

Wayne Nishek Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Wayne Nishek

Interviewer: Sharleen Hirschi Simpson

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Biographical Note

Wayne Nishek served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia from 1962 to 1964 in an agriculture program.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Wayne Nishek

May 4, 2011

Bonner's Ferry, Idaho (by phone)

By Sharleen Hirschi Simpson

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

SIMPSON: [00:00:05] Ok, this is Sharleen Hirschi Simpson, and I am interviewing Wayne Nishek on May 4, 2011. And the first question for you, Wayne, is what are you doing at present with your work or where you're living and what all is going on with you at present?

NISHEK: [00:00:43] Oh, I'm sort of in a retirement mode, but still extremely hard working with a number of agencies in our community, a grow program, a master gardener program, the food bank and with the seed distribution plan with manufacturers themselves. I have gotten together over 2,000 packets of garden seeds and passed them out to different agencies and groups to encourage people to start growing gardens and helped organize a number of workshops to teach people who have not grown gardens before, to grow garden because we're in a nine, 10 percent unemployment area here and it's difficult for a lot of folks. So that's keeping me busy. I'm also a member of the Northern Lights, which is an electric cooperative

helping distribute funds that have been raised to help people in rural communities in ways they think they can be helped. And so I'm looking at a project that we're trying to find some sources to get money to put in electric walk-in coolers at several food banks so that you can recycle and harvest game that has been killed on the road, elk, deer, bear, and in the process so it can be used by people who need it. Plus I'm involved with rural water supply, making sure everything is working. We have 11 people per spring, getting the kinks out of it. I've been very involved in some environmental issues, getting rid of noxious weeds. And I have two groups, who were able to get some funds from the state government. And then I trained farmers in the area and people who have noxious weeds and which chemicals to use to get rid of them. Plus I got in 30 days of skiing this winter. And I do a fair amount of horseback riding. I go to town once or twice a week with a horse and buggy. I have three buggies and a wagon and a sleigh. So that's a 12 mile round trip to town once in a while.

SIMPSON: [00:03:47] Wow.

NISHEK: [00:03:48] To save a little funds once in a while, I do a little bartering with people in the community. Yesterday I agreed to spray the barber's lawn in town and get rid of the dandelions in exchange for four haircuts this summer. So I'm keeping very busy.

SIMPSON: [00:04:14] Yeah, sounds like you're still in an extended Peace Corps, Wayne.

NISHEK: [00:04:17] Yeah, every day I don't know how I got things done before. I have a to-do list, every Monday morning I scratch off one and start a new one. And it just keeps me busy.

SIMPSON: [00:04:37] Yeah, well, that's sort of what I think, too. You know, I just retired last year and it's like, holy cow, I ever work. The next question is, I want you to think about back to the year before you joined the Peace Corps and talk about what you were doing then and you know how you

came to decide to join the Peace Corps. Were you were you at university before you joined?

NISHEK: [00:05:13] University of North Dakota and sort of undecided decided, you know what, I really wanted to get my degree and I was working in ag economics for a while, and then ag education and just wasn't certain where I wanted to end up. So I had just completed my second year of college when I went to a workshop in Denver, Colorado, where Sargent Shriver spoke about Peace Corps and made one of his pitches about getting people involved. And I had grown up with a farming family with seven brothers and a sister, and I grew up in the National Farmers Union and the National Farmers Union had started working with the Peace Corps, Dr. Eklin putting together a program for Bolivia. And I picked up pieces of that as we went along. And I guess that I applied and ended up getting accepted for Bolivia.

SIMPSON: [00:06:23] Ok, so basically the reason you joined is because you were wanting to do something and you have heard about it at the right time?

NISHEK: [00:06:33] Certainly. I wanted to do something more than just study, and I wasn't sure what I wanted to study. And a couple of years before that, I had been an exchange student in England at Cambridge working in agriculture and had traveled extensively through Europe, backpacking and picking apples and hops and seeing parts of the world. And I certainly had a travel bug and I did not have any difficulties in communicating with people, even though we didn't speak the same language, you know, kind of doing what you got to do to make each other understand each other. And so I didn't have any hang-ups there and I had a tremendous amount and skills and anything mechanical or whatever and a pretty good organizational skills. Having grown up in 4H clubs and clubs and church kinds of activities and then a lot of agriculture. Since my high school days, I never really stayed at home on our farm. I worked for other farmers and lived at their places and did all the hard work, milking and grinding see and slopping hogs, and realized that life is too short to do that. And so one

Peace Corps came along and the idealism about helping others to help themselves was a very good idea to me.

SIMPSON: [00:08:06] Yeah. Yeah. OK, so did you have a specific country or project in mind when you applied?

NISHEK: [00:08:15] I thought, well, I guess I did not at the beginning, but communication went on and as I recall, that became more specific because National Farmers Union was working on this project to go to Bolivia. And I said I would be willing to serve in that project. So then it finally became more specific.

SIMPSON: [00:08:40] So think back about your friends and families reactions when you went into the Peace Corps. What did they think?

NISHEK: [00:08:50] Oh, I think they were very supportive of the idea. That was they thought, well, we've got a couple of children going in the military or stay in college or go to the Peace Corps and see what's out there on the other side of the pond. And I had a couple of uncles that had served in the military and came back all busted up and I wasn't too keen about that kind of life. And an older brother that was in the Air Force came back somewhat of an alcoholic and a frustrated person. And it didn't appear to be the kind of life that I wanted to live for a while.

SIMPSON: [00:09:37] Yeah. OK, so what was so basically your family was fine with your decision, right?

NISHEK: [00:09:48] Yeah, my family was very supportive, especially my mother and my father was very supportive. I mean, with you know, they were having a tough time making ends meet. But your college bills and we were and, you know, I earned most of my own money. And so it wasn't something that we had, you know, my father wasn't earning enough to educate all of us kids. That day, if you want to go, go.

SIMPSON: [00:10:22] As long as we don't have to pay for it.

NISHEK: [00:10:25] You'll have a little money when you come back. And it was, you know, at that time, \$4000 was a lot. It's enough to buy a new Chevy.

SIMPSON: [00:10:36] Yes.

NISHEK: [00:10:38] You know, I've only bought one new car in my life.

SIMPSON: [00:10:41] Is that right? Were you at all hesitant? It doesn't sound like you were hesitant to join the Peace Corps once you got the information.

NISHEK: [00:10:53] No, I don't think I was very open to the whole fact. I was excited about doing something different and moving out of North Dakota, which is great. I've always thought North Dakota was a great place to be from, far from. And this gave me an opportunity to see more and do more. I've always been a people person. I like being around people.

SIMPSON: [00:11:20] So since you were invited to join this project with the National Farmers Union, how did you go about preparing yourself and your family for the two years that Peace Corps service? Did you do anything special?

NISHEK: [00:11:36] Oh, I don't really recall actually doing anything special other than kind of fill it up from, you know, go through the waiting game, and it could happen and, you know, you need to have other alternatives have one more chance for another job somewhere along the line.

SIMPSON: [00:12:05] Ok, so.

NISHEK: [00:12:09] It got a little bit complicated too because Marj came along with her fluttering eyes.

SIMPSON: [00:12:13] Did you know her before?

NISHEK: [00:12:17] Pardon?

SIMPSON: [00:12:18] Did you know her before you went into Peace Corps training?

NISHEK: [00:12:21] Yes, I did. I knew her a year and a half or two years at least before they joined Peace Corps. And we met a couple of different times at school and meeting and I was dating one of her earlier friends or whatever. So one thing led to another.

SIMPSON: [00:12:48] Ok, let's talk about training. That's always a biggie. What did you think about the training program there in Arizona?

NISHEK: [00:13:03] I thought it was hot. I thought it was rigorous and I think it was very well done. It was probably a little heavy on some of the anthropological stuff, working with the American Indians. And we all know it was an excellent program and I really enjoyed it. You know, I know a lot of social dynamics, kinds of things, and I recall a lot of tension every Thursday and Friday before the letters came out. We're going to be there or not. Yeah, I think it was the yellow slip you were still there, and if it was a pink you were to pick up your documents and go home.

SIMPSON: [00:13:53] And what was interesting, you know, I would not even aware of those days. I mean, I guess I had my head in the clouds. But anyway.

NISHEK: [00:14:05] I remember quite clearly a couple of people were washed out. One of them was actually a neighbor of mine in North Dakota. You know, got his yellow slip or pink slip or whatever it was. No time to talk to anybody, you know, kind of like, just out of there.

SIMPSON: [00:14:30] Were there any, did you have any disappointments about how the training went or anything that was you especially enjoyed?

NISHEK: [00:14:43] Well, I think I enjoyed when we had kind of one on one time with the Maricopa people. Often times there was a bigger group and an anthropologist and whoever was, between us and keeping the dialog going. But I was able to sit down with somebody and dangle my feet in an irrigation ditch and talk about who they are, where they're going, what's

happening, and their lives. Like I got to know them a lot better. That's what I really enjoyed.

SIMPSON: [00:15:24] Did you feel that the training prepared you for what you were going to be doing in Bolivia?

NISHEK: [00:15:35] Um, as far as the cross-cultural, perhaps yes. But as far as technical stuff, no. They did a wonderful job of making sure we were all in very good physical condition. I'll never forget getting up at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.

SIMPSON: [00:15:56] I think the Indians thought we were nuts.

NISHEK: [00:16:00] That's right. I think the Indians thought we were nuts but we were certainly in pretty good shape. We had a couple old timers who didn't run but they were out there doing it. Some guys that were in extremely good physical condition, and some other ones you just couldn't keep up with. Or I couldn't with my short legs.

SIMPSON: [00:16:36] Okay, well, let's go on. This group has such a unique background because then the next thing is we have all different stages of training. Like what did you think of Puerto Rico?

NISHEK: [00:16:53] I really enjoyed Puerto Rico. I thought that was an excellent example of, you know, suddenly we're in a different culture and we don't need another language. And speaking Spanish really made sense versus what we were learning. And it was a test to try it. And it took a little while before we really got out to other people other than other language instructors at the training camps. But all in all, I enjoyed the cultural part of Puerto Rico very, very much. And I remember extremely clearly the little hikes we had to do in the overnight trips and how different people have of that and and had fun with another one. Extremely frustrating, not knowing what to do when they didn't have a flush toilet.

SIMPSON: [00:17:58] Yeah. Well, what can you think? Did you do you remember that hike across the island?

NISHEK: [00:18:12] Yes, I remember that extremely well and I remember actually taking a shortcut.

SIMPSON: [00:18:21] Well, I think a lot of people did.

NISHEK: [00:18:22] A couple of guys I was with actually hitchhiked and caught a bus to, I don't know what it was, but we got a free ride to the point where we were forced to go and did a lot of kicking back.

SIMPSON: [00:18:38] Well, you know, I always sort of think that part of the adaption process, you know.

NISHEK: [00:18:44] I thought, you know, I think we sat down and realized, what are we going to burn? And also walking for two days to get where we're going. And so we took the shortcut and got to close to where we were supposed to be and camped out this way for a day or a half a day and this way for half a day, and experienced as many things as we could, besides just walking down a path.

SIMPSON: [00:19:13] What about Mayaguez, you remember Mayaguez when we went up there?

NISHEK: [00:19:16] I remember that more of the university kind of setting long ago. I don't remember so much about it, but it was pretty dedicated to the language and cross-cultural stuff.

SIMPSON: I remember the beach.

NISHEK: I don't remember jumps and all that. So that was a positive experience.

SIMPSON: [00:19:37] It was kind of a holding pattern. Yeah, OK.

NISHEK: [00:19:43] The other stuff, when we were out drown proofing and rappelling and having fun helping each other, and that to me was very enjoyable. And part of it, I do tie knots and, you know, I do a lot of different things. I so, you know, I had some things to offer and help some folks.

SIMPSON: [00:20:11] Then we went home. What did your family and how did you feel when you got home? You were trying to get ready to go after the training to go to Bolivia. Can you talk about that a little?

NISHEK: [00:20:24] Well, family, you know, there were some real loop hole types of things. And I like I you know, one little thing was that you're not accepted until the last 10 days to get through training. And because I thought it would be something and I think about half of, you know, we hadn't gotten any drop outs or whatever and so on that. And I was also getting married so I had all those things up in the air. Wedding invitations couldn't go out until we were both accepted. So phone call went to the mother in law saying, yes we're coming home and we plan to get married on this date. So the family rushing around and getting things ready for the wedding. And there was a total of three hundred dollars. And so a lot of what was happening this time with family and friends gathered for our wedding. And we're standing around in the church basement, opening presents and knowing that they'd all have to go with the attic of my father in law's house until we got back. The barrister would not leave the basement of the church, just hanging around. And finally, I realized, he needed, the custom was, to give him a bit of money so he could go home. So we didn't have any money. We had to open some presents to give him cash so they can get on with their life. I remember that very clearly.

SIMPSON: [00:22:20] Yeah. None of us had any money then, did we?

NISHEK: [00:22:22] No, we didn't, didn't have anything. What I had I kind of spent on getting my family together. And we had, you know, by a two year supply or whatever it was. We didn't have that much time at home. I think it was nine days or something. Including getting married and trying to

figure out which car to decorate three, to make sure they got the right one. And I still like.

SIMPSON: [00:23:05] They couldn't fool you. All right, let's talk about Bolivia now. Are you there?

NISHEK: [00:23:12] Yes, I am.

SIMPSON: [00:23:15] When we first got what were your impressions? When we first got to Bolivia, we started in La Paz, I guess.

NISHEK: [00:23:24] We started in La Paz and my impressions were, my gosh this place is high and desert looking at the airport. And I remember picking up a couple of suitcases and heading toward the terminal and just getting a pretty good pace didn't make it, ended up with a bloody nose. I had a little altitude sickness the first 24 hours. I really remember being pretty bummed out, because I just didn't have the strength and energy until I got a little bit acclimatized. I started off too fast.

SIMPSON: [00:24:05] You ignored what they said about taking it slow?

NISHEK: [00:24:10] Yeah, well, I would get shifted into a higher gear, but once we were there, I enjoyed La Paz very much, so much of it is still somewhat of a blur, going to and sitting there. And I don't know, whoever it was and whoever the ambassador. Getting your picture taken. And I was just kind of glad to get out of La Paz to where we were going to live and work. And I was anxious to get to work. I wanted to.

SIMPSON: [00:24:55] Can you talk a little bit about what you were where you were eventually ended up and what you were doing?

NISHEK: [00:25:06] Well, we ended up in Portachuelo in the Santa Cruz area. And I remember that we all moved into, I think there were seven of us Peace Corps volunteers all staying in the same house, five or seven, I don't remember for sure. But that was not the ideal living situation and food

situation and waiting and bathrooms and heading out to figure out who our counterparts were and what work we were going to do and come go back and find some folks. Now we have a very bad day and laying in a hammock and doing nothing for two or three days. And, you know, I remember my role, what I do in that situation. Do I help them or do I continue to try to solve my own problems? And so there was some concern there. And so I spent a little bit of time shopping around, looking around, and we finally located a house that was being built a couple of blocks away when we got back, got together with the landlord and I don't know, we negotiated some kind of rent. I don't remember who paid or what, or Peace Corps did. But anyhow, they were willing to listen to some of my ideas when building that house. And we put all tank underground under the bedroom to catch rainwater. So we have water. And because there was no running water and no home, and a little hand pump on it, built a shower, and a long drop latrine and a kitchen with windows on it and a door. And so when they finished and I spent some time building the screen door and putting screens on the windows. And one of the things that I did in the early kitchen is there were no springs anywhere.

NISHEK: [00:27:11] So I cut up the air tube from a bicycle and put on this screen door in the kitchen and you pushed it open and it slammed itself shut. And I remember the first few weeks you were there and we often had people coming over to see that screen door closed by itself. I forget, you know, the laughs and joy. You have somebody open it, let go, and the door slammed shut by itself. So it wasn't long before we had quite a number of people in our area that had their own screen door and some screens on the windows. And so that was quite an accomplishment. We were trying to do something. I remember Marj very clearly with Marcella, her coworker, making the charts and posters talking about e coli and how it catches a ride on the legs of flies and how somebody talked about sprinkling a small handful of flour on cow manure and human waste and wait 24 hours or less. And then go in your kitchen and see if you can find the little white tracks.

SIMPSON: Oh goodness.

NISHEK: And how that got the message across, how important it is to keep flies off of your food. They were able to relate to that very, very well. The little white specs of stuff all over the kitchen. So they realized that screens do work. So those stayed closed.

SIMPSON: [00:29:03] So was your can you describe a typical day for you out there or were they all different?

NISHEK: [00:29:12] I think in my case, there were an awful lot of different because in the beginning I was to work with a cooperative that somehow had been funded with some USAID money and combines had been bought by the cooperative. Combines to harvest rice mechanically and faster and more efficiently. But the cooperatives, the people that kind of ran the machines were more wealthy landowners and they weren't terribly interested if one of those machines ran or not. They wanted their tractor driver or their workers to know how, but they weren't very interested in developing skills to keep those machines going and how to adjust belts. And they had one machine that had less than 30 hours on its power meter and it wasn't working and nobody could figure out what was wrong with it. So I said I would help with it, but I needed at least two or three other combine operators to work with me. And we went through a process of solving the problem. And I grew up on a farm. And so I know about ignition and air and what you need to get an engine to run. And after four or five hours, we finally traced it to a starter that was stuck. All it needed was two drops of oil and a tap with a hammer, and we had a machine running that hadn't run for two years. Well, and the U.S. taxpayer probably spent over one hundred thousand dollars to get it shipped there. So they really were very happy that they learned some new skills. But I really had a difficult time trying to keep the tractor drivers or combine drivers interested in learning new skills. They only used those machines a few weeks out of the year harvesting rice and then they just sat.

NISHEK: [00:31:17] And so, you know, that we did try to get them to take some notes, but, you know, their literacy skills weren't there. So it was kind of

frustrating. And then there were some funds embezzled in the co-op and things weren't working well. And I could see that it was the place I really didn't have a future.

SIMPSON: [00:31:46] Ok, now talking about the 4H clubs.

NISHEK: [00:31:50] Yeah, I was involved with several 4S clubs or 4H clubs as we know them, and the pigs and chickens and cows, and one of the problems was having good quality animals and so got involved with the Heifer Project located in Cochabamba and put in a request for chickens and pigs and cows. And we had to do a lot of training to make sure that people have a decent chicken house to keep them in so they can get eaten by the predators and enough feed and how to feed them and take care of them. And the same with the pigs and then figure out ways to build fencing when there weren't things like water available. And so we used planks from the old salt mills and built fences to keep the pigs in cause you didn't want them running around and picking up diseases from the other local pigs. They're coming from America and they hadn't been in quarantine very long. And but it turned out to be a very, very interesting project. And one of the things that I remember very clearly doing and trying to do is to help different farmers and groups castrate pigs because we wanted to get rid of the scrub male pigs, the boars, so they wouldn't be breeding all of the local sows because some of the Heifer Project animals we brought in were just white boars and they were white and we had some in red and colored. And in order for them to pass on their genetics to the local sows, females, you didn't want them bred by the other boars, that genetics didn't put on a lot of weight. And so it was terribly interesting. And less than the year, you could see results in the amount of hybrid pigs here and pigs grew faster and bigger and they really caught on. And that, I think was doing extremely well at the time when we left a lot of fat from the pigs was being sold to the rice mill near Montero was because they needed fat for the Taiwanese that were working in their rice fields over there. And so they sold the fat for more money than they sold the meat for because they needed it for cooking and such. So it turned into a very profitable thing. And I remember doing that for a while with some people and how well pigs

went off down there and found that they could grow food for them readily and a lot of corn. And you go, I don't know what we call that in Spanish anymore, but this very starchy green bananas. And so there was readily available to turn into fat and pork, and it worked out very well.

SIMPSON: [00:35:18] That sounds good.

NISHEK: [00:35:20] And an offspring of that whole thing was done by the farmers and the extension people realized, well, if we can do this with pigs, why don't we do it with cattle? But it took us quite a while to get a couple of good bulls that were could be used for breeding purposes to crossbreed with the local cattle, which meant also capturing a lot of scrub bulls and castrated him so they wouldn't breed the cows and allow the scrub bull to do it. And then with some problems because they wanted a young bull who shouldn't breed more than 30, 40 cows a year to do 70 or 80. Well, health wise, it just wasn't able to do it without affecting their new bull. So we had to go very slowly there. But I think it turned out very well.

SIMPSON: That's good.

NISHEK: [00:36:21] And then when those things kind of, you know, got going, I found that I would be teaching Spanish classes, looking at some of my old notes, four nights a week at the school and also one at home. Teaching English classes rather than Spanish classes. That was kind of fun. We had a lot of fun doing that. I remember about six months before we left, I got involved with community development and had the local doctor in Portachuelo and the priest and the mayor and the agricultural extension agent and some of the Catholic sisters and people who kind of controlled the town to have one or two meetings to talk about where we're going in this community. How are we going to get there? Who's going to do what? And, you know, there are all kinds of connections are going in and finally getting people to focus a little bit more on what we need to do and some of the things we can rebuild the road between Montero and particularly along with it during the rainy season to actually stop traffic, put a barrier across the road, no and no trucks until it dried up for one or two days, and which

kept people off the road from destroying it because it was so costly to rebuild it. And there was a lot of grief about that. They were pretty upset with the mayor and some of the folks in that project. But in the end, they were much happier because some the dried up, they were able to move and the roads lasted a lot longer and went pretty well.

SIMPSON: [00:38:22] Right. Just a note. When I was subsequently in Paraguay, it was a national rule that you could not travel on the roads when it rained because it was not strong and it was enforced by the army. So you had to have your camping equipment with you in case you had to stop somewhere because they wouldn't let you on the road until it dried.

NISHEK: [00:38:46] Yeah. And, you know, that's great that they did that but a lot of construction going on in the local police. And I don't think a certain amount of bribes, boxes of, and we've got to go to a wedding, but they may get well.

SIMPSON: [00:39:09] Yeah. Yeah. So let's talk about after the end of your first year, do you remember any particularly notable events that stand out in your mind? Or at any point in time, but particularly then?

NISHEK: [00:39:33] Oh, I guess I remember we started to travel a little bit more. We had gone to Cochabamba and we visited other members of our group and have experienced some of the things they were doing, that was kind of interesting and fun. I mean, I kind of remember some frustration things. After one year, approximately a year, we had a change in leadership and the Peace Corps director, or whatever he was. I mean, politics were involved, but it's hard. I don't recall too much about anything too special. Marj and I went on a long vacation.

SIMPSON: [00:40:24] Where'd you go?

NISHEK: [00:40:27] You went to Peru and to Lake Titicaca and went down the coast to Chile, and then crossed over into Argentina and then into Uruguay. And we had planned to take the train back to Santa Cruz. But when we got

there, we learned the train had gone on strike and they didn't expect it to go again for a long, long time. So we're stuck, almost out of money, didn't know how we're going to get home. And I remember very clearly we're staying at a pension near the airport and we're trying to figure out what are we going to do that night. A DC3 airplane flew in and it had a pilot who spoke English and he came from Santa Cruz. And we got a couple of beers together that night. And asked, when are you going back? He said, tomorrow morning. And so after much discussion, he understood our dilemma, and he said you'll have to be up at 4:30 or 5:00. Marj and I were up at 4:30 and 5:00 with our bags packed. And we went with him back to the plane and they drove up 13 head of cattle with horses right up beside the plane. Cut their throats, skinned them, cut the meat out, threw it all in the airplane and Marj got to sit in the cockpit beside the pilot and I remember sitting on a big cow head and that place was buzzing with flies and blood running out the back. And we flew to Santa Cruz and it was only like 30, 40 minute flight.

SIMPSON: [00:42:21] I bet it seemed like a long time.

NISHEK: [00:42:23] It was raining heavily, heavily in Santa Cruz and we landed on that dirt landing strip and that plane didn't go very far and he didn't have to put the brakes on it himself because we were overloaded and opened the door and we said our goodbyes when Marj and I hiked over to the main road and I stopped and changed my pants because they were all bloody. And we caught a bus and we went straight back to Portachuelo and didn't check in with any customs or anything and whatever the Peace Corps rep at that time, you know, what he learned about it was a little upset with us being a week overdue. We had no way to get back in the day. And, yeah, that's what it's going to come back. We just went to work.

SIMPSON: [00:43:22] Yeah, well, that border between Paraguay and Brazil and Bolivia is kind of a no man's land. Well, tell me, where were you when Kennedy was assassinated?

NISHEK: [00:43:42] We were in our little house in Portachuelo. And I don't remember exactly. I think it was like late afternoon, three or four o'clock in the afternoon. And some people came to the house crying and wailing. And it took a while to understand what they were saying and what it was about. And so we finally got our radio turned on and listened and learned that Kennedy had been shot. Our place was jammed for hours with local folks. Neighbors and farmers came into town and Marj's coworkers' family came over and brought us food. It was several days of just being loved up. Yeah, that guy had made an impression on the world.

SIMPSON: [00:44:41] He had, you know, people who were not overseas, like in Latin America and other places, never really realized the impact that and it was his intentions. You know, I know you can bring up all this stuff about his romances and all that kind of stuff, but his ideals or his intentions were, you know, what translated I think. So, OK, you when you finished your Peace Corps time there, what did you feel that you had achieved what you were trying to do there?

NISHEK: [00:45:31] I came back with kind of a feeling that I'd made quite a number of contributions, but no one real strong particular area. I think some of my strong feelings were that we left a lot of wonderful people behind. And I think had I not been married, I would still be living here. I you know, and I remember from late night discussions about wanting to stay and live in Portachuelo and some of the local folks said, we will help you clear land and you can make a living easily raising rice and wheat and pigs, and you know how to do this and that and we'll make it work together. And most of it at that time was terribly excited about throwing it all in all the way. But we did finally pack up and I remember being 60 pounds overweight. So I want to see Pete, yeah, Peter Flivver was in that neighborhood and had extra rope. And so we gave more stuff away about it because it's kind of a blur. It's a little wonderful. You know, a week before we left, the parties had started and just interesting how, you know, people are coming by and bringing food and gifts and all the other. The mayor declared a going away party in town and everybody who was somebody was there. They butchered a pig and a cow, I don't know where the money came for those

things, but lots of red wine and being that went off and a lot of that port and we danced a lot during the night. It was hard to say goodbye. And I guess people really meant to it, even though we were here such a short time. And it took that long, I think, before some of those cultural relationships evolved. I didn't realize that we were so close to those people. It was hard to say goodbye.

SIMPSON: [00:48:18] Yeah, but could you evaluate your service in light of these three goals of the Peace Corps? The first was to promote technical assistance were requested.

NISHEK: [00:48:33] I think I did fairly well there but I did it in different areas. I remember helping build a number of small wells, you know, got together with all the way through the well drilling project, brought him into Portachuelo for a month or two, and we traveled to several communities that I knew well and dug wells and they moved on and I helped make sure that we put sanitary seals on those wells and install hand pumps. And I didn't do all the work myself. I make sure they knew how to do it out, how to take that pump apart. To me it was terribly important that they know how to do those things. And not, when the pump broke down, think it was someone else's fault. And so there were some real successes there and I did a number of latrines in some of the outlying schools and they understood the importance of it. And some kitchens were built with screens on the window. And on the screen door and those things were positive.

SIMPSON: [00:49:48] For the second goal is to promote better understanding of the U.S. Did you think you were able to do that?

NISHEK: [00:49:57] I think so. And I think that some of that was demonstrated a little bit when Kennedy kicked the bucket. They knew we were from the U.S. and they were paying attention to what the U.S. was trying to do, and we had to do a little propaganda there. I remember going out in the Jeep with a big generator on it and ran a movie projector, and we would have a rotating schedule once or twice a month in a village, we could come and

show films on the U.S. and on farming and agriculture and hooking up animals to harness. And people really got to see a lot about what was happening in America. Very interesting. And the next time you meet some of those people, they would ask questions about things they saw in those movies and try to understand them more. And I think that goal was certainly met and then some.

SIMPSON: [00:51:08] Well the third one that they asked about, is to promote better understanding of other people by Americans. And so how do you what do you think about that goal? That would probably be referring to what's happened since you came home.

NISHEK: [00:51:26] Yeah, I think. But I don't know really how to put a handle on that one. I still find to this day find people that are so naive about certain things and start putting down people in other countries and cultures and you haven't worn their shoes, you haven't lived in those countries. And listening to CNN far too much. It is safe to travel in Africa. You know, these people are a wonderful. We had a couple people blowing steam about Pakistan, how they would never go to that country and how they were awful people. You've never met any Pakistani people! They're wonderful people and they love life and are good human beings. You shouldn't prejudge people. So a fair amount in that area and in the volunteer groups that I worked with, when those things come up in discussions and, you know, we do have a number of poo people in our community and last week we handed out 7,000 pounds of food to people who need food. And I think some of the dialog during and afterwards, do some of these people really need food? Well, that's not our job to judge whether they need it or not. The point is, let's put food on their table.

SIMPSON: [00:53:08] So through the years, have you continued any kind of involvement either in Bolivia or? I know you've done continuing Peace Corps involvement. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

NISHEK: [00:53:23] I think after Peace Corps Bolivia, we finished college and then worked with American Indians and lived on an Indian reservation in

Nevada for a year working with the Paiutes. And we both went back to school, Marj got her degree and I still had a year to go. But we had enough money to go back to school after that year, and I went back and finished college and then we moved quite a few of the Indian leaders throughout Nevada in the 17 reservations and colonies. And somehow we got a dialogue going and they asked if I would come to Nevada and help organize the Inter Tribal Council of Nevada with the Paiutes, Goshute, Shoshone, and Washoe tribes. So I worked as deputy director for three and a half years, the only non-Indian on the staff. And we got a whole lot of money and started out programs and feedlot programs and set up a program where the tribal chiefs of every reservation that we picked up on the first Monday of every month to have breakfast together to talk about and communicate where are we in this, what are we doing together, what can we do to improve things, the steps we are getting on the school board and taking part in who have the power and the only thing keeping track of them on horseback, you know, on down the road, you could see what's happened with many of them, of course, and getting back America and making a good living right now. Many of them are. And after that Nevada thing then we were kind of wanted to do something else. And I spent one year working with a local community action training corporation, which required my being in Oakland, California. About a week or month of working with African Americans and people in Las Vegas and many little communities, doing community organization in Nevada. Then somehow Marj and I got the travel bug again so we applied to Peace Corps and we went to India then as associate director in the Punjab area and Ariana, which is right on the Pakistan border. So it's been almost two full years in Peace Corps in India working on new projects. It's been an terribly interesting experience. We lived in Delhi for three months, then transferred to Chanagar, an outlying district capital, and had a great experience with some very interesting programs. One with family planning to prevent men and women from reproducing and the other one was castrating bulls again and artificial insemination of buffalo to produce more milk. So it's a very interesting couple of programs, but we left when the war broke out between India and Pakistan. Politics are involved. Nixon backed Pakistan and Indira Gandhi said to President Nixon, we're the world's largest

democracy and you are backing our enemy. I'm asking Americans to leave. And so we had to leave.

NISHEK: [00:57:16] Well, it was, you know, a lot of frustrating politics and Peace Corps wanted me to go to Jamaica to serve one year as an associate director there. But something about Jamaica being so close to the East Coast and parents and girlfriends and boyfriends flying over and volunteers going back on weekends. And I saw a lot of politics. And the one week that I was in Washington getting ready to go to Jamaica, and I finally decided that I just didn't want to be a part of that. And I had learned from one of my old Potawatomi Indian friends that I used to know in Nevada that they had a small tribe in Idaho called the Cupie tribe, with 56 left and the people at the Bureau of Indian Affairs didn't know what to do with them. Indian Health didn't know what to do with them. And the local government and city council here and county commissioners were just fed up with them. They'd stolen almost all of their land through the years for a bottle of wine and signature here and they'd hire them a few weeks out of the year to stack bales and drive a truck hauling grain.

NISHEK: [00:58:30] And the rest of the year they were unemployed and a tremendous amount of alcoholism and a lot of social problems. And so we decided to, they said we'll pay your way out Wayne, for your gas or mileage, if you want to drive out to Idaho to look at it. And I remember coming to Bonner's Ferry in a cold wet rainy day and went to the sheriff's office and asked for the Indian reservation. And he had his big cowboy boots up there smoking a cigar. And he looked at me and he said, sonny, why do you want to go up there, I got seven in the jail today. I remember him leaning forward and picking up a big brass ring with a key on it. Tossed it to me, and he said go down that hall and unlock the door, let yourself in and throw the key back. And when you want out, shout and I'll come and let you out. I went back and spent an hour and a half, two hours, talking with the seven people that were in jail and realized these guys are in here for petty crime and whatever, and I saw a real need in our own culture.

NISHEK: [00:59:47] So I shouted and the sheriff let me out. I went out and told Marj we were staying, she wasn't terribly happy because it was such a miserable, miserable day. But we ended up staying and worked with the tribe for two years and got a constitution and bylaws together and finally got them talking together and got the county commissioners and the school district helping out a little bit, some tutoring with the children. And we finally got two Indian students to graduate from high school. The first two that finally made it. Got an alcoholism program going, a little bit of a Head Start program, and money grant to build a community center and build seven new houses. The tribe didn't have a population enough but after working with a neighboring tribe one hundred twenty miles away and stretching some rules, they approved seven houses to be built here in this community. And so we finally got that done. And after a couple of years, things were moving fairly well. And then we got antsy again and went to Tanzania to work with the Lutheran Church of America, building a secondary technical school. And spent three years now without running water and electricity and working and building a school from scratch and making bricks. And smuggling blackboard paint in from a neighboring country because you couldn't get it in Tanzania. Then went to work for the Swedish government, developing an appropriate technology project and did that for four years. That was a wonderful project, training people to build ox carts, wheel barrows, and grain storage facilities and set up machines and solar cookers. And just a lot of things in the program is still ongoing. And my coworker, after we left, became prime minister of the country.

SIMPSON: [01:01:54] Oh wow. Of Tanzania. Wow.

NISHEK: [01:01:59] And he kept things going quite well until he retired. We had a welcoming hand if we went back to Tanzania.

SIMPSON: [01:02:09] Yeah, I guess so.

NISHEK: [01:02:12] And then after that, we came back to Idaho again and worked with the Cupi tribe for another two years and realized that, you know, they

needed an economic base, there's just no way they can continue to make house payments and raise families and buy gas and food and whatever. And so we were able to work with the guys in Agnone when we lived here earlier that owned some land along the Cupi river. And so the tribe was able to help get a grant to work with the Best Western motel management folks. And they got really excited to work with the tribe and set up a little corporation kind of thing and bought the land to build a motel restaurant. And it's the largest employer in the county right now. And the tribe is all driving new cars.

SIMPSON: [01:03:12] Does it have a casino too?

NISHEK: Pardon?

SIMPSON: Does it have a casino too?

NISHEK: [01:03:17] They have a casino. And the population is now a hundred and sixty seven people.

SIMPSON: [01:03:30] Ok, now, so you're still, go on with your story, you've got the motel and the restaurant and casino.

NISHEK: [01:03:41] No, at that time it was not a casino, just the motel restaurant. And a few years later, when I went back to Peace Corps and was not working there, the person that replaced me in the tribe got together. And they then realized that there is money to be made in gambling. And we're so close to the Canadian border and they love to gamble, too. And so they built the casino. It started off small and now it's expanded and they're doing quite well. And education has become important to the tribal members, most of them now graduate from high school and a couple have gone on and gotten their doctorate or master's. And so the big change is going on, but still a lot of work to be done. And now they have resources, but I'm not sure that they're the happiest people here. I'm sure you know where they are going and whether I have the energy to get more involved again.

SIMPSON: [01:04:51] Are you or did they make you an honorary member of the tribe?

NISHEK: [01:04:57] I wouldn't call it an honorary. But I am invited to all of their Christmas dinners and Thanksgiving dinners. And whenever an old person dies, I'm one of the first ones they get a hold of to come to the wake and go to the wake processing of things out there. And I'm still very respected and so is Marj as a person in the tribal community.

SIMPSON: [01:05:22] So Wayne, would you say your Peace Corps service had an effect on what you chose to do the rest of your life for the rest of your life after you got out?

NISHEK: [01:05:36] Oh, I think it certainly has had a role and I ended up, you know, leaving here. And we went to joined the program in South Africa with the University of Arizona, where I worked four years setting up the Nac Engineering Department and the soon to and after spending four years there and Peace Corps was there. And I worked developing programs where volunteers can work with different villages, developing gravity flow irrigation systems and just enjoying, again, seeing Peace Corps and their energy and develop training programs. So their training was more relevant to what they were going to do in their villages and part of the training was making sure they had a coworker into training and worked with them for the last few weeks of training. They and their coworker would work together and put together a plan of work. So when he was finally sworn in, they knew what they were going to do together. It wasn't like we didn't know every day, you know, trying to find a need and fill it.

SIMPSON: [01:06:45] Yeah, well.

NISHEK: [01:06:46] They knew what they were going to do.

SIMPSON: [01:06:48] It was pretty pretty. They didn't really know what they were doing when we were in.

NISHEK: [01:06:56] And so then I kind of became an opening in Peace Corps, a training director in Lesotho, and my contract had finished up with the University of Arizona. So I threw my hat in the ring and I became training director for three years in Lesotho and worked with helping new program get started in South Africa. And so we were there during apartheid and Mandela took over and de Klerk stepped out. So we had some very interesting times, stressful times. And so I really enjoyed that. And my three years were up there. I threw my hat in the ring for a country director position and West Africa, and I was chosen for the job.

SIMPSON: [01:07:48] In where?

NISHEK: [01:07:50] In West Africa, in The Gambia. So I became. Peace Corps had this rule at Kennedy and Shriver put up that you couldn't stay longer than five years in Peace Corps. And I've always agreed with that. But in my case, I ended up staying seven and a half years because while we were in the Gambia, there was an overthrow of the government and I was about ready to leave, but Peace Corps Washington realized that it was too risky to bring someone else in because I knew all these escape routes to the neighboring countries and had very good relations with all the ministries and they needed security for our volunteers. The military leaders that took over within 24 hours, came to the Peace Corps office and said, Wayne, I don't care if everybody else from the USA leaves, the NGOs, we want you and your volunteers to stay in. If anybody gets out of, you know, we'll straighten things out. And that got to Washington. And they say, well, will you stay another two and a half years until we find you a replacement and things settle down and so I did.

SIMPSON: [01:09:07] So was that the leader of the coup that came to you?

NISHEK: [01:09:09] Pardon?

SIMPSON: [01:09:12] The leader of the coup d'état came to you to say that?

NISHEK: Yeah.

SIMPSON: Wow, wow.

NISHEK: [01:09:16] I knew him personally. And you let it be known that he wanted volunteers to stay and help rebuild his country.

SIMPSON: [01:09:25] That's great. That's great. Are you writing your own memoirs, Wayne?

NISHEK: Pardon?

SIMPSON: Are you writing your memoirs?

NISHEK: [01:09:34] I'm not writing anything. I don't even like checks anymore. I haven't written a check in seven years. Marj takes care of all financial things in our family and I have sore knees, getting on my knees once in a while begging to get a little cash. Well, but, you know, the Peace Corps, when we finished up in the country director and moved back here to Idaho, I put a lot of volunteer work with the Land O'Lakes Corporation in Minnesota and went to Nigeria twice to do training programs and repair and maintenance of irrigation pumps. And I went to the Philippines two different times and did training programs and gravity pull irrigation on the isolated little island of Palawan and sort of did a lot. Then started doing a lot of traveling then to Australia a couple of times, then Indonesia two years ago, and now I'm ready to go somewhere else again.

SIMPSON: [01:10:54] All right, that's great. Do you have any last thoughts that you would like to write before I turn off this recording?

NISHEK: [01:11:04] Well, I guess I'd really like to try to figure out what I'm going to do with this second half. I'm seventy now, half way to one hundred and forty. And just wondering, what am I doing for the next 70 years?

SIMPSON: [01:11:19] Well, that's always a challenge.

NISHEK: [01:11:21] But I've got a very busy busy three by five list.

SIMPSON: [01:11:26] All right.

NISHEK: [01:11:27] It's been great talking to you.

SIMPSON: [01:11:29] Yeah. So I'm going to I'm going to stop recording now and.

[END OF INTERVIEW]