

Peter Burr Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
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Biographical Note

Peter Burr served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia from 1962 to 1964 on an agriculture project (Bolivia II).

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Peter Burr

June 20, 2012
Branson, Missouri

By Sharleen Hirschi Simpson

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

SIMPSON: [00:00:02] Ok, today is June 20th 2012. This is Sharleen Hirschi Simpson, and I'm interviewing Peter Burr, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia II group in 1962 to 1964. OK, Peter, why don't you think back about those first, you know, before you went in the Peace Corps. What was it that made you decide to go into the Peace Corps?

BURR: [00:00:37] Well, I liked the concept of a people. The people contact me and my ordinary and typical Americans. I feel that I felt that too much of the image that people had in other countries of Americans would be gained from the world like a detached technical person who wrote the diplomatic corps that many times these people did not engage in people to people contact them when they were into these so-called underdeveloped or third world countries. They had a tendency to say congregate in colonies rather than associating with people and probably the majority of people in those countries that they associate with people like high

governmental personnel. I also felt that many employees of foreign companies who went to these countries were had a tendency also to congregate in poverty. And they also had somewhat of a tendency of, from what I read and what I heard on the news, that they maybe tended to look down on people in the country in which they were located. So I thought really that they also like the concept of working together with maybe having the intimate contact with people in the country. And, you know, personally, I was getting kind of restless and felt like traveling and maybe changing careers and lifestyles. And I felt that by joining the Peace Corps, that might open up new new avenues for me. OK.

SIMPSON: [00:02:34] So how did you hear about Peace Corps?

BURR: [00:02:37] News and news news broadcasts, both radio and TV. I was one of those young Americans who was very optimistic with the election and JFK.

SIMPSON: [00:02:53] Ok, so when you decided to join the Peace Corps, did you have any specific country or project that you had in mind that you wanted to try to get to where you wanted to go?

BURR: [00:03:08] And I really I always think I was taking something of South America or Latin America because I had I did know some Spanish. I had traveled in Mexico previously. So so was kind of inclined to go to Latin America. And also the Peace Corps sent me a very encouraging letter. They said they were looking for volunteers to work in programs of a very bitter experience and dairy farming and work for a dairy agency which sold them for dairy cattle production. I guess they kind of felt it was a logical choice.

SIMPSON: [00:03:49] Yeah, you probably premium because there weren't probably that many people with your experience. So what were your friends and families reactions when you decided to go? Were they surprised that they worry about you or what?

BURR: [00:04:06] No, they were not surprised. They back that they were a little bit disappointed because I was going to wait for maybe two or three years and I thought a little bit about his dictation because I was so up with my father and the family farm and aside from my work on the outside. I also provided quite a little help on the farm work. But I felt that my horizons there in Massachusetts were kind of limited. And so they were they said, go ahead, get to experience. Yeah. We can hire somebody else to take your place.

SIMPSON: [00:04:45] All right. So. What project can you tell us a little bit about when you received the notice that you were accepted and what project you were asked to be part of?

BURR: [00:05:01] Well, I was asked to be part of this Bolivian project, and the government said the government had built a plant there, which is known to people and they needed volunteers to work with the dairy farmers, improving dairy production in the area. They also painted some pictures of Cochabamba, which were quite encouraging. And rather than giving the image of going to a remote village that said you're going to be located in a small city with all kinds of conveniences and so forth, which is a little bit contrary to the image of a Peace Corps man going out to remote villages.

SIMPSON: [00:05:40] Yeah, well, that's the image that was there. And I guess that OK, so did you do anything special to get ready to go to the Peace Corps or prepare yourself or just put up your suitcase?

BURR: [00:05:55] I did a little. I went to the local library and

SIMPSON: [00:05:58] Found out where Bolivia was? That's what I did.

BURR: [00:06:01] I knew where Bolivia was, very much so. In fact, that my first recollection of Bolivia was and I'm dating myself during World War Two, I was reading an article in Reader's Digest it this article is quite critical of me at that time. And of course, it occurred in Bolivia as being just in the country where my head was mined. I didn't know where the tropical areas

of the country. And maybe that's where I first found out about Simón Patiño.

SIMPSON: [00:06:34] Ah, Patiño, yeah.

BURR: [00:06:34] Because they they thought that maybe an American program was not at that time. This would be for the agrarian reform, but to tell that our program was not effective and there was quite a bit of corruption and misuse of funds.

SIMPSON: [00:06:53] Well, you knew more than most of us then.

BURR: [00:06:56] And furthermore, I think I maybe read a little bit about Bolivia from grade school geography. And we picture Bolivia at that time as being a high desert plateau, which they had the Amazon Indians and also read another book. I took a journey one time in university, took the genetics course, and the professor, I think, was quite concerned about maintaining racial, pure racial purity. And of course, that's one way that that happens when you look at that time, which we race conscious and segregation. Yeah, but anyway, he used as an example maybe that because of the mixture of people, races and reported races, that kind of deteriorated.

SIMPSON: [00:07:53] Ok, OK. Now let's go back to the training where you got to training in Arizona. What were your impressions? What did you think?

BURR: [00:08:05] Well, when he got off the plane, I was greeted by a blast of hot air, but Bob Woff was there to greet us. And he he made us feel right at home and he took us to get to the dormitories at the Arizona State. And that's where we were a number of weeks.

SIMPSON: [00:08:29] So what did you do primarily in the training? What did what was your what were the most outstanding memories that you have of that training?

BURR: [00:08:41] I think some of the training, for instance, on the orientation class is about Bolivia, and we had about two or three different so-called authorities of Bolivia with a new series of lectures. And it seemed to be from the particular perspective, the first first lecture was spent close to that time in remote Indian villages and the image of Bolivia as being a remote village. People would find Indians and everything was very primitive, limited, and many of the people, of course, did not speak Spanish. You better learn Quechua.

SIMPSON: [00:09:31] What did you think of the language classes?

BURR: [00:09:34] Well, a language that has been quite effective past I have a bit of a basis in Spanish, so.

SIMPSON: [00:09:46] What about getting up at 3:00 a.m. to do all that?

BURR: No problem.

SIMPSON: You were used to doing that with the dairy probably.

BURR: [00:09:53] In fact, it was better to be a real worry because that was cooler. But we didn't like we didn't mind running it. Yeah. And it was fun to climb up the ropes on, you know.

SIMPSON: [00:10:06] So what did you what about Puerto Rico and about Puerto Rico? Was that experience different for you?

BURR: [00:10:14] Not exactly a Puerto Rico, but it certainly was what was required because I like the greenery, just a round of Arizona. And I enjoyed the physical training in Puerto Rico, some of the intensity rappelling down the dam with a little bit hair raising. But we managed, and I did have some association with it. Sometimes the tendency to wander around and explore and maintain one of the reasons would may be invite me into their houses and they want to talk to me because I could talk a little Spanish. And so it's quite interesting and. So they always receive me

very well. I felt a little bit ashamed of myself because they're not NARA in Massachusetts. They were quite a few quarters of Puerto Rican immigrants probably go brought here to work in tobacco harvesting and grazing. And they were kind of looked down upon in their area. And that doesn't seem to Michelle. I was being treated very positively.

SIMPSON: [00:11:29] And you didn't think that they would have gotten the same treatment in your.

BURR: [00:11:33] Yeah, so we're trying to see if, in fact, anybody with a Spanish name was at that time was kind of looked at it as being for the.

SIMPSON: [00:11:46] Ok, well, we had an extended training, as you recall, where we ended up in Miami. What did you think when you got to Miami and we heard the Kennedy speech about the missile crisis?

BURR: [00:12:04] Well, he said, I was actually a little bit concerned of being right there on the court. I said, if we're going to be bombed, maybe Miami is going to be the first place

SIMPSON: [00:12:15] 90 miles away.

BURR: [00:12:17] Yes, but I was not too worried, however, because I felt that this crisis would probably be resolved. And I did not think that it seemed at that time that we did not get it. We were not advised of the dangerous situation, was maybe to keep us volunteers kind of at ease.

SIMPSON: [00:12:41] And all the people from Miami were leaving and we were still there. So what did you think about the Vermont where he ended up there? Did you ever consider that maybe we would never get to Bolivia?

BURR: [00:12:54] I was wondering, as I said, would we? I know what he said when we landed at the airport, the airport was only about 50 miles to my home here. I'm going home again. And anyway, the training in Vermont

was quite interesting and so forth, and I didn't feel really had it. It was kind of an unstructured situation.

SIMPSON: [00:13:21] We were kind of, I guess, in limbo. Ready to go, but not quite able to be there yet.

BURR: [00:13:28] We had some we had a little physical training course up there, too. And the volunteers complained about the cold in November. And I was used to.

SIMPSON: [00:13:38] It didn't bother you. OK, well, so now let's go back to when we first got to Bolivia. What were your impressions once you actually set foot in the airport or.

BURR: [00:13:53] Well, I set forth and then I got off the plane. I could feel that we were at a very high altitude and so forth and so forth, but nothing I didn't feel like I was going to faint. I had been at some high altitude because. But then again, we were taken from the most notable part and was very impressed by the view of a pop up on the level. And here there's a whole series of unfolding before you. And I think at that time, that early morning local time, we had a view that tools, which was a very impressive view. And then, of course, when really I was at the hotel to play palace, we were advised to rest. Well, I couldn't I couldn't sleep in the afternoon. I went down the street, looked everything very interesting. We didn't street markets. When he came back for supper, everybody was asking, where have you been squabbling around the city? Is it worth your time? You actually take a risk notice at that particular time?

SIMPSON: [00:15:18] Yeah, OK.

BURR: [00:15:21] And was contrasted as maybe a later question.

SIMPSON: [00:15:26] That's OK. Go ahead.

BURR: [00:15:27] How much to the contrast in the population here with people? For instance, your view of the Caucasian race requested conventional wisdom to try to get some anyway to talk to controllers who had their own particular address and so forth, and then also the street vendors.

SIMPSON: [00:15:49] But a lot of color and. Yes, and textures. So, OK, now then we went to college, but we have I don't know about you, but I have I that was a hair raising trip for me on those narrow roads.

BURR: [00:16:09] You sure it was a hair raising trip to me. Much of the way I was driving.

SIMPSON: [00:16:14] Oh, you were driving. Oh my gosh.

BURR: [00:16:15] And I was maybe being extra cautious because I did not. And I guess I get criticized for one of the leaders of the group because I was going too slow. That's a way. This is a very rough road, those gravel and so forth. And I want to be careful with this vehicle is never mind, we've got to get the culture far before it gets dark. And it's kind of a hair raising drive.

SIMPSON: [00:16:45] Peter, how old were you when you went in the Peace Corps?

BURR: [00:16:48] Thirty two.

SIMPSON: [00:16:48] Thirty two. So you were a little bit older than some of the

BURR: [00:16:51] I was older, one of the older members of the crew. We did. I know when we started the initial training that we had a number of people I think of in the 60s and 70s, and I don't quite understand why they were they were rejected or did not pass.

SIMPSON: [00:17:06] I don't I don't know. I know Ralph Long was.

BURR: [00:17:10] Yeah, I know there was a gentleman named Ezra.

SIMPSON: [00:17:13] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

BURR: [00:17:16] I guess he did not complete the training.

SIMPSON: [00:17:19] And well, who knows how they decided you would stay and he would go. Oh who knew.

BURR: [00:17:26] No, no, no. Oh no, no, no. I mean it was it was kind of a I don't know just what criteria they didn't use.

SIMPSON: [00:17:33] Yeah. I don't think anybody really knew. Yes. OK, so tell me a little bit about what you were doing in your job in Cochabamba. You're working with the steel plant or

BURR: [00:17:49] And we worked at the steel plant, and it seemed at first that the head of the plant or the Lewis padrone and I could hear all these volunteers here. And you didn't and you didn't quite know what to do with this. But I want to make use of you guys, you guys back and so forth. You're not here just to be what we call headee directativa. No way is there any way we can contribute. So then we developed a program with individual cow recordkeeping, which we tried to work with in the States. This is a program which I would visit periodically, not clean, take no place to take milk samples and record the milk at the production of each cow, which were used in selection and breeding and so forth. And so I was so wrong. Said that the interesting to start a program that started here in this country, because actually we don't want just want to put dairy cows in the ones who should be keeping and maybe rejecting. And Eric Schmidt also had to work in this similar program. So I guess we were the ones that really set up the program and trained the other volunteers. The young ones. Yes.

SIMPSON: [00:19:23] Yeah, OK.

BURR: [00:19:25] And that was my primary goal and work for the first year and getting that program under way. And I also worked somewhat with the

Association of Dairy Producers Association, in particular the day they came in and enjoyed it. Too much concrete that I used to go to their office maybe once a week for a few hours a day, maybe get their orientation, their point of point of view on dairy farming and Cochabamba and the frustrations of farmers, which I was accustomed to listening to in the state.

SIMPSON: [00:20:02] In the state. Yeah, that sounds like your job was a good fit for your skills. Logical fit. Not everybody had a good fit for them. You were you were lucky, it sounds like.

BURR: [00:20:16] Why we volunteered to work with the CEO. I think in general we were lucky. We felt we had a place to. Yeah. And we are part of the structure and that's good.

SIMPSON: [00:20:27] So even when you weren't working, what were you what did you do with your leisure time? Did you. What kinds of things did you do? Did you live with the family to the right? Did you live with the family or did you live.

BURR: [00:20:44] Yes, I've lived with the family. It was kind of an interesting case. I lived with the lady. Patty was said she had an apartment near the Plaza Colon, if you recall there in Cochabamba. And she was a lady from Luxembourg. And she was kind and kind of temperamental and so forth. And and she and her husband had come to Bolivia after World War Two, and they were worried that Europe was going to be involved in another war that's related to World War Two. Luxembourg, of course, was part of the German empire. And so she and her husband and their son came to Bolivia because they thought it'd be a good refuge from the European wars and so forth. And unfortunately, they were swindled in Bolivia.

SIMPSON: [00:21:40] Oh, dear.

BURR: [00:21:41] I guess they came with quite a bit of money. But then when they lost it in Bolivia and her husband ran off with a boyfriend, so she had to set up their own business, I guess she was a dressmaker. So that's how

she made her living. But from the start, I noticed that she had quite a few resentments against Bolivians and used to go home. What they call it would be under her notice you of that and many I got wrong. All right. Whether she got tired of me sometimes that if I invaded by certain Bolivians to house because she felt that, well, she felt they might want to be robbed.

SIMPSON: [00:22:26] Oh, yeah.

BURR: [00:22:29] That I'm I did meet a number of interesting people. She will contact with some other fellow Europeans that were in refuges in Japan, but say,

SIMPSON: [00:22:42] Ok, did you have a roommate?

BURR: No.

SIMPSON: No, you just, it was just you.

BURR: [00:22:46] Thing is, however, that after a few months, it became kind of difficult to live with her. Oh, OK. And you recommended that I maybe should seek water somewhere else. And eventually we did have a breakup. And I think she was also distressed because I was going out with you.

SIMPSON: [00:23:06] Oh, dear.

BURR: [00:23:08] So I eventually I moved into another place, which is actually a better location of their collection of Cochabamba cable, which which is much, much nicer location. There I stayed until I got married.

SIMPSON: [00:23:25] Ok, did you get married after Peace Corps?

BURR: [00:23:32] No, before. On December 26, 1963.

SIMPSON: [00:23:35] Wow. I didn't realize.

BURR: [00:23:36] Day after Christmas Day.

SIMPSON: [00:23:38] After Christmas. Wow. OK, well I was a pretty significant change for you

BURR: [00:23:45] Then, that's for sure. I didn't expect to get married in Bolivia.

SIMPSON: [00:23:50] Yeah. Yeah. Well, and so then she came home with you.

BURR: [00:23:56] Yes, ma'am. Yeah, he came home plus I adopted a son too. So.

SIMPSON: [00:24:02] Ok, so think about the end of your first year and were there any outstanding events come to your mind when you think back on your Peace Corps experience? Of course I guess meeting Yolanda.

BURR: [00:24:21] Yeah, that was a radical change.

SIMPSON: [00:24:23] Anything else that about the experience there that particularly stand out in your mind?

BURR: [00:24:29] Well, of course I felt that some I felt some at times, sometimes maybe frustrations with working with the Libyan farmers and structural limitations because they're included in Culture Club, because it had the agrarian reform back around 52 or 53. And I felt that so many of the farms that you find were maybe too small to really be economically effective and they did not have adequate irrigation water. And you know how it is only about one parent here you have the rainfall. Here you have a drought and there are many structural limitations. Yeah.

SIMPSON: [00:25:13] And did you ever consider staying in Bolivia?

BURR: [00:25:16] Yes.

SIMPSON: [00:25:18] What made you change your mind?

BURR: [00:25:20] Well, I came home and my parents really didn't want to hear me leaving and they really missed me, and that furthermore, I was kind of a little frustrated at first when he came back and I kind of had to get the American ways to manage the people again and. And I did have I did have work immediately, but I worked work for a while on a tobacco farm. And it worked in the paper factory. In the meantime, he had applied for permanent employment with the U.S. Department of Primary School Administration. Eventually, I was selected. And then, of course, I worked into that job, which for 30 years, I guess I became comfortable with this position, so I did not feel like maybe moving back to Bolivia.

SIMPSON: [00:26:22] So, yeah. So you felt like it would be better to stay?

BURR: [00:26:26] Yes. And furthermore, our son Alexis is now happily enrolled in an American school. He got a long time. It didn't take long to learn the language.

SIMPSON: [00:26:40] So that think back, where were you? Do you remember when Kennedy was assassinated?

BURR: [00:26:48] Oh, yes. Everywhere you go, I will tell you the whole story. OK, I take the vacation down in November, down the alphabet to the countryside. And I saw the and also ended up in Peace Corps volunteers camped out in the real penny right at the end of civilization. Now, I remember that there was, it was a oven. They're made of Adobe, the lady with the use of a debate grid, just like they did in the old days, colonial days in our country. And there was a fire in it that ripped off the clothes. And I stayed there for a few days and I walked over from the countryside and I guess one thing lead to another, you know, I was on the truck together with a bunch of a bunch of campesinos who is also one Caucasian man with a I guess he was an engineer technician. He talked to me quite a bit because he felt maybe more interesting to talk to me than

most of the time host that I'd made a point that I noticed him in that clearing. This is where it seemed to me like you're doing you're cultivating up and down is not going to cause erosion. Agency be concerned that you're more concerned about having the land cleared.

SIMPSON: [00:28:18] Yeah, probably didn't have any farming background.

BURR: [00:28:21] Yeah, well, you know, up the area, I went from there to an encampment of the Bolivian Development Corporation. And I arrived at the encampment on a Friday, November 23rd. The people in the encampment said your president has been assassinated. What? I could hardly believe it. I thought assassination that's way in the past history.

SIMPSON: [00:29:00] Or in other countries.

BURR: [00:29:01] Yeah, I know we had assassination in this country. Anyway, so I stayed there overnight. And they were prepared to go back up to La Paz. I right, the car not being something is going to take a take a truck from there up to La Paz, right in the cab and. Well, we got delayed because there's just one stream. So the confito would not let anybody pass until next morning, and then, of course, he wants her to get up in the stream and guide a path for the truck. And in when they arrived in La Paz in the evening, it was a tough truck ride, which is the highest point. We had to push a truck a little bit. It was loaded too much and there I bought a paper and there and there in the headlines was that Kennedy's assassin had been shot. You were describing the Ruby assassination. I was all the more astonished, I could hardly believe it. But that night I was preparing for the next phase of my trip was going to be to the point of sale, so I hopped on the bus and talked about the bus depot to see my. And in the meantime, the way my baggage was misplaced, I guess we change Washington a little, but I guess the employees forgot to put my baggage on the bus. So I went to a barber shop to have a shave and so forth. And the barber commented about, it's a shame that your president has died and so forth, expressed a sympathy over the at the hotel where he stayed

at the hotel. He also wanted to comment on that. He says recently Justice Douglas visited us. He talked to the hotel. Very, very impressive man.

SIMPSON: [00:31:31] It was pretty and a shattering experience,

BURR: [00:31:35] A very shattering. I could hardly believe it.

SIMPSON: [00:31:38] Because I don't know about you. But one of the reasons I went into the Peace Corps was Kennedy. OK, so you're talking about

BURR: [00:31:49] I was, yes, a Kennedy, in fact, a few years previously when I was still a student of university. All right. You worked in Massachusetts. Kennedy come to the university when he was a senator. You seem to be quite an idealistic, dynamic person, and I kind of thought I'm a little bit mistaken now at that time, but I thought maybe Eisenhower was kind of staid and stodgy.

SIMPSON: [00:32:18] But I think Kennedy appealed to the young people because we are so tired of the Cold War. And the idea, you know, his ideas of being able to cross boundaries and go out and do all these things was very attractive to young people. So, did you go to any of the masses? I mean, I know where I went down to Sucre and all the every little wide spot in the road had a flag flying at half mast, the day after.

BURR: [00:32:51] I don't recall flags flying at half mast. I know, I realize that Kennedy, was very much admired in Bolivia and also I am so of rescued.

SIMPSON: [00:33:10] So you got married in Bolivia, was it complicated to get married in Bolivia?

BURR: [00:33:16] Well, I was married twice because in Boliva, in order for marriage to be legal, you have to go through the civil ceremony.

SIMPSON: [00:33:25] Civil ceremony and then the church one.

BURR: [00:33:26] Religious is up to you.

SIMPSON: [00:33:29] OK, I see.

BURR: [00:33:30] We were married. I was religious ceremonies. Both are very unusual because Yolanda worked for the Institute of Marriage. There was a Methodist institution, in fact, and I met her at the Methodist Church in Cochabamba because I went to the Spanish service and did the union service for four Americans. OK, maybe I kind of want to integrate myself in the country. I want to see much of the sermon I could understand. But marriage was not and was not complicated. We had a simple ceremony, and it was unique because very few people get married in Protestant ceremonies and we looked at that time

SIMPSON: [00:34:21] Not too often.

BURR: [00:34:23] It's much more prevalent now because the evangelical churches have become much more common.

SIMPSON: [00:34:30] So talking about your experience in Bolivia, what do you think were your major accomplishments at the time in your time there?

BURR: [00:34:43] Well, I think the program that you set that every production records, I think was. I hope it will continue, unfortunately. Eric, Eric is not here, and I would hope he could have given us more information about this continuation of work. Then I also have to get that program set up, debris production, testing and handing over, don't asked me to do a study on what was a farm management study. Oh, really? Yes. And he felt that too many of the farmers were not specializing in dairy production, but were also involved in cash crops and so forth, like corn and so forth, that they would even they might be money ahead if they were to specialize in milk production rather than many other places. So he said you might be a good person to do this study. So. So did you. Yes, I did. I did. No, I had no farm to work. That would be reasonable. Republicans would understand the purpose was generally to say they're better educated. I didn't want to think

about some of the maybe campesinos that already had two or three thousand. Yeah, we were operating a very limited acreage in

SIMPSON: [00:36:08] Which they could do different.

BURR: [00:36:09] Not that yes. That was one of my criticisms of the government reform, because that was a criticism that made many Bolivians also do this study. I didn't talk to these farmers and I set a model where they were saying farming and their changed farming, German determined, which would bring them in greater greater gross income and greater net income. And they found, however, in some cases that they were better off to continue with their present stable farming in which they were to encroach upon. But they would strip the corn above the ears and tell them it's roasting years and feed this dry, glanced over it. The cows, which I didn't have a lucrative

SIMPSON: [00:37:01] Well, I mean, you know, to a certain extent they were more diversified. You know, now everybody's talking about diversity in terms of production and making it so.

BURR: [00:37:11] And another factor to that kind of discouraging in Cochabamba was that all the receipts from the bill, for instance, went to a central treasury in La Paz. And then, of course, then the word that filtered back to be redistributed to people in other government entities. There were times, for instance, when the people did not have enough cash to pay the milk producers.

SIMPSON: [00:37:37] Yeah, because it's probably too much of it stayed in La Paz. Yes. OK, let's ok, whenever you when you say when did you actually go home? In 64, in 1964?

BURR: [00:37:52] January 1965.

SIMPSON: [00:37:55] Oh, you stayed a little bit.

BURR: [00:37:56] I stayed over until December thirty first.

BURR: [00:37:59] Ok.

BURR: [00:38:02] We took an unusual, unusual route going home.

SIMPSON: [00:38:06] Oh yeah. Tell me about that.

BURR: [00:38:09] We went overland.

SIMPSON: [00:38:11] Oh you did? All the way from Bolivia?

BURR: [00:38:14] All the way from Bolivia to Colombia.

SIMPSON: [00:38:16] Oh my goodness.

BURR: [00:38:16] To Bogota, Colombia. Bogota. I think you want to say she's a little bit tired of this overland travel site. I don't think at that time there were any decent, decent roads from local downtown down to the Peruvian coast. Yeah, this is where I will take the plane to stay with the Cartagena. And I was interested in Cartagena because I realized there was a site of a Spain ship, a bunch of its treasure to the home country. There was also a very impressive fortress there that we spent a few days inside the hangar, enjoyed ourselves and the beaches and so forth, and explored that, explored the fortress. The guide pointed out to us that it was something that many attacks by both English and French. He said you couldn't understand deeply about this fortress. We made that always a little bit lower because the Spanish, as a rule, were so much shorter than the English and French, they made it more difficult for the pirates to make their way through it all.

SIMPSON: [00:39:32] So then from Colombia, where did you put you fly? Directly back to

BURR: [00:39:36] We flew back to Miami, to Miami. And the first person we visited with my grandmother lived in Sarasota.

SIMPSON: [00:39:48] But then you ended up back in Massachusetts?

BURR: [00:39:51] Yes, and there in Florida. That's, I think, to go overland by now. I'm going to need a car sooner or later. So I bought a car in Florida and we made our way back to Massachusetts.

SIMPSON: [00:40:04] Great, yeah. I actually drove my car in 1976, five seventy six seventy five from Tucson, Arizona to San Jose, Costa Rica.

BURR: [00:40:16] Oh, you did?

SIMPSON: [00:40:17] Yeah. Well, American Highway goes all the way. Yes. And there's like a ferry down below. I didn't watch it. I just needed to get to Costa Rica.

BURR: [00:40:24] You went as far as Costa Rica?

SIMPSON: [00:40:26] Because that's what we were. That was my destination.

BURR: [00:40:28] I know you this you worked in Costa Rica for a while.

SIMPSON: [00:40:31] Yeah.

BURR: [00:40:31] And and you have to do a lot of barriers that go through. I'm not talking about

SIMPSON: [00:40:39] Borders, you know, Customs

BURR: [00:40:41] Administration and bureaucracy and restrictions on movement.

SIMPSON: [00:40:46] We are not not too much. You know, it was it was a little I had a Costa Rican lady with me and she would talk with the customs people.

And I had everything locked down and I'd start unlocking locks. And the idea was she could convince them to let us through without opening everything. And that worked most of the way.

BURR: [00:41:10] Because we had an interesting experience in Colombia regarding officials. And we went from Ecuador into Colombia. We passed through the border and nobody bothered to check our papers or anything of that sort, which we thought was kind of strange for the officials. Go ahead. Well, that were later down the road in Colombia at this point where there were some soldiers stationed.

SIMPSON: [00:41:39] Oh, my gosh.

BURR: [00:41:40] And they maybe they gave us a hard time because we had not had issues. You're going to have to go back to

SIMPSON: [00:41:47] Your wanted.

BURR: [00:41:48] Yes. Yes. And furthermore, I was a little bit then maybe a bit suspicious because I always carry an antique pistol with me. Oh, my goodness. Which were which I was going to give to my dad because he was a gun collector and they were telling us that you people are going to have to go back to the border and have your passport stamped into. Only one now is protesting. Yolanda had the key, she told me, so we've been of girls. She was depressed, not proportionate and equal to the point that I never wanted to see the pictures from there. No, no, no. You can you can go to the next station. Pasto, that's official. There is going to be mass break in the photos. So they let us go ahead.

SIMPSON: [00:42:50] How much did you have to pay them?

BURR: Nothing.

SIMPSON: [00:42:52] Oh, really?

BURR: [00:42:54] I said I never pay these guys off duty to be here. Well, anyway, when we got the pastor and he went to immigration and the official was very frank, very pleasant, he said we don't need that. Our passport, that's all there is to it.

SIMPSON: [00:43:15] They were just trying to get money out of here.

BURR: [00:43:16] Oh yes. That's for sure.

BURR: [00:43:18] Yeah.

SIMPSON: [00:43:19] All right. So thinking back about the Peace Corps experience, would you say it for life was a life changing experience for you?

BURR: [00:43:29] Yes, it sure was. Yeah, it opened I opened up a mean views about how to maybe deal with people in other countries and appreciate their having an intimate contact with them. I was able to understand their situations where they were coming from.

SIMPSON: [00:43:53] So what have you been doing since you got out of his car? What did you do?

BURR: [00:43:58] Well, I was at work for Farmers Home Administration for 30 years.

SIMPSON: [00:44:02] What do you do with them?

BURR: [00:44:05] This is a field of rural credit, OK. We find that on their farms to find out how to do that. OK, I think we're located in the United States. We were. And I was working with farmers houses and also some of the community facilities, credit for rural areas and. And it was in that position, a number of states I started in western New York state and western Pennsylvania, then approval of Florida. I did not care for Florida. Missed the hills. And then they went there. They were transferred back up north and did not have a position open Pennsylvania or New York at that time,

but there was one in Connecticut and they said, well, they will pick Connecticut. So that's where. Sure, the majority might. The rest of my time in the Bahamas home in Connecticut, that's where I retired. OK.

SIMPSON: [00:45:12] Is that where you're living right now?

BURR: [00:45:14] Only living in western New York State. OK, I think we're going about, oh, about 70 miles from.

SIMPSON: [00:45:22] And as your son grow and

BURR: [00:45:25] My son, we find it very interesting. He is now back in Bolivia. Oh, yeah. He has a hankering to start a business in Bolivia. I think it's been very risky and so forth, and in some ways I've been a venture capitalist and he's trying to start a factory in the village, now it's a city called Cobija.

SIMPSON: [00:45:48] Oh, really? Is that a city now that

BURR: [00:45:51] You know where Cobija is at?

SIMPSON: [00:45:52] It's at, Cobija was just a kind of place. It wasn't

BURR: [00:45:56] Well he said that is grown a great deal. It's on the it's on the border with Brazil. I the river divides it, I guess, to facilitate communications between the two countries. Brazil build a modern bridge and a lot of trade, I think essentially goes to work to build rather than to put it here. The standpoint of geographic, geography and so forth, it's more logical in its orientation would be toward Brazil. But he said it's a growing community. You kind of compare situation, situation between Mexico and the United States, where there's too many businesses like this in Mexico, where every we the cost of operation is less. But the market is in safe. Yeah.

SIMPSON: [00:46:53] And global influences. OK, one thing about. As far as evaluating the Peace Corps service, there are three things that they they had goals that they had. One was to provide technical assistance. One was to promote a better understanding of the U.S. And one was to promote a better understanding of other people like Americans. So did you feel that you were generally able to meet those goals with your service?

BURR: [00:47:32] Well, I. I think as far as technical assistance, I didn't feel it had to do much in the way of technical assistance aside from dairy production, because many of the Libyans were university extension personnel involved and. No production, but we're we're quite versed in their field. Yeah, I didn't think we had much of much waiting to keep them. Yeah. Some of the farmers I think we had and we could have just met very improved management techniques, just like the United States, we had to agree in direct contact on how you present your sister. I know, because I've been on the other end and. Then, of course, I felt kind of frustrated with working with some of these campesinos because they did not always realize the dangers of the diseases that could be transferred between Jericho. I will say Aptos and. And now that's a hoof and mouth disease. Yeah, I think I sometimes use Spanish terms. Yeah, they come to me work really. And and I also can get kind of frustrated because these small farmers would have it. I would give to give birth to a calf rather than in the USA. We would win the calf from the cow. Maybe after three or four days. And then Peter, we just have no milk bucket. It would they would let the calf nurse on the cow for months on end. Oh, well, maybe milk out the cow for what we would have remaining, which would be very unusual. Yeah.

SIMPSON: [00:49:29] So have you have you continued any involvement in Bolivia since you got back?

BURR: [00:49:36] Not too much.

SIMPSON: [00:49:41] Does Yolanda still go back and forth?

BURR: [00:49:43] Yes, yes, yes, she does. She has been a long time jetting back and forth because after all, the air travel is getting much more expensive as know where. She kind of would like to live in Bolivia. I do kind of a conflict over that, whether or not it's the people at this point, I feel that we can we could probably live in. Actually, quite comfortably. Yeah. And. Yes, I think he has a part would have been he in the USA and he was in Kuwait for quite a bit of time and he felt he was somewhat more of an important person to share my opinion. And we were say one time he managed the campaign of the governor.

SIMPSON: [00:50:39] In that in Bolivia?

BURR: [00:50:41] Yes, ma'am. Because he remains a politician says, yeah, yeah. They get him into trouble because you have to make, you know, private. There was a bloody massacre in Cobija.

SIMPSON: [00:50:55] Oh, really?

BURR: [00:51:00] Yes, and the government, the government and others, he was great to campesinos were all upset and I guess they wanted to march on Cobija. And he he was trying to stem the. And I guess he posted what troops were available to keep them from entering the city, but nevertheless campesinos got violent over some matters and. They were all armed. And bloodshed broke out, several people were massacred. And the government. Even when I was with the president. That was, of course, very partial to Singer. He immediately. The whole your whole detachment of troops and what they're going to do, and I understand there was immediately going to propose in the present as far as I know.

SIMPSON: [00:52:08] So any discussions you need to kind of be careful.

BURR: [00:52:11] And stay in prison anyway. Why did you Bolivians who are associated with this massacre here, Fernando, just trying to avoid of bloodshed. But the government just yet, corporate detachment beforehand, but they will not send the troops. Well, anyway, shortly after

that, my son was on his blacklist, he being a collaborator with Fernandez and being involved in massacres and so forth. The thing is, it was quite a few other people from Korea who had to leave the country or escape into Brazil. Thing is, however, that our son in law was in Cochabamba at the time of the massacre, preparing to come to the U.S., but that did not make any difference with the governmental authority. They still said he was he put his name on the blacklist, I suppose, because he met he managed Fernandez's campaign. Sure. He was guilty by association.

SIMPSON: [00:53:15] Was he able to get out eventually?

BURR: [00:53:18] I guess he was using a lot of manipulation. And he's an expert in manipulating people and lawyers. And so we did get him out to the USA.

SIMPSON: [00:53:31] Ok, so you still might end up going back?

BURR: [00:53:34] My wife would like to. I think she would like to live there, but she's not too keen about either Cochabamba or La Paz. She doesn't like La Paz because of the altitude.

SIMPSON: [00:53:44] What is she thinking and where is she thinking she would like to live?

BURR: [00:53:47] Well, she's heard about a village called Samaipata.

SIMPSON: [00:53:52] Where is that? In the Yungas?

BURR: [00:53:53] No, it's on the road between Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. It's about, I think, about 70 miles, about 75 miles west of Santa Cruz.

SIMPSON: [00:54:05] Must be a new development.

BURR: [00:54:06] Quite a few Americans and other foreigners have settled there. And it's well, it's hard to remember Europeans are there. There's also, I

guess, Americans have settled there. That's become quite a pleasant village. And that one area that they're also developing in the vineyards right ow. And the climate is almost ideal just to

SIMPSON: [00:54:38] Kind of be like California. It's just grapes and things like that.

BURR: [00:54:43] Yes. It's actually not so far, but it's a somewhat higher altitude from Santa Cruz. So, yeah, there's not the extremes of heat.

SIMPSON: [00:54:51] Ok, well, that's great.

BURR: [00:54:53] And she kind of would like to go there and talk about it too much lately because we're kind of in conflict. We do have her granddaughters here and two of my granddaughters live in the area.

SIMPSON: [00:55:04] Is the granddaughters are who? That's your sons?

BURR: [00:55:08] Yes. Yes. One of the granddaughter is now living with us and we've got two grandsons also. But there in Colorado, they're taking their fortune there.

SIMPSON: [00:55:21] All right. Well, I think, you know, do you have anything else you would like to comment on, Peter?

BURR: [00:55:29] Well, I'm very grateful for this interview, and I think you you've done a very effective job.

SIMPSON: [00:55:34] Well, I don't know about that, but I think it's important for us to try to get as many stories about people's experiences in the Peace Corps because we're not getting any younger. Yeah, so we're not getting any younger.

BURR: [00:55:49] I mean, I look at my age, I said I'm way beyond the average age of Americans. So we're going to be like a living on borrowed time. Fortunately, I'm in good health.

SIMPSON: [00:56:04] And that's good.

BURR: [00:56:06] I don't take any medicines.

SIMPSON: Well, there you go.

BURR: I don't know about you whether you're in good health, you look good.

SIMPSON: [00:56:13] Yeah, pretty good. Pretty good. So. All right. Well, I think we'll just call this put a stop to this right now then. And thank you very much.

BURR: [00:56:23] Well, thank you. I'm sorry I kind of uh.

[END OF INTERVIEW]