

**Benjamin W. Bellows Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Benjamin W. Bellows

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**Biographical Note**

Benjamin W. Bellows served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador from 1997 to 2000 on an animal production project.

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Oral History Interview

with

Benjamin W. Bellows

September 18, 2005  
Berkeley, California

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:06] Today is September 18, 2005. This is Bob Klein. I'm interviewing Ben Bellows, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador, 1997 to 2000, in an animal production project. So let's go back a year before you joined.

BELLOWS: [00:00:28] OK. I was at the University of Michigan and very aware of the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:00:35] How had you become aware?

BELLOWS: [00:00:37] We have to go back a few more years.

KLEIN: [00:00:39] OK.

BELLOWS: [00:00:40] My dad is a dairy farmer in Central Michigan, and we used to go to the Michigan State Agriculture Exposition. And the Peace Corps had

a booth there when I was in the eighth grade. I distinctly remember it was one of the few things that caught my attention at the fair. So I had that in the back of my mind ever since the eighth grade.

KLEIN: [00:01:01] Had you grown up on a farm?

BELLOWS: [00:01:04] Yeah, yeah. We had about a hundred head of cattle, 40 milking cows, and a bunch of beef.

KLEIN: [00:01:12] And my traditional image would be that you were involved in the working of the farm.

BELLOWS: [00:01:17] Yeah, more in the summer than, more during the summer break, when I had more time to work with him. But I helped my dad with milking during the school year as well.

KLEIN: [00:01:26] And during high school, did you have any chance to travel or was it pretty much working on a farm summers?

BELLOWS: [00:01:33] I did travel a little bit. My aunt used to take me out west. That was one big summer trip we'd do. Went out to South Dakota one year, and Wyoming another.

KLEIN: [00:01:42] Oh, OK.

BELLOWS: [00:01:44] But most of the time, and I'd go to Boy Scout camp one week every summer, but towards high school I spent a lot of time on the farm.

KLEIN: [00:01:53] And then entering college, did you have any particular career goal in mind?

BELLOWS: [00:01:59] I wasn't really sure. No. I knew I wanted to do something different than what my roommates were doing. A lot of friends of mine were going premed or doing engineering. At Michigan, those were one of the two major routes that people followed in their undergraduate. And I decided I wanted to do something different, and Peace Corps was in the back of my mind. I knew, I'd known a few people that had gone through

that. Older siblings of friends of mine. And so that was something I was planning on doing.

KLEIN: [00:02:33] So you're coming up to the fourth year.

BELLOWS: [00:02:37] Fourth year.

KLEIN: [00:02:38] Your major was?

BELLOWS: [00:02:40] Economics and history.

KLEIN: [00:02:42] It's pretty far from the farm.

BELLOWS: [00:02:43] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:02:45] And during your college years, what have you done with the summers?

BELLOWS: [00:02:50] Every chance I got to travel, I took it. I was out in New Hampshire one summer at a writer's camp. It was a, you get extended college credit for going out there on a six-week regional literature program. So I went out to Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire. I was doing geology another summer in Wyoming, just south of Jackson, and just traveling as much as I could.

KLEIN: [00:03:16] And during your college years, had you learned a second language?

BELLOWS: [00:03:21] I attempted to. All Michigan undergraduates are required to take a language course and I decided German was going to be the closest thing to English.

KLEIN: [00:03:30] OK.

BELLOWS: [00:03:32] I wasn't all that confident my own language abilities, and as I got closer to the Peace Corps my fourth year, I realized Latin America was where I wanted to go and Spanish is what I would need. So I began

taking, after the German sequence, more Spanish, trying to prepare. But I really failed miserably at that. I just could not get languages to save myself.

KLEIN: [00:03:55] And any reason you decided it was going to be Latin America you'd go to?

BELLOWS: [00:03:58] There were some practical considerations and the sort of experience I would get and the training I would receive. So I wanted something that would have an experience that would have meaning coming back to the States in some broad sense. And I thought that that Latin American context would really help me understand the other America.

KLEIN: [00:04:17] Oh OK. And do you remember the application process?

BELLOWS: [00:04:24] Distinctly. That was.

KLEIN: [00:04:26] It was different in your time.

BELLOWS: [00:04:28] Well, I mean, I had no other thing to compare it against, but it was interesting in the sense that Congress was shut down one year. It was when the Gingrich and Clinton crowd went head to head. And so my application was delayed in that sense, and I was really eager to do it. So I applied perhaps a bit further in advance than I might have needed to. It ended up being a year and a half long because I applied early and then decided to stay in school a bit longer to find a good match.

KLEIN: [00:04:58] And were you able to talk to a recruiter or?

BELLOWS: [00:05:03] A recruiter, yeah, it was a fairly laid-back fellow. But I made frequent appointments and come in and talk to him and get a sense of what was needed. I also had an opportunity to meet with RPCVs on campus. There happened to be, I was taking an econ development course and one of our class members had served in Zaire. And they'd been evacuated in the early '90s and we talked a number of times about that experience and what it meant to her afterwards. Marcy Strazer was her

name. You know, and it was really funny because years later, I ran into her in the Miami airport coming back from Ecuador the first time.

KLEIN: [00:05:44] Have you remembered her?

BELLOWS: [00:05:45] Yeah. We recognized each other immediately.

KLEIN: [00:05:48] And when you would during the application process, you would clearly indicated Latin America.

BELLOWS: [00:05:54] Yeah. Preferred Latin America.

KLEIN: [00:05:55] And at what point in the process were you then invited to a program?

BELLOWS: [00:06:01] Well, I was, I can't now remember. I don't remember the exact date I submitted the application, but I do know that I was initially invited to go to Paraguay to do beekeeping. June of '96. And I was out teaching on Lake Winnepesaukee that year. After having gone through as a student, I came back to teach, and wasn't quite ready to go. They want me to leave that June. And I'd made plans to travel with a friend that summer. And so I declined that nomination, I think, was the way they phrased it. And putting my application back into the general pool for future nominations. And I had been told by somebody in D.C. at the time there was a likelihood of going to Ecuador later that year, that there would be an upcoming recruitment opportunity. So I hung out for that.

KLEIN: [00:06:58] Is there some sense of how many refusals you before they drop you from the bank or the pool?

BELLOWS: [00:07:04] I don't know. It might have been a high-risk strategy to try and find the ideal match, but time-wise.

KLEIN: [00:07:12] Did they note that you had the experience of growing up on a farm?

BELLOWS: [00:07:16] Yeah, that was a, that was the. From what I recollect, it was a big reason for why I was selected for animal production.

KLEIN: [00:07:23] OK.

BELLOWS: [00:07:24] I didn't have the language skills. Working in Ecuador later, I found that many people in other programs did have that as a pre-req, they were able to satisfy those language requirements.

KLEIN: [00:07:34] Now during this whole process, what was your family's reaction to that?

BELLOWS: [00:07:40] My dad had asked me what I wanted to do after college. And I'd paid my own way through school and so it was something I was very proud of doing. And at the same time, I felt like I had a lot of responsibility in deciding something that was going to be satisfying myself and meaningful in the long run. And so, yeah, they were supportive, if not always clearly confident or really understanding why I was doing it. They'd grown up in Michigan, never really left Michigan, and my dad was a fifth-generation dairy farmer in the area. And so strong roots.

KLEIN: [00:08:20] Oh yeah. How about you peers, your friends at college?

BELLOWS: [00:08:25] Oh, they were supportive, thought it was great. Something else, you know, Ben's going to do.

KLEIN: [00:08:29] And any within your circle also joined around the same time?

BELLOWS: [00:08:36] No, actually. It's a good question. I didn't have anybody I knew join. But like I said, I had friends of friends of mine who had older siblings that had, so there were people I know, known of or heard of, who had gone through, but I didn't know anybody in my peer group that was going through at the same time.

KLEIN: [00:08:57] So it was pretty much a straight shot. I mean, once you started, the application process, got the first invitation. Did you have any alternatives in mind? I mean, suppose Peace Corps didn't work out.

BELLOWS: [00:09:10] I know. In hindsight, that was perhaps a little presumptuous on my part.

KLEIN: [00:09:17] Well.

BELLOWS: [00:09:18] I was really dead set on going through the Peace Corps itself. I saw it as a really strong way to get connected to the local community that I wouldn't have. I didn't really have the means. I didn't know about them myself, the programs, myself. And so it was a ready-made package.

KLEIN: [00:09:37] OK. So how long after graduation did you actually enter Peace Corps?

BELLOWS: [00:09:46] Graduated at late graduation in December. Hard to defer my loans and to manage. Yeah, I left in February. So of '97.

KLEIN: [00:09:55] So on your own you continued my Spanish training, or with the encouragement of Peace Corps?

BELLOWS: [00:10:02] Peace Corps encouraged it. It wasn't a requirement that they thought any length.

KLEIN: [00:10:05] They didn't pay for it.

BELLOWS: [00:10:06] No, they did not. This is something I continued to do out of my own pocket at Michigan.

KLEIN: [00:10:09] OK. And now you're finally reporting. What was the arrangement?

BELLOWS: [00:10:15] So I left Lansing. I flew out of Lansing in February and.

KLEIN: [00:10:22] Must have been cold.

BELLOWS: [00:10:24] It was cold. And, you know, the thought of going somewhere warm was nice, but it was.



KLEIN: [00:10:29] Big farewell party?

BELLOWS: [00:10:30] Yeah, I was surprised.

KLEIN: [00:10:32] By who?

BELLOWS: [00:10:34] My parents. My cousins showed up. One of my good college roommates was there and he's just a classic Midwestern character and he broke down when I left and it was.

KLEIN: [00:10:51] So there was a sense that you were really going off to do something good and it was maybe a bit as hazardous.

BELLOWS: [00:11:00] Hazardous and just the distance. It was. It was quite a.

KLEIN: [00:11:07] You had never traveled outside the U.S. before?

BELLOWS: [00:11:10] Not to any significant extent. I was in Mexico once and that's about it.

KLEIN: [00:11:15] Yeah, so big send off.

BELLOWS: [00:11:18] Big send off. Teary farewell.

KLEIN: [00:11:26] And where were you headed?

BELLOWS: [00:11:26] To Miami.

KLEIN: [00:11:26] Up to that point, you had no second thoughts about, you know, should I be doing this or did you?

BELLOWS: [00:11:33] I mean, it was definitely one of those things that, uh, it was exciting, it was, I was nervous, but it was something I knew I really wanted to do. And I mean, I worked as a line cook and dishwasher and was a recent college grad with really no sense of what I wanted to do. So it was

really the, I thought, the most exciting option I had at that point. The most meaningful one. So I flew to Miami for the staging.

KLEIN: [00:12:04] How many days?

BELLOWS: [00:12:06] We were there two nights. It seemed like it was two nights, one or two nights.

KLEIN: [00:12:10] Now how big was the group approximately?

BELLOWS: [00:12:14] Approximately 45 people.

KLEIN: [00:12:15] All going to Ecuador?

BELLOWS: [00:12:16] All going to Ecuador.

KLEIN: [00:12:17] So what was your, do you recall your initial reaction? I mean, now you're in the midst of a bunch of other people who've joined.

BELLOWS: [00:12:25] I thought we were.

KLEIN: [00:12:27] And you're the kid off the farm.

BELLOWS: [00:12:28] Yeah, we were just such an odd collection of people.

KLEIN: [00:12:35] Odd in what way?

BELLOWS: [00:12:35] I guess I went into Peace Corps thinking, well, everybody joins Peace Corps with similar tensions and in similar parts of their life and whatnot, and you find that there's an incredible diversity of volunteers as soon as you get there. And it's something that struck me.

KLEIN: [00:12:51] Who was the most diverse?

BELLOWS: [00:12:54] Oh, we had young married couples and one guy who was from day one saying he couldn't wait to get, you know, Social Security in Ecuador. He was, you know, two or three years shy of getting that, was

dead set on retiring in Ecuador. Sorry. And there were just all kinds of people.

KLEIN: [00:13:15] Did you feel comfortable? I mean, like, they all know what they're doing, but I don't.

BELLOWS: [00:13:21] Well, that was the thing. I think we all, and it struck me that we were all a little uncertain of what to expect, and it became very clear that we were all jumping into the unknown in some sense.

KLEIN: [00:13:32] Ah, OK.

BELLOWS: [00:13:34] And that was a lot of fun. In spite of, you know, our apparent differences, we were all kind of tied up in this event and bonded fairly quickly in spite of the differences. You know, I might never have met these people otherwise.

KLEIN: [00:13:48] Yeah. So the staging was just two days.

BELLOWS: [00:13:55] Staging was two days.

KLEIN: [00:13:57] Medical mostly?

BELLOWS: [00:13:58] Medical and some group dynamic workshops get to know each other, what we want to do, what we expect out of the Peace Corps, what we expect out of the experience.

KLEIN: [00:14:07] From the beginning, was there any kind of emphasis or mention that training was going to be a process of self-selection that would be to decide whether you really want to do this or not? Don't let me put words in your mouth.

BELLOWS: [00:14:20] I don't remember that being an issue, and I know that prior years that was, you know, selecting people out. But that really wasn't part of what we went through. I remember more recently talking to a recruiter here in San Francisco, and he noted, you know, I saw somebody had ET'ed [early termination] and this person was back on the Berkeley

campus. And the recruiter just made the comment about all the money that Peace Corps put into screening her and getting her down to where she served. And my impression just from that comment was that the recruiters now put a lot of emphasis on screening as much as possible prior to training, because training is in country and it does represent a significant amount of cost. And if that's the case, it certainly would make sense from what I observed, because we were encouraged to excel and not to self-doubt our training. To, you know, really get out there and experience as much as possible to make it a meaningful experience. But don't, on the other hand, be worried about being cut from the program at some point.

KLEIN: [00:15:22] But during the application process was anyone saying, you know, do you really want to do this? I mean, was there that kind of question?

BELLOWS: [00:15:30] I noticed that with other people. I think because of the agricultural background and the match, the animal production, the recruiter at my particular point in time was more than happy with the application. But yeah, I noticed with other students that would come in and ask. Well, and he, yes, he would make the effort to try and screen, I guess, in his own way. But he wasn't doing it in some fashion that led you to believe he was. Well, he wasn't warning you so much about the dangers of Peace Corps and self-selection, but just that you would encourage people on particular tracks. Because I did it, I do remember asking him about other programs. And he really encouraged me to go animal production. So there was a bit of guidance, quite a bit of guidance that took place at the interview.

KLEIN: [00:16:18] I don't know if he has quotas to meet, or that they're trying to fill. So from Miami, you flew down to Ecuador?

BELLOWS: [00:16:28] Flew To Quito, arrived late at night, and were greeted at the airport by two guys in blue blazers and khaki pants.

KLEIN: [00:16:40] Who were?

BELLOWS: [00:16:41] Turned out to be the Peace Corps training director and assistant training director.

KLEIN: [00:16:48] Both Americans?

BELLOWS: [00:16:49] Both Americans.

KLEIN: [00:16:50] OK. Yeah, go ahead.

BELLOWS: [00:16:54] Well, it was just interesting. It was classic U.S. Foreign Service wear.

KLEIN: [00:16:57] Oh. When you arrived, how big a contingent approximately was Peace Corps in Ecuador?

BELLOWS: [00:17:09] 150 to 200 volunteers.

KLEIN: [00:17:12] That many.

BELLOWS: [00:17:12] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:17:12] And have been in Ecuador for a good many years?

BELLOWS: [00:17:15] Since 1962.

KLEIN: [00:17:16] Oh, OK. So it's a long history.

BELLOWS: [00:17:19] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:17:20] And what was your first impression when you finally shook loose of the plane flight?

BELLOWS: [00:17:28] I was, I felt like I'd stepped through the looking glass, and it was a trip.

KLEIN: [00:17:33] Very different.

BELLOWS: [00:17:37] Just knowing that I'd made some large leap made it different. I mean, I travel a fair amount now and it's not the same experience, obviously, but just getting through that and, um, it was unreal. So the first couple of days we spent in a hotel.

KLEIN: [00:17:58] All right. Yeah, go ahead.

BELLOWS: [00:17:59] And it was downtown Quito. There was a shopping mall as nice as you could find in any U.S. city, just down within walking distance. There was a supermarket chain called Supermaxi. And we, yeah, I was a little surprised, in fact, to find it as comfortable on the one hand, but pricey in it because we immediately jumped to or transitioned to our Peace Corps living allowance, a stipend that compared to what we're used to. Well, as a student, we also lived cheaply. But it was just, it was definitely hard. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:18:37] And so the first couple of days, were you kind of free to roam and get some sense of Quito?

BELLOWS: [00:18:44] During the evenings.

KLEIN: [00:18:45] Yeah. Had you been broken into language groups either in Miami or as soon as you arrived?

BELLOWS: [00:18:51] As soon as we arrived we took language assessments.

KLEIN: [00:18:54] And where did you assess?

BELLOWS: [00:18:57] Beginner. Yeah. All that language training in Ann Arbor, it was helpful, but yeah, it was a beginner level.

KLEIN: [00:19:04] But those first few evenings wandering around Quito, did you try your Spanish?

BELLOWS: [00:19:10] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:19:11] And were you amazed when people understood you?

BELLOWS: [00:19:14] Yeah, that was, that was a great moment, actually, realizing that you could, that I could, that anybody could speak a whole different language.

KLEIN: [00:19:25] So you're in Quito for just a short time.

BELLOWS: [00:19:32] We're in Quito for a short time at a hotel going through that language assessment, getting our first round of many shots. And doing a number of other, I can't remember now, administrative tasks. And then they moved us out to Tumbaco, which is a suburb about a thousand feet lower in the valley just outside of Quito. And Peace Corps had a long-standing organic farm and a series of host families in the suburb that they coordinated with. So we each went to an assigned host family. I guess that was the other piece. They wanted to match us up with host families at that time.

KLEIN: [00:20:08] And that was from the get-go, when you moved out of Quito?

BELLOWS: [00:20:12] Yep.

KLEIN: [00:20:13] And this was going to be the training site. But you stayed with the family.

BELLOWS: [00:20:19] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:20:20] Can you describe the host family?

BELLOWS: [00:20:24] The situation was they'd had two or three other volunteers previously. He was a teacher at the local secondary school. In fact, this T-shirt was what he gave me when I left Tumbaco, the education unit. And he was Mario Salazar. He's a really short guy. Very, very communicative. He was always, he would speak in short bursts and I imagine if I knew Spanish better at the time it would have been comical. But he tried to get his points across in very short sentences and it seemed awfully quick at the time, but I'm sure he was painstakingly slow.

KLEIN: [00:21:15] Yeah. Who else was in the household?

BELLOWS: [00:21:20] Tatiana, his daughter. His wife, I cannot remember her name right now. But great family. They had a little garden out back. It was a small family.

KLEIN: [00:21:28] But you had your own quarters?

BELLOWS: [00:21:30] I had my own quarters in the back. And his wife was always home. So whenever I was there, even if I was coming back late on the weekend or whatever, she was there to help out even if Mario was out and about. But he would take me fishing and driving around on the weekends, and he was a great guy.

KLEIN: [00:21:50] How long did you stay with him?

BELLOWS: [00:21:51] Three months.

KLEIN: [00:21:53] Three months.

BELLOWS: [00:21:54] 12 weeks. But then we were in and out doing field training as well, so it wasn't in there.

KLEIN: [00:21:58] And did you did you tend to take morning and evening meals with them?

BELLOWS: [00:22:04] Morning and evening meals, yes. He had to get up early to be at school. So I missed breakfast, but it would be prepared and ready for me. And then I'd walk to the training center, you know, go through our language training during the day, do tech training, that sort of thing, and then come back in the evening for dinner.

KLEIN: [00:22:18] OK, let's talk about the components of training. I mean, one is the language.

BELLOWS: [00:22:22] Right.

KLEIN: [00:22:23] And how was that structured?



BELLOWS: [00:22:26] It was very intense. And very well done. They had teachers who quickly became really good friends.

KLEIN: [00:22:33] Who were all Ecuadorians?

BELLOWS: [00:22:35] Yes. All Ecuadorian language instructors.

KLEIN: [00:22:38] Were you working in small groups?

BELLOWS: [00:22:41] We had groups of three or four.

KLEIN: [00:22:42] Ah, OK.

BELLOWS: [00:22:45] It was a really good setup.

KLEIN: [00:22:46] And was there a concentration on conversation or was it going back to the grammar

BELLOWS: [00:22:51] Conversation. The grammar I would piece together later in my site, but the conversation was central to.

KLEIN: [00:23:01] And at any point did the training staff indicate that you needed to move up to a certain level in Spanish in order to move on to become a volunteer?

BELLOWS: [00:23:15] They did set some requirements for us, I can't remember now what the requirement was, like an intermediate, intermediate, I think it was. But they wanted us to have some minimum proficiency to move on.

KLEIN: [00:23:31] OK. So the language training must have gone on for the three months.

BELLOWS: [00:23:37] The language training followed us into the field component. We'd have language instructors with us the entire time.

KLEIN: [00:23:44] Beyond the three months?

BELLOWS: [00:23:45] Excuse me. During the training, they also had community-based events where we'd go out for three or four days to various parts of the country to better understand the dynamics of our tech requirements. And during the course of those trainings, we'd have instructors with us to work on language.

KLEIN: [00:24:04] Let's talk then about technical studies, which would be? Whatever technical stuff? Well, they were less than technical?

BELLOWS: [00:24:12] Less than technical and in some cases, less than appropriate in all honesty. They had us learning.

KLEIN: [00:24:23] That's hindsight?

BELLOWS: [00:24:25] Yes. In hindsight. They had us focusing a lot on cattle ranching, cattle maintenance. We'd go and deworm and vaccinate cattle. Talk a lot about *cercas vivas*, living fences, and other kind of land management techniques that were useful, I guess, to a degree. But again, the ranching component, especially for the site they ended up placing me on, again in hindsight, wasn't appropriate for that.

KLEIN: [00:24:53] But you were comfortable with the technical part of it. I mean, were you familiar with most of it?

BELLOWS: [00:24:58] Yeah. Well, I mean, we never really got to a large dairy emphasis in the course of the training. It was more caring for beef cattle, sheep, up in the Sierras, which up in the high elevation, which I never needed. And then some pork and pig culture. Horsing culture. So that that element was useful.

KLEIN: [00:25:23] Now did the entire group go through the same technical training?

BELLOWS: [00:25:29] So we had three groups or subgroups in our 45 or 48 people that were there, roughly evenly split among natural resources, agriculture,

and animal production specifically. So the agriculture component was more of an organic agriculture emphasis.

KLEIN: [00:25:47] Yeah, but you were in the animal production.

BELLOWS: [00:25:50] I was in the animal production component.

KLEIN: [00:25:53] At what point in the training was there some sense of what it is you would be doing once you got out in the field as a volunteer? In other words, some kind of job definition.

BELLOWS: [00:26:04] They tried to give us a sense of that early on. Sent us out to stay with a volunteer, current volunteer, for three or four days and work with them. It was unclear at that point which site we'd be going to. So it was a matter of going out and just experiencing something. And so I was sent to the High Sierra and stayed with the guy working with a sheep cooperative. And I just remember being hungry, hungry and cold at that point. But it was it was a good experience. Jerónimo was his name, Jerome, and stayed with him and castrated sheep for a couple of days.

KLEIN: [00:26:47] How was your Spanish involvement?

BELLOWS: [00:26:52] There was one moment with Jerome I remember. He was laughing and we were on the bus and I couldn't remember. I asked him, you know, what's so funny? We hadn't been talking for a while. He's like, the song, those lyrics are just ridiculous. And I wasn't at that point yet, and I knew I was looking forward to getting to that. So I was aware of the lack of language acquisition and the desire to continue learning more so that I could get to the point where I listened to radio and understand it.

KLEIN: [00:27:20] Ah, OK. Did you have opportunities outside the just the training setting, I mean, weekends or free time where you, you know, just go and try to talk?

BELLOWS: [00:27:32] Talking with the family. They were encouraged, probably by the Peace Corps administration, to encourage us to talk. But Fatima, maybe Fatima was. Yes, I think Mario and Fatima. And I remember Fatima was

asking me about my day every day. So what did you learn today? Yeah, well the simple past, or, you know, we did this in tech training. So that was good. And I did get a sense, I mean, we were encouraged to go out and it was easy enough to do. Near Quito there are busses going by all the time. So it was a lot of fun, actually, to go out the weekends. Learned some salsa.

KLEIN: [00:28:15] Was there a tendency for the, always to try to travel with a fellow Peace Corps?

BELLOWS: [00:28:22] It was, there was something familiar. It was easier at first.

KLEIN: [00:28:25] Sure.

BELLOWS: [00:28:27] And I think for some people it was an element of safety as well. But towards the end of training, we started developing our own independent paths and people start breaking off into smaller groups and we'd go off for long weekends and do hikes and whatnot in the countryside or spend more time with their Ecuadorian family.

KLEIN: [00:28:48] Right. Was it suggested or were there any restrictions suggested about becoming involved with Ecuadorian women?

BELLOWS: [00:28:58] They gave us, actually, they'd have volunteers come in quite a bit. And the volunteers, of course, are the best way to get a sense of what's going on.

KLEIN: [00:29:06] Right.

BELLOWS: [00:29:07] And there would be discussions, in fact, about dating and the sort of responsibilities that went with it, the cultural norms around chaperoned dates. The importance of behaving well, that's sort of the role model. Being a positive image of America and that sort of thing. It was reinforced and then the volunteers give the, you know, the real inside scoop on what to expect in terms of the expectations that Ecuadorians would bring to a relationship and what North Americans would bring and how that can overlap and where it might cause some tension.

KLEIN: [00:29:49] You could go to a bar in the evening or a club in Quito and drink and dance?

BELLOWS: [00:29:58] During the weekends, it was easy. During the middle of the week, it would be difficult. Just given the travel times and whatnot but, yeah, you could get away with it on the weekend. But language is one of those things that I can't stress enough how important it is. And that was something, it came slowly to us, and we all passed our language exams by the end, except this one guy.

KLEIN: [00:30:22] Just never made it.

BELLOWS: [00:30:26] He never graduated from high school, so I'm not sure how he made it through the recruiting process.

KLEIN: [00:30:31] He was probably a farmer.

BELLOWS: [00:30:33] Yeah, grew up in Appalachia and had that farming experience but.

KLEIN: [00:30:40] That must have been frustrating for him. Or was it, do you recall?

BELLOWS: [00:30:47] He was young. He was also very honest. We were all, well, we were all 23, 24.

KLEIN: [00:30:52] Yeah. So, you know, in the midst of all this, how do you feel about, you know, did you wake up one morning and say, oh my God, I'm in the Peace Corps, I'm in Ecuador, and you know, it's happening. Or were you too focused on, you know, learning to be.

BELLOWS: [00:31:09] I think moments like that happened more towards a third year. And I began to really feel it becoming a part of my life.

KLEIN: [00:31:17] But as training, I mean, the training have a shape? I mean, did you sense you were working towards certain goals which would then

eventuate in your getting a specific assignment? Or it was a little fuzzier than that?

BELLOWS: [00:31:32] Certain objectives. I knew I needed to get my language passed and the tech training. I really wanted to get comfortable. [tape break]

KLEIN: [00:31:42] OK.

BELLOWS: [00:31:43] So the tech training was important in terms of, but I had in terms of objectives. So it was very specific what I needed to do and it was not something that I could. I didn't sit back and reflect on a lot of this until my second year when I had more time to digest and think about it.

KLEIN: [00:32:00] But in training you had a sense that you were going to be doing something related to animal production.

BELLOWS: [00:32:05] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:32:06] And in order to play the role that would emerge, you would need to be up to a certain level in Spanish.

BELLOWS: [00:32:13] Right.

KLEIN: [00:32:14] So that was kind of the mix you were in.

BELLOWS: [00:32:17] That was the mix I was in. And then add to that, I was dating another volunteer at the time and it was.

KLEIN: [00:32:24] Ah. OK.

BELLOWS: [00:32:27] And it got to be a pretty, pretty intense time. But it was, um, there were also expectations about which site we were going to. So every week had its own, its own little drama. If it wasn't language, if it wasn't host families, if it wasn't something on the weekend that somebody was doing, going to a particular market and somebody else wasn't, then it was this issue of where ultimately we're going to be placed and where will our Peace Corps experience unfold?

KLEIN: [00:32:49] Right.

BELLOWS: [00:32:49] And there was a lot of debate about where people were going to go. They interviewed us about our preferences for the regions, took into account medical constraints that some of us might have had.

KLEIN: [00:32:59] Did they ask for your own preferences?

BELLOWS: [00:33:03] They did. After we had some time to experience the coastal environment, tropical, very commercial, freewheeling salsa culture. And then in the Sierra, it tended to be more conservative, cold climatically, you know, the weather was cold, but it was also kind of a very isolated and insular culture in some sense. And especially in the indigenous communities, it was conservative. I mean, it's safe, made it safe for women to live independently in these areas. But also you could get a lot of collective work done. So we experienced snippets of all these in the course of our training, and going out to tech on the coast, doing tech in the mountains, doing tech in the Amazon, the Amazon basin. So we were able to get a sense of what we wanted to do, and I preferenced the Amazon. I thought it'd be a really interesting place to live.

KLEIN: [00:33:55] Were you influenced by where your girlfriend might or might not be?

BELLOWS: [00:33:58] Yep, there was also that. I really wanted to be close to Amy. I thought it would be a great experience and yada yada yada. And of course, the trainers knew that was a bad idea. And yeah.

KLEIN: [00:34:12] And why was Peace Corps there? I mean, did you have a sense that of the role that you would be playing? I mean, what was the need?

BELLOWS: [00:34:26] We tried to have discussions about development. I mean, this is something that I was drawing on my economic development courses I took. It was a yearlong course I took Michigan and tried to put it in some academic frame. And there were moments when I was able to do that.

This import substitution theory that we discussed, policies we discussed in this econ class in Michigan. I saw the Andino, which was this car that the national government had tried to promote and produce back in the '70s, and they were still models of this pattering around the Pan American. But these were just moments and the large part, for the most part, the Peace Corps experience was just a kaleidoscope of color and sensation that it was really hard to distill anything from it at first. It was overwhelming.

KLEIN: [00:35:12] But Peace Corps had been there for 40 years.

BELLOWS: [00:35:15] Had been there for 40 years, and you begin to wonder, well, what am I doing and how effective am I going to be doing it? And what's the point of learning living fences and cattle vaccination? This is all something that somebody else could be doing locally. If they can train this to me, if they can train me on this in three months, why couldn't this sort of thing be done on a large scale if this is truly what people need or what the economy needs? And it was only when I went to my site towards the end of my training and realized, one, that they had placed me with the nonexistent cattlemen's association. And that I couldn't even conduct a basic needs assessment on this. It was Two Ears of Corn. Heifer Foundation or World Neighbors, I can't remember now, puts out this really simple book about agricultural needs assessment. And I was trying to use that during my site visit to second guess what Peace Corps had already done. And I couldn't do it and I couldn't do it because of language, I couldn't do because I really had no sense of what was going on. And it was just it was frustrating. Like, what, yeah, what am I doing here?

KLEIN: [00:36:20] And this is all, where are we on?

BELLOWS: [00:36:23] This is all during my training.

KLEIN: [00:36:25] Oh, OK. So how did you resolve it in your own mind?

BELLOWS: [00:36:30] I went through stages.

KLEIN: [00:36:31] OK. No need for shock therapy.



BELLOWS: [00:36:38] Well, it was something. They also trained us in some very basic animal management, including castration. And it turns out, castration was something in high demand oddly enough, you know, with a lot of subsistence farmers who kept pigs. Sort of preparing any sort of, you know, your bulls or your boars for market, castrate them, get the testosterone or whatever hormone it is that taints the meat, get it out of there. Get it out of the meat and then sell the animal. So it was something that I did when I first got to site and it was something that I could easily explain, something I didn't take a lot of language comprehension to get through, and it's something that people wanted. So I accepted. This is after I swore in. I was placed in site. I accepted the title that the people started calling me, doctor. And foolishly accepted that. They warned us not to do this sort of thing.

KLEIN: [00:37:30] It's pretty heavy stuff.

BELLOWS: [00:37:33] It would get people's attention this way.

KLEIN: [00:37:38] Well, let's wrap up training. There's often a component on the history and culture of the area you're in.

BELLOWS: [00:37:49] They went into that some, but a lot of that I pieced together afterwards too. There were books. Peace Corps volunteers have been in Ecuador since 1962. A very famous volunteer in the literary world, Moritz Thomsen, wrote *Living Poor*. And I pieced together kind of what I could through that and oral history, talking to staff members who had been involved with the early Peace Corps, about what sort of direction Peace Corps had taken over the years. Found out afterwards there was a colonization movement in the Amazon. That volunteers had been very involved in teaching landless campesinos to read and as a result were labeled communists and CIA agents at the same time but the land of the state. And it was all kinds of interesting politics to take on that I learned about later. But we talked generally about development, about the need for the community to take a, meaning, we did driving their own development, so to speak, that Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:38:52] With all of this, were there Ecuadorians involved in the discussions or was it pretty much Americans who stood up and did the training?

BELLOWS: [00:39:00] It was sadly largely Americans that stood up to do this. Peace Corps volunteers who had studied it and worked on it, that sort of thing.

KLEIN: [00:39:06] Now on this score also, in the training phase, was there any discussion of world politics or Latin American politics as it relates to the U.S. and U.S. Peace Corps?

BELLOWS: [00:39:23] So right before I'd left for training, there was a presidential coup. Mobs took to the streets and kicked, Bucaram was his name, Abdalá Bucaram, kicked him out. And this is all in the press, the U.S. press, before I left for staging. So it was something that everybody was a little nervous about when I left. So we talked about that while I was in training an American, who I later got to be really good friends with, was kidnapped out in the Amazon. He does environmental impact studies as a consultant to multinational oil firms that are under a lot of pressure to keep their environmental record clean. So they go out do these baseline assessments and then they have something to compare their impact against. He was kidnapped by a local indigenous group that was later blacklisted by the State Department. His father is in D.C. and fairly well connected, so they were able to get the U.S. embassy involved. FBI negotiators came down and within several weeks he was freed along with his colleagues. But that all kind of took place in the local press that was filtered through to some extent in our discussions with the Peace Corps director and that sort of thing. So yeah, there were some discussions about the broader implications of an oil economy such as Ecuador's prone to boom and bust cycles.

KLEIN: [00:40:40] But were you given any specific cautions about avoid this or don't say that?

BELLOWS: [00:40:45] We were given one litany, one stock phrase. Peace Corps is not a religious nor a financial institution. We essentially don't come with financial resources, but we encourage and will assist in transformations

that the community takes on, or issues that the community takes on. So we learned to say this in Spanish long before we knew the correct grammatical constructions for it.

KLEIN: [00:41:11] As you were finishing up training, was there any discussion of an evacuation or emergency plan?

BELLOWS: [00:41:22] No, not, no. I think.

KLEIN: [00:41:25] I mean, if there was trouble out where you were, there was no?

BELLOWS: [00:41:27] Strikes. Strikes were often a big problem. And that was something that because Bucaram just recently left and there was a bunch of governmental instability, there was going to be continued problems with this, and that was something they always encouraged us to stay in your site. If you have any problems, stay in your site. That's the best, that's the safest place to be.

KLEIN: [00:41:43] It wasn't like, you know, call home, call the office, and we'll tell you where to be so we can pick you up with helicopter or anything dramatic?

BELLOWS: [00:41:52] Not until 2000. I was part of the Y2K prep.

KLEIN: [00:41:55] OK, we'll get there. Good. By the end of training, you had an assignment.

BELLOWS: [00:42:03] I had an assignment.

KLEIN: [00:42:04] It was one you had visited.

BELLOWS: [00:42:05] I had gone out and realized that the assignment they'd give me didn't exist. So.

KLEIN: [00:42:12] But you still had that assignment.

BELLOWS: [00:42:13] I still had that assignment.

KLEIN: [00:42:14] Was there any Ecuadorean counterpart you'd be working with?

BELLOWS: [00:42:19] The Peace Corps office did a very good job of coordinating within the community to identify one person to come up to Quito for the swearing-in ceremony and act as a counterpart and act as a liaison to into the community. So that person ended up being the cattlemen's association president.

KLEIN: [00:42:41] The non-existent cattlemen's, OK.

BELLOWS: [00:42:41] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:42:44] Did he fess up that it didn't exist, or you had to find out on your own?

BELLOWS: [00:42:49] I found out on my own. It wasn't obvious. Aside from the fact that he didn't own any cattle. He was the one shopkeeper in town that was very active and had relations with or had family up in the Sierras. And he was also evangelical, which kind of made him an outsider.

KLEIN: [00:43:10] Ah. Most others being Catholic?

BELLOWS: [00:43:13] Catholic, yeah. He was evangelical, connected to an evangelical community, and had seen what volunteers had done in neighboring towns up in the Sierra several years previous. So really pushing to get a volunteer out there again in his town.

KLEIN: [00:43:25] OK. By the end of the training, had many of the trainees gone home?

BELLOWS: [00:43:34] One. One didn't pass training.

KLEIN: [00:43:37] Oh, OK, so what we, in the old language, were deselected or chosen to not.

BELLOWS: [00:43:44] Deselected.

KLEIN: [00:43:45] Yeah. Had the group developed much of a tight feeling? You were all over the place and you weren't functioning as a group much.

BELLOWS: [00:43:54] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:43:57] Although there were individual cliques or your relationships.

BELLOWS: [00:43:59] Yeah, no, there were. And then I think towards the end, especially during the swearing in ceremony and all that, we came together for a few days and really felt like a strong group. But we were all quickly going to our sites and going our own ways. So I don't think we had a strong sense of group as others might have had.

KLEIN: [00:44:24] Were you Ecuador 78 or something, or they don't know?

BELLOWS: [00:44:26] Omnibus 77.

KLEIN: [00:44:28] Was it 77? OK. Now, tell me. Your own adventure training's over. You have an assignment. It's in the Amazon.

BELLOWS: [00:44:42] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:44:42] And it's as far as you understand, it's animal production. But you also know it's for a nonexistent cattlemen's association.

BELLOWS: [00:44:52] Right.

KLEIN: [00:44:53] But you still have to pack it up and head out to, what's the name of the place?

BELLOWS: [00:44:58] Chiguinda.

KLEIN: [00:44:59] Chiguinda, OK.

BELLOWS: [00:45:02] So we went to Chiguinda. There were two of us.

KLEIN: [00:45:04] Oh, two.

BELLOWS: [00:45:06] One of the volunteers who was in agriculture and I never, it was an indication about how poorly our group bonded, but I really didn't know her until we went out there. She'd been assigned to a neighboring village that was only accessible by foot path through mine. We were at the end of a road that had been slowly built over the last 40 years out of the Sierra. Settled piece by piece by landless campesinos and small landholders out of the Sierra since then. So the road ended where we at our site at Chiguinda and Julie went on into Bermejós.

KLEIN: [00:45:45] All by herself?

BELLOWS: [00:45:46] By herself. It was even a smaller frontier sort of played. Both of them, both of those sites struck me at the time as frontier towns on a dry day, which were rare. On a dry day, we'd get the dust coming, blowing through a bit if you get a breeze. And all the wooden buildings. It was strikingly unusual in Ecuador to have a large number, a wooden town still. Almost everything was cinder block as it seems to be all over the world. And this is largely still a wooden town, store facades and that sort of thing. And it was it was interesting that way.

KLEIN: [00:46:25] Now there had been a volunteer in that town before?

BELLOWS: [00:46:30] There had been a volunteer in the Sierra and not in this town, not in Chiguinda. So we were the first volunteers, Peace Corps had been in Ecuador for 40 years and the first volunteers in this town.

KLEIN: [00:46:40] OK. And so tell me how you know you arrive in town? Did someone, did you get there by bus? Did someone from Peace Corps take you out?

BELLOWS: [00:46:50] A counterpart.

KLEIN: [00:46:51] Your counterpart did.

BELLOWS: [00:46:52] Our counterpart made sure we got out, and Julie had a very clear list of which busses to take at what time. I was just along for the ride. I figured I'd get out there somehow, and I'd been out during training and going out during then to live there it was.

KLEIN: [00:47:06] What was your counterpart's name?

BELLOWS: [00:47:10] Mucho. I'm just trying to remember his last name.

KLEIN: [00:47:12] Mucho. OK.

BELLOWS: [00:47:13] Luis. Luis, um. Such an indication of how close I didn't get to this guy.

KLEIN: [00:47:20] Had Luis arranged for living accommodations for you?

BELLOWS: [00:47:26] We stayed with him. I stayed with him, and then Julie went out to Bermejós. I stayed with Luis the first week and then it was just a matter of walking across the street and talking to some people and finding a room available in an old house, single story. Rosario, Rosario Viesquez. And Rosario was, she seemed ancient at the time. An old woman, she kept her hair and braids very long, and she spoke in very simple sentences,

KLEIN: [00:48:00] Which must have been helpful.

BELLOWS: [00:48:01] It was very helpful. And she kept a garden in the back, cooked over an open fire. Most everybody else in town had a propane tank and they could afford this gas. It was subsidized. She couldn't.

KLEIN: [00:48:13] Now did you negotiate rent?

BELLOWS: [00:48:14] Luis did.

KLEIN: [00:48:16] OK, and were you going to be taking meals with her?

BELLOWS: [00:48:20] I ended up buying a gas range. I took some meals with her. She'd invite me in for coffee, coffee and humitas, this little kind of a wet

version of a tamale, but we'd talk quite a bit. She would explain the weather patterns and just talk about people in town. She's very opinionated.

KLEIN: [00:48:44] But you just had, you had a room there?

BELLOWS: [00:48:46] I had a room, separate entrance.

KLEIN: [00:48:48] Was security a problem?

BELLOWS: [00:48:50] No.

KLEIN: [00:48:51] So whether you had a camera or whatever, I don't know what kind of goodies you traveled with.

BELLOWS: [00:48:56] I have one camera that my grandfather had given me and I really wanted to take advantage of that. I had some expensive hiking boots and other nonsense that I brought down from the States, and it quickly molded in the first year.

KLEIN: [00:49:10] Yeah. Now you were not up in the mountains, in the Amazon?

BELLOWS: [00:49:15] It was an approach to the Amazon. It was about 5,000 feet in elevation, 700 meters.

KLEIN: [00:49:19] Was it rainforest?

BELLOWS: [00:49:22] It was cloud forest. So rain would, the humidity is coming off the Amazon essentially hitting the mountains at our elevation and dumping meters and meters of rain. And I saw, there was one construction company that the government had paid to come in and finish the road down to our county seat below. And that company had rain records for the area and we'd get anywhere from two to three meters of rain a year. It was just incredible.



KLEIN: [00:49:46] So can you picture yourself, I mean, what was your feeling in the first week in town and you're there? You'd wake up any morning, did you know what you were going to be doing?

BELLOWS: [00:49:59] Every morning was different. I tried to make plans, especially the first couple of weeks. It was easy with the castration job that I had suddenly taken on. And I had people coming knocking at my door relatively quickly for basic vet services, veterinary services. So I'd go out and give oral albendazole was this one drug, oral dewormer that we used to give, and do that. And then people started coming in with requests that I couldn't. One guy had a lame horse. I had no idea how to deal with that. And I found that the castration business could actually be rather risky. I lost a patient. And that's when things started sinking, and I had to be a little more careful about what I was doing.

KLEIN: [00:50:47] How soon into your?

BELLOWS: [00:50:48] First month, in June.

KLEIN: [00:50:51] And did the owner become irate or?

BELLOWS: [00:50:55] People were stoic. It was. No, she didn't. Another Viesquez family, there were a number of Viesquez and Alvarez, and that was two dominant names in town. And Aravelo. But yeah, Narciso was their name, and she ended up being a really good friend of mine. And she was patient and we tried, later on, we tried raising guinea pigs in a modern fashion and tried raising pigs as well using commercial methods. But this first time I killed her pig, I just felt, I felt awful.

KLEIN: [00:51:38] Yeah. So the first couple of weeks you're there is like you come into town. Whether you're Peace Corps or not it doesn't matter, that you're like the new vet and people are coming to you for veterinary services.

BELLOWS: [00:51:55] Coming to me. And then I learned and I had bought all this.

KLEIN: [00:52:00] I mean, did they pay you?

BELLOWS: [00:52:00] No, I refused. They'd offer to. They'd offered lunch, in which case I'd take them up on that as a chance to.

KLEIN: [00:52:07] Who did they think you were?

BELLOWS: [00:52:09] Just took it as a great gift, I guess. I, well, until I killed somebody's pig. It was hard to explain that.

KLEIN: [00:52:20] Well, I mean, did you find yourself having to explain, I'm an American, I'm Peace Corps, or, you know, I'm a gift from God?

BELLOWS: [00:52:28] Well, they'd had foreigners come out. It was a weird corner of the world. And you get out to these little corners and you find that folks are a little more accepting of somebody that doesn't apparently fit in. Had I been in the Sierra, I think there were longer established communities it would have been accepted. But in this area, it was almost, everybody knew everyone else's business. And so to that extent, I was a new person and they wanted to figure out what I was doing. But on the other hand, they were used to having people come through that might not want to tell their entire history or people that were for whatever reason relocating. They had a Swiss guy that lived out there before the road was pushed through, selling chainsaws in the '80s. And there's a Husqvarna, or I can't remember, there's some Scandinavian brand of chainsaw. Actually, Luis, the shop owner and the nonexistent cattlemen's president, he had the shop and he would sell these brand of chainsaws. And it was actually a very good business because people are cutting the primary forest and taking out these premium, premium hardwoods on the backs of mules.

KLEIN: [00:53:35] They would do it that way? You didn't have large companies coming in running it?

BELLOWS: [00:53:42] Not yet. Most of the large timber exploitation I saw was either.

KLEIN: [00:53:47] Rather large trees, as I recall.

BELLOWS: [00:53:48] They can be.

KLEIN: [00:53:49] Yeah. And they would cut them down and cut them up?

BELLOWS: [00:53:53] They'd cut them into two by sixes typically. That's kind of a standard length, two meters by, uh, two by sixes are more in the U.S. That's like two feet or two inches by six feet.

KLEIN: [00:54:06] Yeah. And where would they take them?

BELLOWS: [00:54:11] They'd bring them into town on the backs of mules. They'd have like four of these, two on a side with a wooden pack saddle over the mule and they'd be dragging this thing. And you could see, you could judge how far they were coming in from the forest, from the mountain sides. I mean, this is steep mountains they're dragging this over. Because the boards would be worn down on the edges where they dragged through the mud.

KLEIN: [00:54:32] Were these valuable woods?

BELLOWS: [00:54:35] I suspect, yeah, we're talking like.

KLEIN: [00:54:39] Like mahoganies and.

BELLOWS: [00:54:40] Cetrome. They had some cedar, but they're also like a colorado they call it, podocarpus. There's like four or five different species of podocarpus, it's a kind of a rare tropical conifer, I guess.

KLEIN: [00:54:53] OK. But you didn't get involved at all that, did you?

BELLOWS: [00:55:00] No, I mean, I didn't and I did. At one point, we had a small grant from the county to construct a tree nursery, and we ended up using local wood to build this. So it's ironic, we're cutting down the hardwoods to plant fruit trees. Kill a tree to raise a tree. But yeah, so they did that. And then so on Sundays, it'd be a market town with everybody coming into the area, either bringing in wood, selling cheese that they'd produced on their local farms, three or four dairy cattle or just cattle. And everybody had their mule. And so it was truly a western sort of town perched there in a tropical forest mountainside.

KLEIN: [00:55:40] How is your health up to this point?

BELLOWS: [00:55:42] I'd get random illnesses, but it all passed rather quickly.

KLEIN: [00:55:45] And how were you feeling about being there?

BELLOWS: [00:55:48] Some days were good. Some days were fantastic. Get the language down.

KLEIN: [00:55:54] Were you very conscious of, you know, language limitations? And did you feel that you could overcome it?

BELLOWS: [00:56:01] Yeah. Both. And I'd set certain timelines. I wanted to master a certain amount of language by. We were in our sites by late May, early June. So I'd want to do something by October and then by December.

KLEIN: [00:56:16] And what did you do when you weren't working that? Sat in your room and cried?

BELLOWS: [00:56:25] No, it was great. We go out and play. Pretty early on, I started playing indoor, it's called. We actually played it outside on the conch cement field. It's the only dry spot you could find some cases. And these guys, and I ended up doing this too, but we all played in our rubber boots. These knee-high calf high rubber boots buy for five bucks, you know, and we'd play indoor with a very hard small ball. Small field version of soccer.

KLEIN: [00:56:55] OK. After you've been in town for six months, had you begun to develop friendships with peers? I mean, were there, you know?

BELLOWS: [00:57:10] The families, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:57:10] And so there were some people you were more comfortable with and could help you, you know, sort of be like informants about what was going on.

BELLOWS: [00:57:18] Definitely. Definitely. One guy, this is what I found out a couple of months into my site, was that there was a veterinarian actually moving

back from the Sierra. And his mother and his family lived in town, and he had gone to the Cuenca, large city where I'd get my mail, about five hours away by bus. He was there studying and was coming back and finished it. He was about my age and we got to be really good friends that first year.

KLEIN: [00:57:44] So you had an opportunity to get some sense of the traditional life of people among whom you were living?

BELLOWS: [00:57:50] Well, I also learned a lot about how perhaps moving out there and just the dynamic of where they were at. how their traditional life had changed. And Oscar was telling me, this is my counterpart, my veterinarian friend of mine, that the people had stopped speaking Quechua about a generation ago. And had kind of adopted, you know, slacks and pants, very simple shirt and pant outfit for the guys. And then women also started wearing pants, not wearing the pollera, which they continued to wear in the Sierra. Their relatives in the Sierra were still, even though they weren't speaking Quechua as much in the Sierra either, were still dressing traditionally.

KLEIN: [00:58:33] Was there electricity in the town?

BELLOWS: [00:58:34] Yep, that came out thanks to Nanyo, Victor Jimenez, which was another really great guy. I still call him two three times a year, so keep in contact over email quite a bit.

KLEIN: [00:58:46] Who was Victor?

BELLOWS: [00:58:48] Victor was the local *secretario* who's in charge of the, there's a political division. So from province down to county, down to township. And the township was called the *parroquia* and we had a *teniente político*, was the political lieutenant, political appointment. He was, he ran his thing, but he would often change with the president. So every year we had a different *teniente político*. But the secretary remained the same. Nanyo was the life and blood of Chiguinda, and he could. Nanyo is brother in Quechua. And so he just took on this nickname, everybody called him brother. And, you know, would make sure that the festivals happened every year. He went and processed paperwork in the cities to make sure

we got electricity, in '95 I think they got it in Chiguinda. And then in '97, late '97, we got telephone lines actually.

KLEIN: [00:59:39] Wow.

BELLOWS: [00:59:41] So I was able to get a line for Rosario into her house, which she just couldn't believe. And that was such a great moment.

KLEIN: [00:59:52] Could you call home with that phone?

BELLOWS: [00:59:55] I could. It was very expensive and I don't think I actually did. I received a couple of calls from the States on that. But I didn't call back.

KLEIN: [01:00:03] Now, six months into being in the village, were you writing home?

BELLOWS: [01:00:10] I was writing letters and it was painfully slow, and I ended up buying a Macintosh classic, one of these tiny little computers. And I had that in my site the second year. And I started, you know, so I'd write stuff on the computer, save it and then send it off as an email my second year, when I started getting email in Cuenca.

KLEIN: [01:00:32] But you were doing creative writing at the same time on your own?

BELLOWS: [01:00:36] Yeah. And I fancied myself another Moritz Thomsen at some point. And of course, that, you know, I think what it was, it was classic Peace Corps experience. Everybody wants to write when one when they get to Peace Corps. A couple of friends of mine in that same cohort that I was, in Omnibus 77, were also writing. And so there was, El Clima was our Peace Corps newsletter, and I got to be editor of that at one point, and I was writing articles, submissions to that. Doing a lot of that the first year, the second year not so much.

KLEIN: [01:01:09] During your first six months, what kind of contact did you have with the Peace Corps?

BELLOWS: [01:01:14] Limited, very limited.

KLEIN: [01:01:15] Did anyone come out to visit?

BELLOWS: [01:01:17] I don't recall. The first year we had one visit from my APCD, the second year Julie's APCD came out. So between the two of us, we had a visit once a year from Peace Corps. But we also had our six-month follow up conference, I think they called it, so we all came out.

KLEIN: [01:01:37] What did you do? You went to Quito?

BELLOWS: [01:01:38] Went to Baños, this place on the eastern side of the Andes, south of Quito. So it's closer.

KLEIN: [01:01:44] It's a long haul for you.

BELLOWS: [01:01:46] It was a very long haul, yeah. And I traveled a lot. I was in my site, perhaps I'd be in my site for two weeks at a time. I'd come out for my mail, which was a three-day event, given the bus cycle. Leave one day, get there, the post office would be closed in Cuenca. So I'd wait to the next day, get my mail, and then I wouldn't be able to enter my site until the third day.

KLEIN: [01:02:11] And there were, I assume there were some volunteers in Cuenca.

BELLOWS: [01:02:16] Yeah, we had a crash pad, just as it happens. We had a volunteer who lived and worked in Cuenca with an NGO, an environmental education NGO, and so we'd stay with her, Katie.

KLEIN: [01:02:29] And that was by arrangement, did you pay or just sort of?

BELLOWS: [01:02:32] It was understood that you'd help out with everything that you could while you're there, but it was definitely open. She gave people keys.

KLEIN: [01:02:39] And the first conference when you got together, was it that same group that you had come with? Or was it?

BELLOWS: [01:02:49] It was that same group and then the group before us, ahead of us, that was close to COS.

KLEIN: [01:02:55] Oh, OK.

BELLOWS: [01:02:56] So we were all the same program. So Ecuador is on the six month cycle where January or February they have the outdoorsy guys, the natural resources, agriculture, and animal production come in. And in the summer they have the social services, they have youth and health.

KLEIN: [01:03:14] And this is after six months, right?

BELLOWS: [01:03:16] So we were in Baños for the six-month conference. We received some tech training going out and seeing, I think, a local farm, but mostly it was a chance to process what we'd experienced. Make sure that we're on track for further language acquisition and to see if there were any issues, medical issues, that sort of thing, that were coming out.

KLEIN: [01:03:37] But at that point, could you say to your APCD, there is no cattlemen's association. What is my job out there?

BELLOWS: [01:03:48] It was clear that he wouldn't have been able to answer that question.

KLEIN: [01:03:51] Oh, OK.

BELLOWS: [01:03:52] If I had asked him. So I can tell him that there was no cattlemen's association, you know, and he would respond, well, that's a pity. What do you think you're going to do? And so knowing that I just went ahead and made plans to do other things.

KLEIN: [01:04:06] Were you reporting back on a regular basis to the Peace Corps?

BELLOWS: [01:04:09] Peace Corps, like any bureaucratic function, I suspect has got to report on its progress. And so we'd file these annual reports about the



number of living fences that we trained people on, the number of talks or *charlas* that we'd given.

KLEIN: [01:04:23] Whether you had or you hadn't.

BELLOWS: [01:04:25] Whether we had or we hadn't.

KLEIN: [01:04:26] You must have the temptation to just throw a number in there.

BELLOWS: [01:04:29] Sure, there is that.

KLEIN: [01:04:31] That was only annual?

BELLOWS: [01:04:33] That was annual.

KLEIN: [01:04:34] And it wasn't really getting to the guts of what it was you were or weren't doing.

BELLOWS: [01:04:39] I've often thought about this since then. I mean, how do you evaluate something as qualitative as person to person experience or connection?

KLEIN: [01:04:48] And oh yeah, yeah. But in a sense, you know, the bigger question might be, is it worth having you stay there and is it worth replacing you, you know, as you come to the end, right? I don't know what point then.

BELLOWS: [01:05:04] That's something I've never really been able to answer. I mean, afterwards, I certainly encouraged, and to this day, there are volunteers in Chiguinda, so.

KLEIN: [01:05:14] So six months, you work your way back to Chiguinda. And had you tried to maintain contact with Amy or was that?

BELLOWS: [01:05:27] No, that was long gone.

KLEIN: [01:05:28] That went by the wayside. Geography.

BELLOWS: [01:05:33] Geography. Actually, she was one of the first people, I think, medevaced, so I lost contact of her with her soon after.

KLEIN: [01:05:41] Yeah. And did you, were you asked whether someone else should come out to your village?

BELLOWS: [01:05:49] Not initially. Not initially. I made that request at the end of my two years, to have somebody came out, and it took another three years before somebody did.

KLEIN: [01:05:57] Yeah. So cover the next six months, I mean, you're back from the conference.

BELLOWS: [01:06:00] Back from the conference. It flew by. We were doing a number of different things.

KLEIN: [01:06:08] The language was improving.

BELLOWS: [01:06:09] Language was satisfactory. I was able to give talks. We gave a couple of talks. Beginning to identify who we wanted to work with. Again, Julie and I tried to work in tandem as much as possible.

KLEIN: [01:06:19] And what was Julie's specialty?

BELLOWS: [01:06:21] Julie was premed and agriculture, an agriculture volunteer. And very dedicated to what she did. I was very impressed. She was always experimenting with new crops and seeing why some things worked and why others didn't, and very careful about how she talked to people to get the right amount, get some insight about how people are doing things currently and how it may or may not be improved.

KLEIN: [01:06:46] Did the two of you stay in touch kind of?

BELLOWS: [01:06:49] Yeah, I'd go over and stay in Bermejós and, I mean, she'd get. We had like a dinner we'd do twice a week. We'd get together and I'd eat at her place. She'd come over to Chiguinda. And she started coming over

to Chiguinda a lot more often the beginning of my first year. And it turns out she was getting kind of sweet on Oscar and they started dating, and to finish the story, they got married by the end of service.

KLEIN: [01:07:21] And did she stay in Ecuador?

BELLOWS: [01:07:24] They left. She went, summer of '99, she went straight into Fort Sam Houston, joined the uniformed, the Armed Forces Medical School. And they now live in D.C.

KLEIN: [01:07:41] That second half of the first year, did you feel that by the end of the year, you sort of have a definition of what your job was being there or? It seems very diffuse.

BELLOWS: [01:07:53] It was.

KLEIN: [01:07:54] Likely to be moving in any one of several directions.

BELLOWS: [01:07:57] Yeah. There were talks about getting a *lechería* or getting a milk farm set up, or maybe a dairy processing plant. Oscar had all these grand visions of industrializing, essentially, the agricultural production.

KLEIN: [01:08:11] Now tell me again who Oscar is.

BELLOWS: [01:08:13] I'm sorry. Oscar was my counterpart, the veterinarian, the young student my age who had trained in Cuenca, had just come back, and was very gung-ho about especially veterinary medicine, large animal vet medicine.

KLEIN: [01:08:27] You didn't have an Ecuadorian minister, ministry, that you related to?

BELLOWS: [01:08:35] No. The Ministry of Agriculture and Ranching, the Mag they called it. Yeah, it was defunct. And we had, there was an office in Gualaquiza. So from Chiguinda, the road had been punched through in '98. But prior to that, we used to walk or ride horses down to Gualaquiza, the county seat. It was a half day trip down through the mountains to a

lower elevation, definitely a lot warmer, more tropical. And they had a Mag office there, the agriculture office, but the extension is there, operated primarily around Gualaquiza, and in some cases were essentially the hired hands for the alcalde to work on his farm. It's just, it was crazy. So we were independent.

KLEIN: [01:09:23] So did you then start to sort of team with Oscar?

BELLOWS: [01:09:27] Yeah, oh, it was great. I mean, we'd go out, work on his farm on some days. We had an experimental trout farm set up, pools that we worked with. A number of things there. And then he would go out and do rounds, often with people and with the farmers in the area, and I'd go with him or I would schedule some appointments and he would come with me. And it was great and we were talking. It was great. We just were able to talk about all kinds of things and it was just a fantastic experience.

KLEIN: [01:09:53] Did he speak English?

BELLOWS: [01:09:54] No. This is all.

KLEIN: [01:09:55] You were then getting much better in Spanish.

BELLOWS: [01:10:00] Yep.

KLEIN: [01:10:01] So in effect, you were working as itinerant veterinarian?

BELLOWS: [01:10:05] Itinerant veterinarian on some days. Other days I coordinated with, there was a clinic because we were in a township politically. We had money for and received a health clinic. And so we had a doctor who was off and on his one year rural rotation after college or after university, and a nurse was coming out on her exercises. So we'd work with them on annual rabies vaccinations for all the domesticated animals in the area, go out to all the outlying communities. Chiguinda was small, but they were even smaller settlements if you can imagine off in the hills of, you know, five or six houses and one little concha again to play their indoor after work. So yeah, some of these were. This one, Sangoremo, was right on

the side of a hill, I mean, side of a mountain. Breathtaking view. But the ball, you had to be careful where you kicked it. It was just breathtaking.

BELLOWS: [01:10:58] The three thousand foot goal?

BELLOWS: [01:11:00] Yeah, yeah. But we'd go out with the people from the clinic. There was a women's association in Bermejós and another one in Chiguinda. And in both cases, we worked with them on raising guinea pigs and doing small gardening projects. I started teaching in the school. There was a secondary *collegio*, high school, but it only went up to grade nine.

KLEIN: [01:11:23] What were you teaching?

BELLOWS: [01:11:26] English. I tried doing English for a semester and that kind of bombed. The English teacher in town was married, was Nanyo's wife, the secretary's wife. So they both had government jobs, and were kind of the middle class of the town. And Ines was her name. She, uh, she couldn't speak English although she was the English teacher. And so it made for very interesting class dynamics.

KLEIN: [01:11:51] But you weren't a teacher, but you were a teacher.

BELLOWS: [01:11:53] Yeah, I wasn't a teacher and I was coming in and providing the English.

KLEIN: [01:11:57] What would you do?

BELLOWS: [01:11:58] Greetings, basics. Just work on present tense greetings, the same sort of mechanisms I remembered from my language training in Spanish.

KLEIN: [01:12:06] How old are the students?

BELLOWS: [01:12:09] Oh, anywhere from probably 11 to 13.

KLEIN: [01:12:13] Did they, how did they see you? Did they take to you?

BELLOWS: [01:12:17] Yeah, they were great kids. They were a lot of fun. There were a lot of fun, but English was just something that they had to take. And it was, we'd practice that sometimes after school, coming down the hill behind Chiguinda, it was, you know, practice things. Or during the market weekends, you know, kids walk by and ask how I am. And that sort of thing. What time is it?

KLEIN: [01:12:45] And were with great pride doing it?

BELLOWS: [01:12:47] Yeah, I mean, like anybody learning a new language a little embarrassed, perhaps, but you know, they enjoyed it. Yeah, it was a great exchange.

KLEIN: [01:12:57] During the first year, what was the traditional life of the area like and did you touch it, see it, observe it, photograph it?

BELLOWS: [01:13:06] I took a few photos. I didn't do it justice I think. I wrote about it as best I could, but then I just lived it.

KLEIN: [01:13:14] Did your friends then sort of try to engage you on what was going on?

BELLOWS: [01:13:19] My friends back in the States?

KLEIN: [01:13:20] No.

BELLOWS: [01:13:22] Oh, in Ecuador? Oh yeah, people are definitely. I was asked to be a godfather to a, they used the term godfather, but it wasn't. It was a confirmation during the Catholic process. It wasn't a baptism. I wasn't really officially being godfather in that sense, but it's a confirmation sponsor. And so I was asked to do that and there were a number of, you know, parties and birthdays and the *quinceañera*, the 15 year old party, a lot of young girls in town, just being part of that. Playing indoor with guys on the, you know, the weekends.

KLEIN: [01:14:02] Were you the only non-Ecuadorian in town?

BELLOWS: [01:14:05] Yeah.

BELLOWS: [01:14:08] Julie and I were the only. There were, but again, we have random travelers come through. It was not a well-traveled area, but there would be backpackers. I remember one backpacker from southern France came through the second year, at the end of the first year and beginning of the second for the New Year's, and stayed with Narcissa for a week. But yeah, we'd have random travelers come through, but I was the only one.

KLEIN: [01:14:29] But you didn't feel isolated, or did you?

BELLOWS: [01:14:33] No, I mean, it was. Actually it struck me, as I'm sure does every volunteer, but at the moment, there's a moment when you realize that this is your life. This is what you're doing and it's really hard to see yourself doing anything else. And I mean, I toyed with the idea of buying land out there and starting a pig farm.

KLEIN: [01:14:54] But that's the point also where you may be thinking of your being there, not in terms of how many pigs you castrate, but how many people you know and how you interact.

BELLOWS: [01:15:09] Up to that point, everything in my life had been something that I had been born into or simply was following some current. I mean, I was raised in Eaton Rapids, in Central Michigan, not by choice, because that's where I happened to be born. And I went to University of Michigan not really because it was perhaps the most interesting place I could have gone to, but because it's the most economical and is where everybody in my cohort was going out in high school. And suddenly I had made the conscious decision to go to this place. I had no idea what it was like, or what to do. And I was becoming a willful member of this community, and for the first time in my life, I took ownership and responsibility for that, and it was a fan.

KLEIN: [01:15:49] Must have felt good.

BELLOWS: [01:15:50] It was weird. Yeah, it was great. It was empowering. It was really empowering. And yeah, so it was fantastic.

KLEIN: [01:15:59] And you'd traveled between first and second year? You get some vacation time.

BELLOWS: [01:16:04] Yeah, we had a lot, 24 days a year or something like that. Any travel. I made it around the country a little bit. I mean, I'd go to Cuenca a fair amount. I went down to the beach. So you go from Cuenca, five hours to Cuenca, three hours from there, back down the mountains towards the coast to this banana capital of the world, Machala. Big banana port, and we went to the beach there once for a VAC meeting. This Voluntary Advisory Council that had regional meetings where people would get together and talk about the work. So we did that, but other than that, no, not really.

KLEIN: [01:16:41] And now going into your second year, are you feeling yourself less a Peace Corps volunteer and just your own person?

BELLOWS: [01:16:52] Definitely. Peace Corps fades to black, I mean, it was just, it was in the background. It was certainly something I did. I was the editor of El Clima, you know, so I'd go to Quito every three months or two months to put together that newsletter. And I mean, my other contacts outside of my site were volunteers to a large extent. There were some relatives of people at my site that I'd meet elsewhere. But to a large extent, my network was Peace Corps volunteers. So, you know, it was connecting that way. But Peace Corps, as an institution keeping in contact with the administration, other than my Quito visits, it was random, rare. I mean, we had a rabies scare at one point. A cow died of a confirmed case of rabies. Later we dissected it, took the brain in a jar to a lab and confirmed it was. And so we had to go to Quito, Julie and I. And Oscar because he didn't qualify. This is, again, this disparities thing was just driving us mad because he's a really good friend and he couldn't get the same sort of medical care that we did. And we were living off a salary that most people try to feed families of five or six off of.

KLEIN: [01:18:00] So money wasn't a problem.



BELLOWS: [01:18:02] Money wasn't a problem.

KLEIN: [01:18:04] Talk about the second year.

BELLOWS: [01:18:06] It was fantastic. At that point, you begin to develop, begin to realize it, like you say, that you're part of this community and it was fantastic. We were learning the names for various trees and seasons. The *chonta* was this really hard nut, it tasted it kind of like acorn squash, about the size of a small peach or a green apple. And we'd boil these *chonta* seeds and it was great. Put some oil on it or something. And things like that, you begin to really tie into the community. A lot of times I was interested in oral histories and I was talking to this one guy, Brito was the other last name. I was, in fact, the first year they'd ask your name. I'm going off on a tangent here, your name for a bus ticket. And it was silly. There was no reason. You buy a bus ticket, why do you need your name on it? But so I'd tell them, Benjamin Brito. I just dropped Bellows, became a Brito. And then I moved on later to a phonetic pronunciation of my last name.

BELLOWS: [01:19:08] But anyway, I was talking to this guy, Manuel Brito, and he was telling me about when he was a kid going out and collecting the quinoa. No, not the quinoa. The quinine bark, back when there was a market for that still. And we'd learned the history that one time this town drunk. He was, I mean it's sad to say, but he was drunk most of the time. He brought me a human skull, and he said he found it in the woods and it was the most macabre sort of gift. But he said he wanted to show his appreciation for what we were doing. And there were stories then, I guess, with a human skull and with others of *huacas*, they called them, these pre-Spanish burial sites that people would occasionally raid. I mean, you hear about them in New York state and, you know, the mountain cultures here in the U.S., but also throughout South America. So there were moments like that where you begin to appreciate kind of the human impact and human presence going back there.

KLEIN: [01:20:11] Sometimes during the second year, volunteers know that they are within sight of the end of their tour, and they kind of look to building at

least one monument to their having been there. I don't know if that affected you.

BELLOWS: [01:20:29] We had our monument. We had our monumental family. There was an extended family in Bermejos, and Bermejos was essentially divided between the Alvarez and the non-Alvarez. And if you remember the Alvarez clan, they had it great. They worked really hard. They were kind of, they were clannish. But we helped them out as much as we could.

KLEIN: [01:20:51] This is in your town?

BELLOWS: [01:20:51] This is in the neighboring town that Julie was in.

KLEIN: [01:20:53] Oh, OK.

BELLOWS: [01:20:55] Bermejos. And so we. Julie, her second year, moved from the town she'd officially been stationed in to Chiguinda to be closer with Oscar and it just made more sense logistically. But we would go back to Bermejos often. And the second year we helped them put together a Peace Corps partnership grant. That, I mean, this was again the intention to willfully or not to build a monument in some sense or to leave some mark.

KLEIN: [01:21:21] That you can come back to.

BELLOWS: [01:21:23] And it didn't work. I mean, the Peace Corps director saw right through it, as you know, as an attempt to do some good but too late. Yeah, we were COSing that year and the application didn't go through.

KLEIN: [01:21:36] But what was it that you were going to use the money for?

BELLOWS: [01:21:39] Pig farming. We wanted to set up small *chancho* areas of the pig housing for a number of different families there, most of them Alvarez but.

KLEIN: [01:21:53] Who were not currently raising pigs?

BELLOWS: [01:21:57] Interested in it. They were doing some, but not as much as they wanted to. They had a small mix of subsistence farming. They had a few sheep, surprised they didn't get hoof rot, but, um, and some cattle. Everybody had cattle.

KLEIN: [01:22:10] So as you came to the end, getting near the end of the second year, what did you decide? I mean, what was your?

BELLOWS: [01:22:18] I wasn't nearly ready to go and my life in Chiguinda felt like I had done as much as I could there, and there was an opportunity to work in Quito out of the Peace Corps office. They'd just created a Peace Corps volunteer coordinator position. And the volunteer coordinator remains on Peace Corps salary and is essentially a third-year extension. But you coordinate with the APCD. And so I applied and got that position.

KLEIN: [01:22:49] Was the sense that the coordinator would be spokesman for volunteer concerns?

BELLOWS: [01:22:55] Both. Both that and an ability for better, a better means for the administration to go out and provide a second pair of eyes for the APCD. So it's a way to connect.

KLEIN: [01:23:06] During the second year, was there a political crisis or did that come later

BELLOWS: [01:23:10] Constantly. We had strikes and discontent.

KLEIN: [01:23:13] In your village?

BELLOWS: [01:23:15] No, we were largely saved from that. It was a beautiful little bubble to live in, in that sense, isolated from a lot of that. But there were strikes in the Sierras. I remember the Peace Corps gave us Treks, Trek bicycles, mountain bikes, and so I rode this back up over the mountain on these. It would be an all-day trip, but I'd ride it up, I don't know, five thousand feet, and then down into the central valley. And a couple of times I went past stone, went through strikes. I mean, you'd go through stones piled across the road, burning tires. People were peaceful. It

wasn't, you know, violence necessarily. But there was a lot of anger and destruction of infrastructure.

KLEIN: [01:24:04] But it wasn't like armed rebellion.

BELLOWS: [01:24:06] No, no armed rebellion.

KLEIN: [01:24:07] And it was not dangerous for you to travel.

BELLOWS: [01:24:10] It wasn't dangerous to travel. It was a striking contrast to what you see in Colombia. Two neighboring countries, one incredibly civil, the other not.

KLEIN: [01:24:16] And when you would come to one of these barriers, would people immediately recognize you as non-Ecuadorian?

BELLOWS: [01:24:23] Well, riding the bike decked out in some sort of faded gringo gear. Yeah, it was. Yeah, yeah, definitely would stand out. I was careful about where I went. But people were generally very accommodating too, and there are a lot of gringos in Cuenca. It's kind of a, it's a comfortable, mild climate and beautiful architecture.

KLEIN: [01:24:47] So the political trouble, domestic problems, really didn't impinge on your being where you were in the village.

BELLOWS: [01:24:56] No.

KLEIN: [01:24:58] And so at the end of the second year, you're ready to finish it up in the village.

BELLOWS: [01:25:06] We'd done so much that second year. We'd had a second agricultural festival that we'd organized with the town. We had projects with the *municipio* to build a tree farm. We'd done all these projects and efforts and really sunk roots. And then there were a series of weddings that we went to between volunteers and the Ecuadorian community and Ecuadorians, and it was just a fantastic event. Julie's wedding was held at the end of that second year in Cuenca. Folks came down.

KLEIN: [01:25:38] Her folks?

BELLOWS: [01:25:38] Her folks came down and Oscar's family was there. It was just a beautiful event.

KLEIN: [01:25:42] Did she need to get Peace Corps permission for the marriage?

BELLOWS: [01:25:47] I imagine there must have been some paperwork. I ended up being one of the witnesses in Quito, at the civil ceremony. But there was a lot of paperwork they had to go through.

KLEIN: [01:25:57] So at the time you're leaving the village, Julie and Oscar are going to be staying or are they?

BELLOWS: [01:26:03] They're also making plans to leave.

KLEIN: [01:26:04] Oh, OK.

BELLOWS: [01:26:05] They're also making plans to leave.

KLEIN: [01:26:06] You mentioned you were sort of tempted to stay on, but you got the volunteer coordinator job.

BELLOWS: [01:26:13] Got the volunteer coordinator job.

KLEIN: [01:26:15] And did what, left?

BELLOWS: [01:26:19] Yeah, we left in May of '99, and I went south for three weeks of vacation with friends of mine who were COSing. And my girlfriend at the time, I was dating another volunteer in Sigsig, which was a neighboring town, the first town you hit when you come back from the Sierras. Deena Chapman, she was a wonderful volunteer. And we dated for about a year, the second year.

KLEIN: [01:26:44] You went down to Peru?

BELLOWS: [01:26:45] All of us went down to Peru. We traveled and it was odd. I mean, for the first time, I was really traveling on a gringo trail and doing the backpack experience, and I was able. It felt very unreal. It wasn't, I wasn't connecting with anybody, you know? I was the tourist for the first time in my life, really?

KLEIN: [01:27:08] But how is your Spanish at that point?

BELLOWS: [01:27:10] I was very comfortable with it.

KLEIN: [01:27:12] So you could, even though you were in tourist status, you could go someplace and you could initiate conversation in Spanish.

BELLOWS: [01:27:21] Yeah, loved to. I mean, that was, I mean, it was great to be with my friends and some of them I hadn't seen in a while. Nate Brown ended up being my housemate in Quito, and we've been in good contact. Brown and Bellows, we're the same names. We were actually together at staging and then, throughout Peace Corps and even now. So it was good while we were traveling to Peru to be together as a group and kind of share experiences and decompress. But yeah, every chance I had, we were talking with Peruvians and getting a sense of what was going on there. And it was such a contrast in terms of the stability of the country in Peru, the stability of the currency, and the political situation.

KLEIN: [01:27:56] Was Peace Corps still in Peru?

BELLOWS: [01:27:58] They had pulled out years ago because of the Shining Path and were in the process of going back in but hadn't gone in yet.

KLEIN: [01:28:05] Yeah. So you had a vacation.

BELLOWS: [01:28:08] Had a vacation. It was great.

KLEIN: [01:28:09] Came back to Quito now for your third year.

BELLOWS: [01:28:13] Came back to Quito for my third year. I actually went home also. I was traveling a lot, May and June, went back for a wedding. That's

my second time. You're right, I did go home during my first two years. I totally forgot about that. But that was my second time home. And in both cases, that return home was a shocker because. That's right. It was a shocker because I remember that sense of being willfully part of a community and then coming back home and seeing that everything had become kind of a very faded memory. It was still intact and it was odd. You walk in and the light switches work and then the houses are winterized and you don't have dogs and chickens waking up at four o'clock in the morning and it's quiet and everything was orderly.

KLEIN: [01:29:11] The supermarket looked very different.

BELLOWS: [01:29:12] Supermarket was striking. I mean, it was the sort of things that people go through during acculturation or reentry. It was all hitting me, but it was hitting me in bits and pieces. And so my second time back in June of '99, Oscar was there, which was odd because Julie and Oscar had come back and she was now down in Fort Sam Houston doing her boot camp. And so Oscar was hanging out with me for a couple of weeks and we went up to the Michigan State, or interestingly enough, up to Michigan State farms, model farms. And we did the same thing that we did had done in Peace Corps. Only it was in reverse. I mean, Oscar had shown me all the extension operations that were in Ecuador around Cuenca and had taken me out to the university there and just showed me around various things. And so here I was showing him around Michigan State and we were going in to see this high, high tech pig breeding operation and horse farms and all the rest. It was great.

KLEIN: [01:30:09] Did you ever play at being an Ecuadorian when you go into a setting? I mean, you could if you walked in with Oscar.

BELLOWS: [01:30:16] Yeah, I could. I didn't do that in the States, but I could get away with it in Ecuador, playing a Venezuelan or Argentinean.

KLEIN: [01:30:24] Yeah, yeah.

BELLOWS: [01:30:25] And uh, yeah, that was a trip.

KLEIN: [01:30:28] Must be fun.

BELLOWS: [01:30:29] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:30:30] You want to talk a little bit about the third year? It must have been very different.

BELLOWS: [01:30:35] Third year was a lot different, supporting the administration, talking in English a lot more, and learning a different kind of Spanish. I mean, the Spanish of the countryside was, in some cases, the Spanish was a second language for people who are learning it as a second language, Quechua being the primary one, or just the level of education was simpler. So you get, you know, 15 different verbs and you're all set, you know, the running joke.

KLEIN: [01:31:01] Did you ever try to learn Quechua?

BELLOWS: [01:31:03] No, there wasn't a significant amount of need for it. I mean, there were communities where it would have been helpful, but everybody spoke Spanish in the context I needed it. So that third year in Quito, we had an apartment, we lived in a modern part of town. I got to be good friends with this guy that had been kidnapped in '97, and we were spending a lot of time with him going out on weekends, hiking in the mountains. He was also a, um, a guide for the Outward Bound groups that were coming down through Costa Rica, so we'd had a chance to go out with those groups on extended hikes. This was fall of '99.

KLEIN: [01:31:40] That's non-Peace Corps.

BELLOWS: [01:31:41] It's non-Peace Corps, it's on my weekends, but because we were settling on this office schedule, we had very fixed work schedules.

KLEIN: [01:31:47] Oh, OK.

BELLOWS: [01:31:48] And it was very interesting. But then it took some time off again in October of '99 and actually rode my bike, the Peace Corps bike, from the Colombian border down to near the Peruvian border in nine days. And



it was just, this other guy I was with, he's an animal and he's just like, always ahead on my map, it was crazy. So we did that. And then as soon as we got back on a bus, went back to Quito, and hooked up with his Outward Bound group and climbed Cotopaxi. It was just a very intense month.

KLEIN: [01:32:18] Yeah, at least physically.

BELLOWS: [01:32:20] Physically, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:32:24] Now, during the third year, who would determine how you spent your time?

BELLOWS: [01:32:32] The Peace Corps office, the APCD. This is another touchy issue. I mean, the politics of that office and the APCD at that time was under some suspicion, or it was, his case was under review and.

KLEIN: [01:32:42] Was he Ecuadorian?

BELLOWS: [01:32:44] He was Ecuadorian, yeah, and he ended up being asked to retire early.

KLEIN: [01:32:48] Yeah.

BELLOWS: [01:32:49] So that left the program at the end of my third year without an APCD for about six months, and I stayed on to coordinate that one.

KLEIN: [01:32:57] Now that was the Ag APCD?

BELLOWS: [01:33:00] The animal production fellow.

KLEIN: [01:33:01] So you played that role?

BELLOWS: [01:33:05] Well, yeah. I mean, I gave that title on my resume, but it was more. I continued to be the coordinator until they could find an APCD.

KLEIN: [01:33:11] But they didn't pay you his pay?

BELLOWS: [01:33:13] No, no. I continued to be the coordinator.

KLEIN: [01:33:17] Didn't you have a sense that you should be on payroll and receiving a. Or wasn't that an issue with you?

BELLOWS: [01:33:25] You know, coming from Chiguinda to Quito was itself a cultural reentry in some sense. And so there are all these stages and I was so happy just to have, satisfied to have what I did in Quito, knowing what it was like for, you know, the basic guy in person in Chiguinda to live. It wasn't a problem initially. Now when I did fill Jorge's role, so to speak, for that last two-month period that I actually had. I COSed in July, and then I stayed on two months on a special contract that covered some additional expenses. It wasn't an APCD rate, but it was a, you know, what a high school teacher might, an American high school teacher if they were hired locally. Yeah, it was basically a local higher rate, local hire of an expat. So I did that for two months. But yeah, for the entire third period, third year, Jorge got in more hot water and the program kind of was going through a reevaluation. It was interesting trying to deal with all that.

KLEIN: [01:34:39] But you were part of that evaluation process?

BELLOWS: [01:34:42] Yeah, we had. [tape break]

KLEIN: [01:34:44] OK.

BELLOWS: [01:34:44] Yeah. The PTO hired a Colombian consultant from Cali who came in and I drove him around the country interviewing various volunteers, checking out current and past Peace Corps animal production projects, and getting a sense of recommendations about where to go in the future. And that was a good discussion. We had long hours. For the first time in my three-year period, I was driving cars that third year out of the office and, you know, living the life in the city and it was really a good experience. And anyway, so we'd talk for long hours on these drives, and it was a broader sense of what was happening in Latin America. And I finally had the basis to begin to understand what was going on in Latin

America, you know, without that. The sort of discussion that we could've had in training in most cases would have gone over my head.

KLEIN: [01:35:31] Now, during that third year, did you get a chance to get back to your village?

BELLOWS: [01:35:36] Yeah, I went back frequently.

KLEIN: [01:35:39] Just to visit and see people, socialize?

BELLOWS: [01:35:42] Well, frequently is maybe too much. But yeah, I'd go back often to Cuenca and I'd see relatives and friends there, Julie's in-laws, Oscar's family. And then I'd also go to Chiguinda when I could.

KLEIN: [01:35:53] Julie and Oscar were out of the country.

BELLOWS: [01:35:55] They'd left the country at that point, but I still was in contact with their family.

KLEIN: [01:35:59] And in this third year, with the role you're playing, did you have a lot to do with Ecuadorians at the governmental level where you got any sense of Peace Corps' role? You know, it seems to me.

BELLOWS: [01:36:16] I was going in trying to work with the Ministry of Agriculture, but it was pointless for me, for what I needed. I was trying to place new volunteers in sites, and the ministry had pretty much pulled back to provincial or county level offices and did very little extension to the best of my knowledge.

KLEIN: [01:36:41] But it always sounds to me like Peace Corps, at least in this agricultural component, is playing its own role. I mean, it's doing Ag extension, whereas the government that has invited us in is not. So it's like running its own show. I mean, is that a fair assessment?

BELLOWS: [01:37:05] Running its own show? Yes. I mean, the big money agriculture was in roses, was in industrialized agriculture. The Peace Corps wasn't doing that. And so the ministry might have more involvement in other

sectors of the agricultural economy that we weren't tapping into or we weren't involved in. So I'd see their roles as somewhat complementary.

KLEIN: [01:37:28] I mean, it's interesting. Peace Corps has played many roles in countries, you know. But there's the basic the underlying purpose of the Peace Corps is to provide the technical help in conjunction with or in cooperation with, you know, a host country.

BELLOWS: [01:37:49] Well, the host country unit most often, and this is what we did with our site assessments. Our host country units were *municipios*, so communities. We always had a community counterpart. Some organizational counterpart on paper at least. Now it could've been like the cattlemen's association, although I avoided that like the plague the third year. But, I mean, we always had some person, point person, that we were going to who is the representative of a larger institution.

KLEIN: [01:38:13] OK.

BELLOWS: [01:38:14] Um, and I was keenly aware of that as we went out this third year, my third year, and began setting up the next round of agriculture sites or animal production sites. We wanted to take a new focus on fishing and fish culture.

KLEIN: [01:38:30] So whose decision was that?

BELLOWS: [01:38:33] We were really low on trainees on one training cycle. The country director decided we're going to boost the numbers. We're going to bring in 13 fish people on the social work cycle in the summer and we're going to train them in the Oriente.

KLEIN: [01:38:48] But it wasn't as if in discussions with the Ecuadorian government, it was decided that.

BELLOWS: [01:38:55] Right. This was a need to make sure we keep our numbers up. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:38:59] So you were involved in bringing in the fish group?

BELLOWS: [01:39:01] Well, it made sense. We had a fish biologist in Loja, in the southern part of the Sierra at the national university there, and he identified some sites in the Oriente, in the Amazon area, with me. And there's all this latent need, and that's where I discovered that you could plug volunteers into a lot of places and they, depending on their characteristics, they would do all right. I mean, the community, I thought, was positioned well in most cases, in every case, to take a volunteer.

KLEIN: [01:39:30] So as you come to the end of the third year, where are you headed? I mean, have you been.

BELLOWS: [01:39:38] Wanted to stay somehow connected to Latin America and was looking for work opportunities. And the country director was, you know, I was asking her about this and I remember something to the effect that as a U.S. professional, it's very difficult to find development work per se in Latin America without more training. And that it wouldn't be as easy as Africa, I guess, where she had worked. That's just one comment I remember her making. But yes, I was considering some options. I was thinking about grad school.

KLEIN: [01:40:10] So at that point, you had a bachelor's degree.

BELLOWS: [01:40:13] I had a bachelor's degree.

KLEIN: [01:40:14] In economics and history.

BELLOWS: [01:40:16] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:40:16] And two years, three years Peace Corps experience. And what did you do and what are you doing? I mean, we're almost up to the present.

BELLOWS: [01:40:26] Yeah. Late 2000, I had COSed a couple of months earlier, was staying in the office on this contract. When that was up, I flew back to Lansing. It was really anti-climactic. I started out where. I ended up where I'd started out three years earlier.

KLEIN: [01:40:41] But it's your home.

BELLOWS: [01:40:42] Oh yeah, I mean, it didn't. It was home. These were, you know, my family members and everything. But it was a lot different, oddly different.

KLEIN: [01:40:54] How long did you stay in Lansing?

BELLOWS: [01:40:57] Three months all told.

KLEIN: [01:41:00] I guess if you stayed 30 years, it would be like you never left home.

BELLOWS: [01:41:04] Right. Well, my wife, my girlfriend Nicole, was a good friend of mine during college. We met in the dorms, and she was one of the people I would write those long letters to. When I was home both times, I called people just to try and catch up with folks, and she always was one of those individuals around. So we kept in contact and she came down to visit right before I left briefly, as did some other friends. And so when I went back to Michigan that fall, she was in Chicago and I made a point to go see her often. And I was also on the job market, and it was in D.C. in the career office, the Peace Corps career office and first date of this announcement posted I saw it, caught my eye. Centers for Disease Control is looking for somebody with international experience, does not need a master's in public health. Please forward your CV to this email address. And I did it right then and heard right back and it was by far the best job offer. I was looking at bike messenger, and this is in October, bike messenger in Chicago, working for UPS during the holiday season.

KLEIN: [01:42:11] Yeah. Well.

BELLOWS: [01:42:13] Yeah, I mean, a lot of work, but I was just, it was by far the most interesting offer. But in the course of conversation, it became very clear that I wasn't going to be working in Latin America, that it was going to be African focused.

KLEIN: [01:42:26] The CDC job?

BELLOWS: [01:42:26] The CDC job, and it was going to be HIV, and again, something I had previously little to no experience with. In Atlanta, in a town that I had no intention to move to and knew nothing about. So I got on the plane, flew down with two boxes, and stayed at the youth hostel the first week with a car, rented car, and just drove back and forth to work until I found a place to stay.

KLEIN: [01:42:50] So you went to Atlanta.

BELLOWS: [01:42:52] So I moved to Atlanta. And there, that was that. But I moved there and come to find out that job had been posted at the Peace Corps office because the person who hired me was a volunteer out of Morocco in the '60s.

KLEIN: [01:43:06] And you stayed with the CDC, and now you're at Berkeley.

BELLOWS: [01:43:12] I stayed with CDC two years. I flew to, worked out of Kenya and Uganda and Namibia, Zambia rather, for a little while, in that second year of CDC, and then I worked in Namibia for a couple of months.

KLEIN: [01:43:27] Was it research or education?

BELLOWS: [01:43:30] Program, program work. We were developing training curricula for HIV counseling and testing.

KLEIN: [01:43:34] CDC is or is it AID?

BELLOWS: [01:43:36] CDC was developing this. This is all part of the, what was called the Life Initiative at one point, yeah, but it was something that began under Clinton and ramped up under Bush.

KLEIN: [01:43:46] OK, and you're currently in a?

BELLOWS: [01:43:51] So I came out here. Well, I was CDC during the anthrax attacks, which I thought was fascinating, to see that behind the scenes.

And then with the HIV crisis and then summer 2002, I decided to accept the invite to come to Berkeley for a graduate program. I packed up my things and rode my bike from Boston. I went up to Boston to see Nate Brown and rode my bike down to California.

KLEIN: [01:44:22] Over the mountains.

BELLOWS: [01:44:23] Over the mountains. A little bit longer than Ecuador.

KLEIN: [01:44:26] Yeah, that's great.

BELLOWS: [01:44:28] That was fun. It was a great experience.

KLEIN: [01:44:30] And what's the program, the exact program you're doing now?

BELLOWS: [01:44:33] So I did the master's in public health, did another internship with CDC in Namibia for that summer, and then came back. Graduated in 2004 with my master's in public health. And now I'm doing epidemiology with a focus on health financing reform in Kenya and Uganda.

KLEIN: [01:44:50] OK. Toward the doctorate?

BELLOWS: [01:44:53] Toward a doctorate. This is more of an extensive program evaluation, but implications for health outcomes.

KLEIN: [01:45:01] And what would you like to do once you get your doctorate?

BELLOWS: [01:45:05] I'd like to go back overseas. I mean that experience.

KLEIN: [01:45:08] With a particular bias toward Latin America or?

BELLOWS: [01:45:13] Not anymore. Not anymore.

KLEIN: [01:45:15] Have you been able to keep up your Spanish?

BELLOWS: [01:45:21] Some. I went back in 2003 for a couple of weeks and I keep in contact over the phone with people.



KLEIN: [01:45:29] Great, great.

BELLOWS: [01:45:31] Email. I mean, it gets cheaper and cheaper every year. And then I've got friends in Quito, an ex-pat community. So I keep in contact with people there. In Ecuador or in the situation such as this, there are a lot of people coming up illegally. And so you hear about people and you get phone calls from folks that are doing their thing.

KLEIN: [01:45:54] We won't reveal any of this to the FBI or the INS.

BELLOWS: [01:46:01] But yeah, so I hear from people randomly.

KLEIN: [01:46:06] And so, you know, you really look to a career working internationally.

BELLOWS: [01:46:11] Yeah, I'd like to be overseas again for a short period of time, for a year or two or three.

KLEIN: [01:46:17] So in fact, you know, the question is, it's almost answers itself. What effect did Peace Corps service have on you?

BELLOWS: [01:46:27] No, it was.

KLEIN: [01:46:28] I mean, and I think you've been answering it all through the interview.

BELLOWS: [01:46:33] It was profound.

KLEIN: [01:46:35] Anything else you'd like to add for the National Archives, for the record? You want to sing a song, right?

BELLOWS: [01:46:42] Right. No, that's one part of it. That's good.

KLEIN: [01:46:46] Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]