLL: [00:30:03] In the group?

FOOTE: [00:30:05] I think in our whole group, but certainly in our own D group. And I don't recall, not being a very good rebel, except when I really know what I'm doing and I sort of sit and watch and wait to see. But I think either some of us grasped or I learned that. [tape break] I think some of us grasped or I learned that these comments might be used to decide who might go into country and who might not, and the consequences of deselection for the men were extraordinary. And even without taking into account the military service issue, which is hard to set aside, obviously, in this time we are now August or September of 1968. For women as well. I mean, no one wants to be deselected if you're there honestly and earnestly participating and hoping to serve and wanting to serve and hoping to do good and help.

FOOTE: [00:31:11] So it was a poisonous. It was the first time I have ever experienced, I may say, the first and last, but certainly the first time I'd ever experienced anything like this. I have no idea why the Peace Corps allowed it to happen. I have no idea what good it accomplished. I have no idea what benefit or insight could. Somehow, at some point in time, and it may not have been in the first month or six weeks, but certainly after a couple of months, people realized, no, don't participate.

FOOTE: [00:31:52] Now I do remember someone wrote that I was odd because I wore bows in my hair. And of course, I come from a southern school and you wore bows in your hair to pull your hair back from your head. And I had several bows of different colors. I mean, not a multitude, but I had long hair and I pulled it back so it wouldn't fall on my face and it never occurred to me that that was odd. And I thought later, well, why would someone write down? I guess, if they really thought I was odd or defective

in some way, it was more to do with my character or whatever. But somehow that was actually used or Mr. Tucker said that to me and I don't know. I don't remember the circumstances, but the whole effect of the whole that segment of the Peace Corps training, as I mentioned, was poisonous. It was divisive. And somehow we didn't allow it to work. And it was almost a tacit agreement.

FOOTE: [00:32:52] I don't remember any meetings in the, you know, under the dark of night. But I just remember sensing, deciding, and I think everyone, however it came together, was not going to allow another person in our group to be hurt by someone who had no honor, no respect, no experience, contributing nothing to Costa Rica, the United States. This was solely a personal benefit. I don't know how the Peace Corps could have allowed it. I must have said this two or three times. It was so horrifying that in a way, the only benefit of it was, even though our sites were scattered over what one looks at the map and since this is a very small country, we were so scattered and we rarely saw each other during our years of service.

FOOTE: [00:33:58] Nevertheless, even when one of us might not be the best friend of another or be as close in terms of interests or perspective or manner, nothing would we have done to have denigrated or diminished in any way someone else. We always would have been supportive. And I think if there's anything good that came out of what happened, hopefully that was it. And a little bit of courage, maybe not the courage to quote unquote go to the Peace Corps and say anything, because there was no one to go to. I mean, people sort of came in and out of this camp and the teachers came and went to the extent they were needed. Mr. Tucker, with his whatever he was doing at night, with his clipboards and his comments and whatever.

FOOTE: [00:34:57] And then there was a segment which I only recall from reading letters, which my parents saved. I don't know that they saved all of them. I didn't even know they'd saved any of them. My father has died and my mother has severe dementia, so I can't ask them. I asked them a little bit through the years about their feelings. And my brother, just younger than I, to whom I wrote letters, has died. So I have no one I can. My grandmother



died and I wrote her a couple of letters and my godmother's mother died. And so there's no one I can go to and say, what did you think about my letters, my thoughts about me? I think my parents and perhaps my brother thought I was going crazy, at least in country. I don't remember writing letters very much in the training. I did write letters as a Peace Corps volunteer, I think more out of a sense of duty than anything else, but also out of a sense of keeping my sanity.

FOOTE: [00:35:51] I just think that the Peace Corps training preparation, oddly enough, was kind of vague. It was sort of the least of the organized and memorable aspects of the training, when one would think it would be the most important. And what we were to do, as it turned out, was to make a team of three. We were supposed to work in agriculture, cooperatives, and health. And of course, most of us were liberal arts graduates, and I don't know that anyone had any, I took economics courses, but economics background. Nobody had any scientific background I recall in particular. But the way it worked out, I thought, I get cooperatives. I've had some economics, I've had political science, I've lived around the world. This is fine. I'll work in cooperatives. Except I was told in Costa Rica, oh no, no, no. Women do not work in cooperatives. Except as it turned out, the head of the cooperative in Nicoya, which is the capital of the canton where my site was, was a woman, but that was way down the track. So my team.

ROLL: [00:36:53] Now when you finish training, you were selected in.

FOOTE: [00:36:59] But we weren't sure how we were selected in, except we had to choose an area. And they said, well, there are only so many slots. And so if you don't choose an area that has a slot, then you can't go.

ROLL: [00:37:12] Was this in Puerto Rico?

FOOTE: [00:37:12] This is in training in Puerto Rico. We didn't have any training in Costa Rica.

ROLL: [00:37:18] So you chose your site when you were still in training?

FOOTE: [00:37:22] We didn't choose it. Actually, they were showed us some sites on a map and they described them. And as it turned out, John Dellaverson, my dear friend John, Frankson Sally, whom we call Paco, my dear friend, and I made a team. And you couldn't have had three more disparate people in the world, and we adore each other to this day.

ROLL: [00:37:44] You were allowed to choose your partner.

FOOTE: [00:37:46] I'm not sure actually whether we sort of fell into it because we were not, you know, close personal friends coming into the Peace Corps together or anything. We obviously didn't room together. But somehow in shifting out these little groups, the three of us said, great. And Frank, unfortunately, is not here for this reunion where we're doing this taping. John is coming and I am just beside myself to see him because I haven't seen him in many, many years. I have seen John and Paco since we finished our Peace Corps service, but not anywhere recently, and certainly not enough. I thank them because although we hardly ever saw each other as it turned out, because our sights were far apart and because of the rainy season and riding the horses you couldn't get through, and all this. We really didn't see each other, but we had a bond that transcends the Peace Corps. It's transcended the vagaries of life. It's as though they are annealed to me, and I have only two other people I can describe like that. One would be my law partner and the other is my new husband. And John and Paco and Jennifer. But John and Paco is my teammates. We had a great theory about what we were going to do.

ROLL: [00:39:04] What happened?

FOOTE: [00:39:05] And a site we were going to go do it in. And then it just changed.

ROLL: [00:39:09] But this all happened in training in Puerto Rico? And then how and describe how you got to Costa Rica, what your initial impression was, and what happened to your team.

FOOTE: [00:39:22] Well, they gave us a like a week off and I remember going back to Virginia to see my brother, who was in school, and my godparents are

in Alexandria, and that was sort of our home base. My parents were in Sweden. And for, I think it was about a week. And then I don't know that we reassembled in Miami. But whatever the airplane tickets were. There was a route that Pan Am flew once a week, up from Panama and to New York and once a week down to Panama. I don't know if the same route was to Colombia, but it may have actually gone to Colombia and turned around. And, you know, Tuesdays it flew south and Thursdays it flew north and it stopped in the various, I can talk about the countries in a minute. But anyway, San Jose, where of course, we flew in and got out and there's a little Peace Corps office in San Jose. I think we had an address. And there must have been an arrangement for us to go to a little hotel in San Jose. There were a couple of quote unquote Peace Corps hotels that you didn't have to stay in a Peace Corps hotel. It wasn't owned by the Peace Corps, but they were inexpensive. But they were clean. They were safe. They were very modest. I mean, there was one sort of rather nice hotel where we sometimes go to supper if we had a parent to come or some very special occasion.

FOOTE: [00:40:37] But generally we had little Peace Corps hotels. And so if you arrived, Costa Ricans and other people could stay there too, of course, but you could ask for the register or they would tell you or you might hear an American voice. And generally, the Americans who stayed there were Peace Corps volunteers. And we were really pretty respectful and this wasn't a rowdy operation. But that's what people, when they came to the capital city, they stayed there, until my very last year when I had my little apartment. People would come and stay at my apartment. But I remember we met Toby Orr who was the country director, and he was from Montana, as I recall. I don't believe he was a Peace Corps volunteer, but I could be wrong about that. But he had had some agricultural experience as a rancher, and he was comfortable economically, and I think he was recruited perhaps, maybe he had some political connections, but very pleasant guy. Very nice guy.

FOOTE: [00:41:29] There was a gentleman person, man named Ralph Bates, and I would not have recalled his name until I was rereading my letters on the way out to Denver today, who had something more to do with the day to day operations. And he was sort of quote unquote in charge of maybe

Guanacaste, which is the peninsula that's on the west coast of Costa Rica that had several Peace Corps sites. I know that he accompanied me and I assume John and Paco. But when we flew out from the capital city to Guanacaste and went to Nicoya, which was the provincial capital. It was the province of canton was Nicoya and the capital town is called Nicoya. And my little town is called Corelli de Nicoya. I can't find it on the Google map. I'm desperate to get a good Costa Rica map to find it again. It's northeast of Costa Rica, northeast of Nicoya, about an hour and 15 minutes. Paco went to Pozo de Agua, which was a little bit larger kind of community, maybe 20 minutes beyond my sight. And then John went sort of in the southeastern direction, down to Roblare, and they were very scattered.

FOOTE: [00:42:44] But I think we must have gone on the same plane. And all I remember was an old C47 type plane. And usually when we flew, we flew in little tiny four-seaters with the mail and we would. It was obviously inexpensive enough that we could do it. We didn't go to the capital city that often, but that was the only place to go. And so this was a plane that the Peace Corps surely had paid the price of a ticket for. And so I remember standing at the top of the stairs and whether I was the last one out of the plane or whether there was someone behind me, I don't know. And I remember standing there and I had on my little white ruffled blouse, sleeveless. I had on my little green and white checked skirt and my little flats and my stockings. And I looked around at this empty desert, which was just the airport. It was a little grass strip, and they had to chase the cows and the chickens and the animals and the children off when they had a plane land of any size.

FOOTE: [00:43:45] And I stood there and I thought, I don't know if I can do this. And then I stood there and I looked around and there was nobody else. No one else was going to help me. And I said, you have to do this. And I remember walking down those stairs thinking, I have just jumped off the cliff, or I have jumped into the unknown, which more than anyone anticipated, I truly had jumped into the unknown. No one knew a thing about my site. I don't think, quite frankly, anyone had ever been there. It was voted retrospective, because no one ever came, it was never to have been a site. There was nothing to prepare whatever, but it was very

different from everybody else's. But I didn't know that at the time. So off I go in a jeep with a man I'd never met. We drive over and out we go.

ROLL: [00:44:35] Did the man in the jeep? Did he meet you? Or was he just?

FOOTE: [00:44:38] The man in the jeep was a contact of some kind for the Peace Corps in Nicoya. He wasn't the sheriff, but he had. He wasn't the mayor of the town, but he had some sort of position of that sort. He was Costa Rican, of course. Very nice smiling man. I want say his name was Don Sergio, but I would have to search for his last name and his position. But he had a jeep. It was an open-air jeep, kind of an old fashioned army type World War II type jeep. It was painted red, I remember that. And off we went, the two of us. And off I go. And it takes, as I say, about an hour and 15 minutes on the little busses. They had a little bus that would come once a week. We didn't have. There was a great big, we would call it a creek like Rock Creek sort of, in Rock Creek Park, that separated the land from my little quote unquote town, which I'll describe in a minute. And when it was in the rainy season, it became a raging torrent.

FOOTE: [00:45:36] And the only way you could cross it was with one of these little tiny hammock bridges like you see on Bridge on the River Kwai type thing. I mean, with the rickety little ropes and the rickety little sort of half wooden woven kinds of steps. And I had never had a ropes course, that was kind of terrifying over the raging torrent. Now, if you'd fallen in, you would have smashed your head on a rock. You wouldn't have drowned, but you would have been smashed. Whether you would have died or not, I don't know, but it would have been a mess. One of the projects or the results of my having been there, not that I was responsible for it, was we actually got a bridge built so you could drive across it all year round. And that's when the bus could come. It was like a little old-fashioned school bus. And they were painted different colors. They were kind of rickety, very clean. The paint wasn't perfect, but they were very clean. And I remember the bus, the first time I got on the bus, it said, *donde hay orden está dios*. Where there is order, there is God. I was so taken by this I thought, wow, you know, no spitting in the bus.

ROLL: [00:46:39] Yeah. Your first impression.

FOOTE: [00:46:40] When they drove me out, they drove me up and it was in the dry season and I had a little *paniyay*, a little basket with my little suitcase and we got out and obviously an arrangement had been made. The town was not a town. There was a little soccer field, not trimmed like grass like we have, but just a little open area, large. There was surprisingly enough, a whitewashed cinderblock church, a very small chapel church. There was a teensy ancient little shack, two little wooden steps, all gray unpainted wood, tumbled down. It looked like a sharecropper shack in the South. Very, very small, very poor. That was the telegraph office and a very nice young man who was married and had two little children was the telegraph operator for two hours a day. But it was a government job. It was really nice that he had this job, and that was the only way to communicate.

FOOTE: [00:47:49] I mean, there was no radio, no telephone, no electrical outlet, no nothing. But the telegraph, it was amazing. The telegraph linked that whole country and it was very efficient. I mean, if I sent a telegraph on day one, day two somebody got it. They came in paper format because the man, in this case, he would write them down. And you could hear it clickity, clickity, clickity. I don't know why there was one in my town because not that many people used it. I used it. I mean, it cost I say two or three or four *colones* and I don't know the conversion rate anymore. But let's just say it was 25 cents, 20 cents, 10 cents. It wasn't very expensive. And I think it was per telegram, not per word. Or maybe you only got so many words and whatever, but you actually could send a telegram, and it was fairly reliable absent a storm. Not on the weekends, maybe, but let's just say two or three days a week.

FOOTE: [00:48:41] Then there were two little what we call *tiendas*, and they were tiny little *bodegas* where you would ride up on your horse and almost like having the sliding window from McDonald's.

ROLL: [00:48:57] Where did the horse come from?

FOOTE: [00:48:57] Well, if you had a horse, I later had a horse, but I mean, everybody rode horses there. I mean, we're in the middle of nowhere. Nobody has any motorized vehicles. This is a rural setting. What I would

compare it to, not having been in the Midwest in the United States, a little bit like Colorado or Wyoming, Montana. Um, corn, dry rice, and beans.

ROLL: [00:49:17] How many people?

FOOTE: [00:49:18] Cattle. I was looking at my letters. I would have said about five hundred people in a five-mile radius. One of my letters said maybe it was a guess on my part. Seven hundred. Most families had between two and 13 children. The men, well, the people who live there are primarily of Indian descent, Nicaraguan in great part. There were certain tribes that came and I can't remember, I'm embarrassed to say, the principal tribe. But they were small, lithe, beautiful dark glossy hair, very deeply brown skin, extraordinarily mild mannered, not with the drinking and a few other things, kind, shy, gracious, quiet.

ROLL: [00:50:15] They spoke Spanish?

FOOTE: [00:50:16] They speak Spanish. There was no Indian dialect that I know of. And they spoke very nice Spanish, very formal Spanish. In Costa Rica, I did not learn the form of *tu*. Everything was *usted*. And we even talked to the trees and the tables and chairs in *usted*, you know? So it was wonderful in that sense because it was a Spanish that you could take with you. And the vocabulary I thought was, although I talk about it, my letters I was reading, it was a, I mean, I guess, a vocabulary focused on that world, which was an agrarian world. But it was a community, very spread out, little tiny little shacks people lived in. Just you never knew where you might find one, just sort of scattered. And the landscape was flat, cattle grazing. Most of the land was owned by absentee landlord.

ROLL: [00:51:16] How far were you from the water, from either the gulf or?

FOOTE: [00:51:20] No, no. I was way inland. I was way away from water. Nicoya is about right in the middle of the peninsula. And although I was northeast of it, I never saw the water. I mean, it was miles and miles, and they didn't even have any roads. I mean, there was no way to go to the water.

ROLL: [00:51:35] When you first arrived in your site, was there a place for you to stay? Was there a little hotel?

FOOTE: [00:51:40] No, no, no, no, no. I had to talk about the two tiendas in each family who had the tienda lived there. And then there were two other little houses, and that was it. There was nothing. Nothing. And so later, I wondered why it was chosen, I thought, well, of course, all the sites are rural and the people who live around come through and all that. But as I came to realize, although the people are wonderful people, hard-working, earnest, they loved America and Americans, even never having met one or seen one and knowing nothing about it, no one had ever been to. I mean, nothing. No one traveled. No one went to the capital city. I mean.

ROLL: [00:52:19] Did they have radios? Were there transistor radios?

FOOTE: [00:52:21] We only had electricity when the generators in the tiendas were run and they were usually run, my recollection, Joanne, is about between an hour and two hours a day sometimes. And that depended on whether or not they had the petrol, the *gasolina*, that depended on what was going on, if anything. Every now and then we'd have a *bailar*, a dance. We did some fundraising for my little, the little health nutrition center, and one of it was having *bailars* and making tamales and selling things of that sort. And so then the generators were used to turn on little light bulbs, electric light bulbs, not cute little fairy lights, but little light bulbs, and just enough so that you have light. But by, whenever the sun went down, whenever it was dark, that's it. And everybody wakes up four o'clock, 4:00 to 5:00 in the morning with the crows, and the chickens.

ROLL: [00:53:22] I'm still not sure where you stayed. The first day, what happened?

FOOTE: [00:53:25] I stayed in the back room of one of the families, and I don't know how the arrangement was made. There were two families. They didn't particularly care for each other as I came to learn. Don Ramiro and Dona Antonia were a youngish couple who had, uh, five or six children. And I arrived on the last day of school and when the schoolteachers would come in. And Costa Rica did have a very deep program for trying to get



out to the campo to educate people. The school teachers came out Monday morning on the bus or by horse or by motorcycle. One of them had a boyfriend who had a little motorcycle or Vespa type little motorcycle. And they would stay until Friday, and then they would leave. So I had the cot of one of the teachers for the summer because she wouldn't be there. And their summers, in essence, the reverse of ours.

FOOTE: [00:54:21] So I was in a little, it wasn't a room. It was a little, not even a cubicle. It was one wall was the outside wall of the house and one was as you curved the back intersection of the house. And there was a little curtain and there were two little metal aluminum cots, little thin mattresses on them. I mean, that was perfectly fine. And so I slept in one little cot, and the other little cot was the young woman who was the maid for the family. And I used the word maid. She was a servant, a *servienta*, and I want to say her name was Marisol, but I have to look and see if I know it. And she was treated not badly, but she was a servant and she got up earlier than everyone to turn. They had a *horno* where you have a great big plaster dome on top of a wooden table where the ashes are and that's where you could bake. And she swept the nerves, all dirt floors. And she slept in that little bed.

FOOTE: [00:55:29] And then, earlier than I had remembered, I asked if I could live in this, apart because my living with this family then made me the enemy or the competitor, or gave more prominence to the family with whom I was living as opposed to the family, you know, a hundred yards away, maybe not even a hundred yards. And so it was awkward for me if I'm supposed to go around and visit all these families and treat everyone equally and get to know them, that I was staying with one family. I mean, no one told me this. I gleaned this finally, you know, on my own, but I could have used some help. But of course, I had to do what, make all these arrangements that I'm about to talk to you about. So I ended up first. I thought I was buying, then I thought I was renting and I paid my little *colonos* for my housing allowance that the Peace Corps did give us, it was some small amount of money, to one person because I was told he she it they were the owners and it was not. They didn't have, they didn't own. So I had to pay again.

FOOTE: [00:56:28] And I quote unquote renovated the *carnicería*, which is kind of funny if you speak Spanish, because that's the meat stand. And so I was the American carne, carne Americana, and that's a whole other story. But the little *carnicería* had been a meat stand. It was closed. They hadn't used it in some years. Dirt floor. The boards were about, oh, a foot high, about a quarter of an inch thick and about probably a yard, it varied, at length, but a yard long. And they were nailed to little upright posts, and they were so warped that one sprung out and one sprung in and one sort of half straight. One was cracked. And so you could put your hand through them. I mean, you could peek in, you could look in. So I call it the fishbowl because that became my house. It had a little corrugated metal quote unquote roof, except the way the corrugations went and the two pieces of the tin. When the rain came, I had tacked up a piece of plastic that would try to use to catch the rain with these tacks. And then if I were fast on my feet and I saw it rain and it rained, I could rush in and I could push the water out without it exploding. Sometimes I wasn't fast enough and it exploded all over everything.

FOOTE: [00:57:46] It was about, it was probably about seven feet by seven feet. I had a little metal cot, like everybody else had, thin little mattress. I had a table to use as a desk with a little stool. I had a little wardrobe, and I can't remember how I got this. I must have somehow gotten it in Nicoya. It was a little, had four legs, and it had a little square box standing on four legs with the opening and somehow I could put my clothes in there. I think I must have just stacked them. And that was it. And so I had a little door. And it did have a lock on it, but I was just reading my letters and realized how many times I was robbed or theft occurred. And what would happen is I would go to my little, my little shack, the *carnicería*. Outside I did have them build a latrine and I had a little, it was like a little four walls of corrugated metal, which was my quote unquote shower.

FOOTE: [00:58:49] And so I could go over to a well that someone had nearby. And I can't remember whose well it was right now, but I had permission, and I would fill a bucket and I would take the bucket back to my little quote unquote shower area. And then I would use a *huaca*, which is a half a gourd, cut in half and cleaned out. So it's like a large spoon, the bowl of a ladle. And I would pour water on myself for my bath. And so what I would

try and do is take the water and sit it in the sun. So that would warm up a little bit because it was terrible. And for eating I lived on and I purchased cans of tuna fish. But sometimes I would eat in my little shack by myself and I would eat either with one family or the other that had the tienda. Rice and beans, Coca-Cola. Because the water was just filled with parasites, and I had several bouts of really severe. I had ascariasis worms and I had parasites, and they just eat up your insides.

ROLL: [00:59:56] Did you have any way to boil water at all?

FOOTE: [00:59:58] No, nothing.

ROLL: [01:00:00] Did anyone without electricity that was. With any kind of, was there any?

FOOTE: [01:00:07] Um, the two families that had the tiendas. And I mean, people did, they didn't have gas or anything like that, but they cooked with *leña*, with wood. But it was very expensive to get and it was hard to get and you had to go out and cut it and bring it and dry it and all this. And so it really wasn't used a lot. When I was teaching my health and nutrition classes, the problem was they had lots of orange trees. Not like our oranges in America, but a variation or cousin. And they were called *naranjas*, and they didn't have much flavor. So when you cut the juice and you drank it, it was almost like water with a slight, just a touch of flavoring and a touch of color barely. The oranges weren't orange like ours. They were more green with a little orange and yellow color. So the juice was very, very pale. And if they drank the juice, it would have been great, but they would drink the juice mixed with the water. So all the children had parasites, and that was part of my deal was to talk about boiling the water. Boil it before you use it.

ROLL: [01:01:07] How realistic do you think that was?

FOOTE: [01:01:07] Other people drank coffee. A lot of, they drink, and I don't drink coffee, which was in a way a shame because that would, of course, been boiled.

ROLL: [01:01:14] Was their coffee boiled?

FOOTE: [01:01:15] Yes. And it was boiled and used much like the Puerto Ricans did, with the little *bolsa* on the wall, the little sack on the wall. And fairly strong coffee as I, I mean, I tasted a little bit, but fairly strong and pour the water through the *bolsa*. And I still, although I don't drink coffee, when I make it at my house, I make it, I don't have the *bolsa* but I had the little Melitta drip. I make it the same way for people. But they drank coffee and they ate rice and beans and ground tortillas. And they made their own tortillas, and it was a very elaborate process, mixing the lime and grinding. So every day they were grinding corn after soaking it and making the tortillas, which actually were pretty tasty. The beans, oddly enough, were cooked in significant amounts, I assume it was actually now that I think about it, lard. Lard as opposed to, there was no olive oil, but I mean, as opposed to an oil, a vegetable oil. And they were cooked in this grease and they were served. And so if you looked in the oil with the beans, let's just say there would be two inches of beans and three inches of grease, I mean, oil.

ROLL: [01:02:24] Yeah.

FOOTE: [01:02:26] Now they ate rice and beans, which we learned in our Peace Corps training, which I hope is true, that it makes a complete protein. So that was the protein. And although there were chickens and they were killed for making tamales, for example, or for special fiesta. They weren't regularly eaten. One of my classes was trying to chop yucca leaves to make an omelet because they did have eggs, or often would have, or could get eggs from the chickens and make an omelet. This like a spinach omelet. And we went through this whole elaborate deal, and it's just sort of a digression quickly and oh, Nina Sarita, very delicious, blah blah blah. Next time we meet two weeks later or whatever it was, the following week, and I said, now did you all? [tape break]

FOOTE: [01:03:17] And they came back and I said, oh, did you make the omelets? Little heads are shaking no, no, no. And I said, oh, didn't you like it? Oh yes, Nina Sally, *delicioso*. Very delicious. And I said, oh, but you didn't make it? No, Nina Sarita, *no estamos acostumbrados*. We're not accustomed. And that was a mantra, I have to say. Something very

simple. But it was new and it was different. And whether it was because I was introducing it and I was the gringa. They called me Latinita because I have sort of olive skin, although it's not that olive. I mean, actually, I think I'm pale, but I had a little bit yellow skin. Sometimes they called me a Latinita. Didn't bother me. Or Sarita, Nina Sarita because I wasn't married. Oh, Nina Sarita? And they'd shake their heads, you know? So I never knew what in the world they thought about me or why I was there or what. Sort of like a Martian being dropped out in the midst of all this.

FOOTE: [01:04:19] And it didn't matter because you sort of went about this, you know, this being nice and talking with people and hoping to get things better and get a little progress and build this little nutrition center and help with the children and blah blah blah. But it was, um, the only thing I can say I think with confidence is, I did no harm. I think, I hope I represented America well. I did try to contribute to the lives of the people whom I met and lived with. I lived as they did. Granted, I could switch off. And I called it that, switching off into an English mind. I could go to the capital city and I would see other Peace Corps volunteers. So I did have another life or maybe another life, because I had a life in America that I didn't know what it would be, but I wasn't going to be living in Costa Rica. I was not going to marrying the 16 year old boy who was, you know, a local nice boy, and they couldn't understand why I wouldn't want to be the novia, the sweetheart, of this little 16 year old boy. Granted, I was 21, but he was sort of a grown young man, but it was a view of me, us.

FOOTE: [01:05:29] I mean, I don't know that they ever really understood what the Peace Corps was all about. They never, I never, as it turned out, understood why I was there. But it was very, um, we were fortunate. We were not afraid. We were not treated with suspicion or viewed as some sort of pernicious or demeaning or negative influence at all. I think it was a source of wonder and mystery and humor. I mean, different activities I'd engage in. When they had a special fundraiser and all the men who are fabulous riders rode and they could ride by a little hanging ring that was the size of a wedding ring. And they had little tiny sticks. And if you rode by and in one swoop, you could put your stick through the wedding ring, you got a little prize. And at one of our little fiestas, we did this. Well, I'm up on my horse and I'm taking several passes and they are laughing so

hard they are literally falling off their horses. I almost fell off the horse, I was laughing so hard.

FOOTE: [01:06:39] So they made me and I kept for years, and somehow I think I have now misplaced it. But I kept for years. They braided a large vine into a circle that was probably about, oh, six to seven inches in open diameter. And they hung it up on the ribbon, and they gave me this tiny little stick and off on my horse I go. And I went charging through and I got my stick through the ring, and they were just thrilled to death. But on the other hand, women didn't ride. Only the men rode. So I was not breaking the rule, and that's the only time I ever wore slacks. I wore blue jeans. There actually weren't blue. They were sand colored jeans. Everyone wore skirts. And to this day, I hardly ever wear slacks. I didn't wear any in college because we didn't wear them in school. So it's all these little bits, you know, I think about one thing, I think about another thing, and I think about this whole life. And then I left my site after about a year and went to work in the capital city.

ROLL: [01:07:39] When you first, when you when you first. The first month or so when you were in your site, when you describe it, it sounds very bleak. Were you depressed? How did you kind of keep yourself going?

FOOTE: [01:07:55] I kept myself going. I didn't get a lantern until some months after I got my little *carnicería*, and it was a little lantern that had a canister of propane gas I would think. Something where you'd punch a little hole in it and it burned a white light with a mantle so I could read at night. But generally I didn't because there were these monster spiders that came in. I mean, these spiders were called pica caballos, and they were huge. Now I thought their bodies were about six inches across and they had legs. But maybe grand total they were about seven to eight inches in size. They were unbelievable. And maybe I got only the granddaddies. But one particular occasion. I slept, I rigged up a mosquito netting over my little cot so I could tuck it in and I could get my fingers just around the little edge of the mattress. And the mosquitoes wouldn't come through the mattress, but it was not so much the mosquitoes. It was the scorpions. And the scorpions would come in and come all around because I was living in this place that, you know, it was basically open to the elements.

FOOTE: [01:09:00] And on the little hand-made fence posts outside that marked a field right outside my little door, when I opened my door in the morning, all the vultures sat. So I opened it up and all my little vultures are all lined up. But I also remember opening the door and looking up at the stars because it was pitch black. I mean, there wasn't a light within a jillion miles, and I had never seen stars like that, and that generated an interest in stars on my part. And you look up and the heavens were bright. They were brilliant. It was so stunning. It was, uh, it wasn't humbling because I was humble enough as it was, but it was so beautiful and it was so lonely and it was so empty and it was so exquisite. And I remember looking at the stars and thinking how tiny we were in this tiny little place in the middle of nowhere, on the dot on the map and the wonders of the heavens are all above us.

FOOTE: [01:10:11] And so you just ricocheted from, I don't know, if I was depressed, I didn't know why I was depressed. I think I was very, very pushed because I was all by myself. I don't know if having another volunteer, but there wouldn't have, the site wouldn't have supported. I mean, it never should have been a site. I should have been in Nicoya or I should have been in some sort of little town. But in any event, it was fine to be out in the middle of nowhere. And I'm sure other Peace Corps volunteers served in the middle of nowhere. But it was very hard to do anything other than maybe be a little piece of chain to link together the beads. And the beads were the people and I was the chain and the beads were already there and they were scattered all over and they certainly ran into each other and saw each other and they had their own lives, which I probably never penetrated in great part, but at least I could speak their language. Except I would ask them to come and gather, or we'd talk about the bridge and the nutrition center or this or that.

FOOTE: [01:11:17] And so people might have come together who otherwise wouldn't have, just because there wasn't an occasion to, or they came together, perhaps when. I mean, the whole concept was to set aside, if you will, personal differences or distinctions or whatever. And let's work for the good of the little community. I have no idea what this little, I call it my town, my little dot on the map looks like now. I used to dream about it and I would intermittently, it would come in. I can't say why or what would

trigger it. And I wonder would they have electricity. Would they have automobiles or cars? Would the children go on to high school? Because when they finished, I think it was fifth grade, no one went past that.

FOOTE: [01:12:03] The life was very spare. I would have to say they were poor, but having seen urban poor. To be poor in the country and actually whether it's your land or someone else's land, which you've got animals and you've got space and it's cleaner, it's safer. Is it a better life? I can't say that, but I think it was certainly a different life and a life in which being poor wasn't so demarking in some way. It was, um, I think I would have chosen that life than a life in an inner-city poor barrio.

ROLL: [01:12:49] Now let me ask you, would you describe a typical day and then what led you to decide or how did you leave this site? What was that like in the next place you were?

FOOTE: [01:13:02] In my letters, I talk about how it seemed that the days were timeless, and I guess I had to make an agenda, make a program or make something to do, I guess, is what you would say, because there wasn't anything to do. And so I, part of my job, as I saw it, was to go visiting. And as I visited closer and closer in, then I walked farther and farther out and I walked until I finally got my horse. And then of course, I was buying this horse and I was buying it from somebody. But they told me it was this age and this much money, and it was not that person's horse and it was somebody else's. I mean, *engañar* is a verb to be taken advantage of, and there was a lot of *engañar*-ing in this whole system. And I don't mean to point fingers at anybody, but either I wasn't able to grasp what was being said, which is entirely possible. I mean, my Spanish kept getting better and better and better and better and better, and I think I was very good at learning and communicating. I mean, I may have been at the top tenth of one percent, I mean, in that aspect for my group. But I'm not sure of to what avail.

FOOTE: [01:14:08] But I did go out to visit people and as the area I traveled and traversed grew, I did ride my horse on occasion. But I visited. I organized little meetings and we would have the nutrition meetings where the ladies would come, and I'd set them for 1:00 and they'd show up at 3:00. And



sometimes they wouldn't come and sometimes they would. And sometimes they were excited, sometimes not. But the word got out. It was called, um, *correr la voz*, to run the voice, to spread the word. Most people could read, I think, but they didn't. Reading wasn't part of their lives.

ROLL: [01:14:51] Did they have material to read? What would they?

FOOTE: [01:14:53] There were little comic books, as I recall. Sort of like telenovelas, television novels when they were in comic book form, in thin little comic book paper. Our newsprint type paper. They were colored. And I'm assuming they would be brought in from Nicoya, and maybe they were for sale, or maybe they were passed around. I just don't remember. But that was about the extent of the reading.

ROLL: [01:15:21] Did you have written material for your nutrition classes from Peace Corps or did you create?

FOOTE: [01:15:30] I don't recall anything from the Peace Corps. I think what I did was I wrote on a chalkboard or I wrote on a piece of paper. I think what I had was, um, there was an easel or not. I had a large tear sheets of, um, because I used to call them *charlas*. When we had more formal meetings, they were *charlas*, and you'd have a paper on a stand and you would flip the pages and you would draw pictures or you would write things. And I must have had paper and some magic markers or pencil or pen. And maybe that's how I wrote it down. And then probably, for example, when we were making the omelets, you know, two eggs and a bunch of yucca leaves, I mean, they didn't really need a written recipe for that, they just had to watch it. So I don't remember, quite frankly, that there were any Peace Corps materials. We had been given materials because we were having training in birth control, which was a subject that we were supposed to sort of maybe get into. But very quickly in my site with the wonderful man, the Spanish priest in Nicoya, scratch all that. I mean, nothing of that in Costa Rica.

ROLL: [01:16:38] How did you, how did he scratch it? Did he come and tell you? Did somebody tell you what was the?

FOOTE: [01:16:44] There was a conversation I remember where I think he came. The little church, quote unquote, was open. It was owned by the absentee landlord and it was open for his daughter's wedding, the daughter of his mistress, actually. So I guess it was her daughter, his daughter. I don't know that. And on the Fiesta Patronal, and I want to say that the patron saint of Guadalupe might have been Saint John because I think it was in June. But if it wasn't Saint John, it was, I think, a June type thing and they opened it on that day. Otherwise, the building just sat there and nobody ever went out. We opened it once to clean the bats out of it. I mean, it was like this building, you couldn't use it for meetings, you couldn't use it for parties. I mean, so you kind of wondered why it got built and it was the only real building there. And it had a little steeple, tiny little one room, but darling. But to what purpose? But he came for the Fiesta Patronal and I think his name was Padre Jose. He was Spanish-Spanish, beautiful Spanish, very well educated, and I can't remember what order was his order.

FOOTE: [01:17:53] He was the padre at the church in Nicoya, and I don't remember why he was in this missionary type work. He was very young, I'd say, probably in his, or young to us then. He was in his probably early thirties. I think he left after about a year after I had gotten there, and maybe he'd been there a year before. So probably he was being rotated through. And I don't recall meeting his successor. But whether he spoke to me directly or he was standing with two or three people and they were telling me, but they were just. The message came to me, don't even think about talking about this. And I looked in my letters. Costa Rica, I was told, had the highest birth rate in the world. Now I don't know if that was true. 3.9 percent. That's the number I have in my letters, and I don't even know that statistic I would have gotten from being in the capital city and going to some ministry meeting. I don't know whether that's high or low, and I don't know. The Ministry of Health was very interested in helping people not have so many children because I will tell you these women, if they were 40, they looked 60, and it was sometimes horrifying to see their health.

ROLL: [01:19:09] When you have the *charlas* with the women, did they ask you about birth control?

FOOTE: [01:19:16] No.

ROLL: [01:19:16] When they told you what they wanted, what they needed in terms of health, did they?

FOOTE: [01:19:22] No.

ROLL: [01:19:22] They never said anything? And they didn't express any health needs that weren't being met to you?

FOOTE: [01:19:30] Health was not a, although there was. The reason to want the nutrition center was because the *unidad mobile* would come, the mobile health unit would come, and it was supposed to come once a month. And these were doctors who, as part of the Costa Rican education arrangement, if you taught in the campo for two years, you could almost choose your school when you went back to the *meseta central*, the highland and sort of the more developed areas. If the doctors would work on these *unidad mobiles*, which I think were all over the country, certainly they were existing in Guanacaste and that's how I heard about them, and that's why I wanted one to come to my town. There was some consideration, perhaps either for scholarships to go to medical school or some kind of stipend. There was some compensation that would make it possible for a doctor to consider doing this. Unfortunately, in my little town, the doctor had an illegitimate child and didn't want to come. And so it was, you know, the personal side, the political side, the economic side, then the health side.

FOOTE: [01:20:39] I think the people weren't dumb. The people maybe heard. But then how do you put it into action and having a foreign unmarried 21 year old fell from the sky person to talk to you about this and not tell you, but to talk about it. I wondered if it might have been, had more impact or less impact, if there had been kind of the, oh, matriarch of the town. There were several key players, I think more by economic circumstances than by necessarily deference for social standing. But it's again, I say I don't think I did any harm, I just don't know how much good I got. But as it turned out, finally CARE, which for its work in Costa Rica was wonderful. CARE provided the cinderblocks and we provided the labor. And if we dug a well

and then we got some help with the pump, then we could have the little, they call it little health center.

FOOTE: [01:21:49] If we got the little *centro de nutrition*, then the government would send special grain so you could make better tortillas with it. And they would, special corn. And they would send the mobile health doctor sooner or later. And they would send, I think, some kind of traveling nurse. Now whether that only came with the mobile health unit doctor or maybe came a little more frequently. There was going to be a health component that could only work for the good of the people. And so we got the little nutrition center built and then it wasn't the building that made the difference. So I didn't want a monument. I wanted the program and the services that would follow with it. And that was a big commitment on the part of, and that's why we did our little fundraising and our fiestas and that sort of thing. But when you asked why I left my site, I was there. I went November of '68 and I guess I went to San Jose to teach at the National School for the Blind. It was actually called the Escuela Nacional, um, Para Estudios Especiales.

FOOTE: [01:23:03] It was for children who were deaf and blind and had mental retardation, and it was the only school for the blind in Central America. And I think it may have been the only school for the blind, um, for the deaf. There may have been a school for the deaf in Panama. And we actually had children from several countries. I thought I remembered one or two maybe even coming from Mexico. So perhaps it was southern Mexico, but I'm not positive about that. And it was a tribute to the national Ministry of Education. The head of the school had actually taken her master's degree at Columbia University in New York. She was Costa Rican and married Costa Rican who was visually impaired. And it's a little school, and that's a whole other sort of life.

FOOTE: [01:23:50] But I left my site because there was a huge kind of explosion between several of the men. It was during one of the fiestas. They got really, really drunk. Huge fights, the machetes came out. Some of the funds we raised were embezzled. They were reallocated among some of these more senior people. It was as though the atom bomb struck and it just all, it was just shattered. Now, no one thought I was complicit in any of

this and I wasn't running away. But it made me angry. I cried, in my own private room. I mean, I couldn't cry in front of them, but it was as though it was the utter destruction of everything.

ROLL: [01:24:38] Everything you had worked for.

FOOTE: [01:24:38] Not just I, but the community had worked for. And it was so, it just permeated every layer from the children up to the grandparents. And it was so wrong and so hateful and so unnecessary and so much a part of this machismo. I remembered in my letters I had gone to John's site. They were having a little rodeo and a man got gored by a bull and no one had any first aid kit or nobody wanted to help him. And he wouldn't go to the doctor. And I ended up somehow cleaning and bandaging his eye. I knew nothing about any of this. And it was a pervasive malicious, definitely influence, and I want to say probably in Costa Rica, it was less than in other places. I can't say, was it more or less in the cities than the countryside? And it wasn't out of a mean spirit, but it was so ingrained. Men were superior, men were in control, and when they drank, they fought and they fought with their machetes. And it was vicious. It was vicious to themselves. It was vicious to their wives, it was vicious to their children. It was horrifying. And then the storm would subside and things would sort of go along, you know, kind of crawling in the pieces. You pick the pieces back together and kind of, you know, reassemble, but you never knew when these outbursts would come.

ROLL: [01:26:07] Was this explosion severe enough that it endangered? But you said you have the little *salud clinica* that you had?

FOOTE: [01:26:16] Oh, that project, it delayed it and it set it back and it caused me. I mean, I think I was reading my letters, you know, a sense of despair because I didn't know, how do I rebuild this after all this time? You know, who am I anyway? I wasn't supposed to be building this. They were building it. I was just sort of helping and encouraging and supporting and bring information. If we had a little group to go to the national capital, I took everybody on the bus there. I mean, it was this wild trip, but I was the assistant or the, I was not supposed to be the leader. And by Peace Corps definition, or by maybe diplomatic definition or whatever it was, we were

not supposed to, I guess, produce it and leave it. We were supposed to help everyone participate and cooperate and buy into it.

FOOTE: [01:27:12] And I realize there are people who trail off or buy in, and some are more enthusiastic and more able and more this and more that. But it was more a role of unwavering support and contribution. And granted, I put in my own money. My little allowance from the Peace Corps was, I don't know, like 20 dollars a month or something, and I would put my own money into things. I mean, not letting anyone know, but just putting it all in. And so I was literally buying into the project and to the fundraisers and I did do a lot.

FOOTE: [01:27:46] I don't know what in the world if we were to find the children, the young people, the mothers and fathers. My big regret is I have not gone back to see Serita Orozco, the lady who was the head of the cooperatives in Nicoya and a wonderful. She was a retired schoolteacher, an extraordinarily insightful and thoughtful person. I have not gone back. I thought maybe this reunion would be in Costa Rica, which would have been the time to go. I want to go. I have left the tendrils and I think in a way that might have hurt the people there because there had been a volunteer couple in Nicoya, very nice. And I met them, actually. I think if I met them in Costa Rica, it was only as they were leaving, but I saw them once or twice in the United States and they had not written. And people asked about them.

ROLL: [01:28:39] Ah.

FOOTE: [01:28:40] And I think they were a little hurt that that that they didn't come back or weren't writing regularly. And it was a little, not that I knew their circumstances. But I said, well, you know, they've gone back to school or what. I had some little bit of knowledge and it was hard to say they have another life now. And so I don't know what people would even remember, if anything about any and all this.

ROLL: [01:29:05] So when you decided to leave because of circumstances.

FOOTE: [01:29:09] I had done everything I could do.

ROLL: [01:29:11] And you didn't want to deal with this anymore.

FOOTE: [01:29:12] Well, there wasn't anything more for me to do.

ROLL: [01:29:15] OK.

FOOTE: [01:29:16] Either they would put it back together as a community.

ROLL: [01:29:19] Right.

FOOTE: [01:29:20] And I didn't walk out the next day. I mean, this is several months later, and so I didn't even know what I could do or where I could go. And as it turned out, John and Paco ended up going to the very south of the country to the site that they had told us was not a site. And it turned out to be, as I understood, a great experience for them. I don't think I ever got there. I went to the capital city and I had a choice of either going to Nicoya to work with the high school. I can't remember quite now exactly what the job would be, or something involving kids. I had a choice of going to the capital city and working at the National School for Special Education, Enseñanza Especial. Or there was some other kind of job, maybe in the capital city. I had written them down in my letters to my parents, and I thought, no, I've never. Knew nothing about education, nothing about children, nothing about blindness. I'd like to go and do this job. And so that was a second chapter.

ROLL: [01:30:11] So did you keep any contact with your original site when you went?

FOOTE: [01:30:17] I went back to my site several times. I can't remember if I stayed overnight or when. My parents had come to visit before I left, and that was a big, a big deal. I came back and had a big party for the children. Excuse me, I think I'm noting in my letter. I remember when I left, I think it meant maybe it was for the inauguration of the nutrition center was the last time I went, at least to see it, and it was almost finished. There was no great despedida either, great big goodbye. And maybe they

thought I had left them or abandoned them. And I think I sort of felt as though it was, it had ended. It was over.

ROLL: [01:31:02] So what about your time in San Jose?

FOOTE: [01:31:05] I taught at the National School for Special Education, teaching blind children, and I help them with their schoolwork, and I took them on little excursions around town and took them to the swimming pool, which was a big deal, across town on the bus. And I lost one child one day and that was all. That's a complicated story, but I found the child. These were children, I would have to say, all some of them, I think, perhaps came from families that were fairly poor. I think they were basically on scholarship. They boarded, so they didn't go home to their homes. I was more of, uh, an assistant like you would have in a school room, I think, going around helping them with their schoolwork, helping them with their little daily living skills, playing with them, talking with them. I learned about children and learned about visual impairment and gained great respect for the effort that was being made.

ROLL: [01:32:07] Sounds like it was a totally different experience in terms of responsibility, in terms of support, in terms of?

FOOTE: [01:32:13] Well, I had no Peace Corps support there either, but I made my own job.

ROLL: [01:32:16] Yeah, and you had other people to be with that were.

FOOTE: [01:32:21] So when I did live in the town, I rented an apartment over, actually it was over a bar, but it was a very quiet bar and no one ever bothered us. They did that, you know? And so my little tiny apartment I had, I think I had a bedroom and a living room and a little. It wasn't a porch, but it was a little sort of slightly separate area from the living room. And then I had a little teeny-weeny kitchen on which I had a little table and two gas burner, two gas burner tabletop thing. There was a tank of gas. And in our Peace Corps footlocker, my section had included the Fannie Farmer Cookbook. My mother was a fabulous cook. I never had been given lessons and never participated much in all that. But I did watch. So I



went through the cookbook and I marked the recipes that I could cook on two burners and I invited people over. I have to say I think I had some Costa Rican teachers somehow, I remember entertaining them. But other than that, I didn't.

FOOTE: [01:33:22] And I liked the Costa Rican teachers very much. I didn't have the opportunity much to meet many Costa Rican Costa Ricans. I did go to classes at the Alliance Française, the Alianza Francesa, because I'd studied Spanish and for about a year and a half, my brain froze. And I couldn't remember any French at all. I mean, not the simplest words. And all of a sudden, one day that dam broke open and I could separate my Spanish and my French. And so and I did, you know, was able to meet people. But I don't recall how often I was invited to someone's home or I didn't have any contacts in any ministries or anything like that, and we would meet people and be very polite and we might have lunch with them. But I really didn't participate at a diplomatic level or a sophisticated level. It was still pretty much you go and do your job and work and help and do projects and things of that sort.

ROLL: [01:34:17] Of the two assignments, which one did you like the best?

FOOTE: [01:34:22] I would in a way say both. I would say I learned a lot from both experiences. I think I gave everything I could to both in an unprofessional way, but an earnest and dedicated way. They were very different. I thought about graduate school when I finished and I thought I'd either be a rare books librarian, not knowing about library science. I would go to translator interpreter. [tape break] But I knew nothing about, anything about it, but I did write to America and I wrote just a couple of schools, I mean, I didn't know where, and I learned that it was called special education for visually impaired. I learned that there was the Monterey Institute near where my parents lived as opposed to going to Geneva, which I thought was pretty cool, but I thought, maybe I should go back to America. Plus, I had to earn my own way. And I tried to take the LSATs in Panama, and it got all I say screwed up. I mean, screwed up, and I use that word intentionally. Then I was so angry about it, and I was so angry with the Peace Corps. But that aside and the pristine testing service.

FOOTE: [01:35:29] So I decided. I went back. My parents had moved to California when my father retired and I knew nothing about where they were living. But I went back and I made the decision to go to graduate school at UVA, University of Virginia. I received a fellowship and I took my master's of education degree with the specializing in learning disabilities and visual impairment. And while I was there my second year, I did audit courses at the law school. Virginia has a particularly prominent school and I think we had a very good special education department. I then moved to Tampa and taught for a year, and again, all on my own. I didn't want to be on my own. I didn't ask to be on my own, but I was. I taught children with learning disabilities. And I read to the blind on the service, radio reading service, that the local university has. My braille skills became less and less and less, and so I could transcribe less and less and less.

FOOTE: [01:36:27] And then I went to law school after substitute teaching for a year, and I finished law school in '77 and I have been practicing law since 1977 in Clearwater, Florida. I've been practicing with my partner since I became a lawyer, Dennis Thompson, and we were in the same firm for my first ten years. He had come to the firm before I did. And then when it sort of shattered in a thousand pieces, he and I made our firm. And we've been very happy together, and I have carried away all sorts of lessons from the Peace Corps and all sorts of lessons from practicing law with Dennis. But I think probably the most important lesson I've learned is one of respect for others of all ages, all conditions.

FOOTE: [01:37:25] I do. I say I love America with all our warts and all our flaws and all our mistakes and all our bewilderment and false starts and terrible effects we've had on people and places. I would, I only want the best for America, and I want America to be the best in the world. And I just think of us as a great giant that can be a force for good, and I hope that it will be more so a force for good.

ROLL: [01:38:01] When you started, you said you saw Peace Corps is a way of doing service for your country.

FOOTE: [01:38:06] I gave ten thousand percent. Ten thousand percent.

ROLL: [01:38:16] Now is there anything else you'd like to say?

FOOTE: [01:38:19] That sounds a little self-serving. But I gave 10,000 percent. So and I thank America for providing me that opportunity. And I think America can thank me for my service.

ROLL: [01:38:34] Well, I thank you for this interview.

FOOTE: [01:38:36] Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]