

Lew Hemmer Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Lew Hemmer served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Macedonia from 2011 to 2013 on a community development project. He later served with Peace Corps Response on two youth development projects in Saint Lucia (2014-2015) and Dominica (2016).

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Lew Hemmer

March 21, 2019
Ringo, New Jersey

By Candice Wiggum

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

WIGGUM: [00:00:01] All right. Today is March 21st, 2019. This is Candice Wiggum and I am interviewing Lew Hemmer, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Macedonia from 2011 to 2013, and then a Response volunteer in Saint Lucia from 2014 to 2015 and in Dominica in 2016. He worked in community development, youth development with the Ministry of Health, and youth development again on Dominica with the Ministry of Education. So he's had lots of good experiences that we're anxious to hear about. So let's start, first of all, with why you decided to join Peace Corps.

HEMMER: [00:00:48] My interest in Peace Corps began my senior year in high school. I graduated when President Kennedy started it. I saw the first Peace Corps recruiting poster when I was a freshman at Penn State in 1961 in September. I was just interested in it then. And of course I couldn't get any farther with my interest, any further with my interest, because I hadn't finished school. I had to finish college. After college, well, I met some early volunteers who were returned volunteers. I was

very interested in their experiences, but went to graduate school. In graduate school, I met several returned volunteers because that's what they did. They were in Peace Corps following undergraduate and then following, and then they went to the Peace Corps and subsequently went to graduate school. Their experiences intrigued me.

HEMMER: [00:01:51] Um, my, my basic upbringing coincided with my, or caused my interest, I guess, because I was always told it's not enough. You've heard the old maxim. It's not enough to do no harm, you have to do some good. That fit right in with President Kennedy's invoking the not to ask what your country can do, what you can do. That stayed with me. But life was going on. And after graduate school, I was busy getting a career started and got married and had children and went to, went to post graduate school and again met more volunteers. So. And I met volunteers when I was working at the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia. So the returned volunteers I met and I got just really, really interested but had to raise the family.

HEMMER: [00:03:00] So when the children were grown and had finished their college and their graduate school, I was heading toward retirement. And I was really, I don't know, at loose ends, I guess is the best way to say it, because I didn't like the idea of not doing anything.

WIGGUM: [00:03:22] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:03:22] So the idea of Peace Corps came back to mind. And prior to my retirement, my wife had been transferred by her employer to work in Germany for a year. So we, we worked through that and realized that's really not bad at our age, being able to experience other cultures. And when I. So, you know, I really need to regress for a minute. Digress. When we got married, we both wanted to join the Peace Corps, and we both applied.

WIGGUM: [00:04:03] Ah.

HEMMER: [00:04:04] I forgot that part. We had both applied to the Peace Corps when we got married, and in the process of the application we were expecting our first child.

WIGGUM: [00:04:16] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:04:17] And at that time the recruiter told us that would be okay.

WIGGUM: [00:04:22] Oh, wow.

HEMMER: [00:04:23] That you could have a, you could take a child with us. We didn't want to do that. So that's why that went on the back burner. And then my wife later went, got transferred, and I retired before her. She was still working. And I said, oh man, I can't wait till you retire and we can go in the Peace Corps like we always wanted to do.

WIGGUM: [00:04:48] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:04:48] And she said, why don't you go now? Because who knows if I'll be able to go when I retire. She had some health problems that, as it turned out, probably would have prevented her from going in. So we reflected on her experience of working abroad and how we managed with it. And I applied and was accepted and was assigned to Macedonia.

WIGGUM: [00:05:14] What did your kids think?

HEMMER: [00:05:17] Good question. You know, I can, I can almost hear them. First question was why? Why do you want to do that? So I told them all the reasons and that was fine with them because, again, they had experienced that their mother had been in Europe for a year while they were in graduate school. So that was fine. It was also intriguing to them that that they could visit. And they did.

WIGGUM: [00:05:51] Sounds like it surprised them a little bit that you would do that.

HEMMER: [00:05:55] Yeah, it didn't surprise them about volunteering because I was always volunteering. I was on many community organizations and so on.

But, but going overseas for, what, 27 months it was, a commitment that surprised them. But then as we, because it took a while, it took me a year and a half from application until I went to pre-service training. And in that time, providing them with a lot of information about the Peace Corps and talking about it a lot. They were very supportive. They were very supportive. And then while I was there, they did come and visit. And that was nice for both us and myself and them.

WIGGUM: [00:06:43] Yeah. Yeah. Now, how did you end up in Macedonia, getting assigned to Macedonia?

HEMMER: [00:06:51] Well, at that time you had to just say, I will go and serve wherever I'm assigned. And I said that. And a recruiter, I had a phone interview with a recruiter as well as a video interview on the internet. I guess that's the placement officer, not the recruiter, called and had questions for me and where did I want to go? And I said I'm sticking with what I said, except I have concern about going someplace cold, really cold. And I had in my mind Mongolia.

WIGGUM: [00:07:38] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:07:39] I wasn't too sure I wanted to be that cold. And he, of course, grilled me about, I thought you said you would go wherever assigned by, da da da. And I said, okay, I understand, and I will. And then he assigned me to Macedonia. And I immediately started reading about Macedonia.

WIGGUM: [00:08:02] I was going to say, what was your reaction when you got the news where you were going?

HEMMER: [00:08:06] I didn't know much about Macedonia. I knew where it was.

WIGGUM: [00:08:11] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:08:11] So I started reading and I read history and read Yugoslavian history and war history, and I read some books by Macedonians and I read some book, I read a book by a Roma woman who wrote a wonderful book. She was, she was a brilliant person who wrote a very good book

about the Roma culture, but also about the Balkans and the conflict of cultures. And that was helpful.

WIGGUM: [00:08:50] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:08:51] So, and I, and I also got, I purchased online some self-study books for Macedonian language and started studying that. Made a lot of errors that had to be corrected when I went to Peace Corps, especially pronouncing the alphabet.

WIGGUM: [00:09:13] Uh huh, uh huh.

HEMMER: [00:09:15] So I did that. And I couldn't find anybody local who had any experience, recent experience in the Peace Corps, and especially nothing related to Macedonia. But I did go online and I found, uh, a volunteer who was serving at the time, but going toward COS, his close of service. That was Michael, who we mentioned.

WIGGUM: [00:09:44] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:09:44] And I found a currently serving volunteer and we communicated a lot. And he scared me a lot with things like wait till you, if you've been studying the language, wait till you see script. That was a fellow named Link.

WIGGUM: [00:10:02] Oh, yes.

HEMMER: [00:10:04] And he had a good sense of humor, though. And he, he helped me with some information. And then I also wrote to a woman who I believe was serving in Macedonia at the time. She was in the same cohort with Link. She was the retired dean of students in New Hampshire.

WIGGUM: [00:10:25] Mm hmm. I know her.

HEMMER: [00:10:30] Dr. Wiggum. She was, she was helpful with correspondence at the time. Very, very supportive, very encouraging. And I followed through

with everything and eventually got assigned to a cohort to start in September of 2011, which I mentioned.

WIGGUM: [00:10:52] What was your training like?

HEMMER: [00:10:55] Well, the formal training started the week after we arrived. I guess it started really the week we arrived, that they had at the time, it was an orientation week, which is training.

WIGGUM: [00:11:11] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:11:13] Uh, I was, but I had informal training that started at staging where they tried to impress upon us that we were, you know, representatives of the United States in everything we did. And we should watch what we do and so on. And I met the rest of the cohort. And informally I learned some unfortunate things about them, because I was the oldest. There were two, possibly three other middle aged volunteers in my cohort, and the rest were all right out of college. And they were only interested in having a party the night of staging.

WIGGUM: [00:12:03] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:12:04] We, our staging was in Philadelphia, and I was very familiar with Philadelphia. I lived outside of Philadelphia. I tried to, uh, they wanted to go out for something to eat and drink after, after the first meeting, before we would leave the next day. And I tried to direct them to the Old City Tavern. And from the hotel we were in to get to the Old City Tavern was a fairly easy walk, and I detoured with the walk to take them past all the historical things and they had no interest. They didn't even look at Betsy Ross' house. They didn't even look at Independence Hall.

WIGGUM: [00:12:49] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:12:50] And after we ate in, in the Old City Tavern, which was where the founding fathers used to hang out, they were not interested in any of that. I tried to point out we're standing in a room where they had those

discussions about independence and how to, how to deal with England and all that. They didn't want any of that.

WIGGUM: [00:13:23] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:13:24] So we ate and then they immediately went out and found a bar to have drinks at. And I went back to the hotel.

WIGGUM: [00:13:31] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:13:31] Which was sort of, uh.

WIGGUM: [00:13:34] So you didn't feel very connected with the other volunteers at all?

HEMMER: [00:13:37] That was foretelling of my whole experience, yeah.

WIGGUM: [00:13:39] How old were you when you went into Peace Corps?

HEMMER: [00:13:41] 67. I turned 68 during pre-service training.

WIGGUM: [00:13:45] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:13:47] So from there, of course, we went and had our orientation in, um, Kumanovo and a week in the hotel there. And much of the same type of thing going on. The training provided by the Peace Corps I thought was pretty good at that point. The initial orientation and the, of course, the first. That orientation week was the policies, procedures, and all that sort of stuff. And it was pretty good. And I thought the country director did a pretty good job of trying to get us to seriously focus on things, starting with how it took too long for him to get everyone's phone numbers and so on. He did it in a nice way. He was very supportive and encouraging.

HEMMER: [00:14:46] Um, when we went to our training sites, um, I was with two of the middle aged volunteers and two or three of the younger volunteers, and we all got along very well.

WIGGUM: [00:15:04] Where did you train? What was the training situation like?

HEMMER: [00:15:07] That was primarily for cultural, um, inculcation, I guess you'd call it, inculcation. Um, yeah, it was, it was half day of cultural learning and a half day of language studies.

WIGGUM: [00:15:21] But did they, did everybody go to the same place for training? How was your?

HEMMER: [00:15:27] At that time, the whole cohort was divided up into I think there were three training sites. And I was in Kratovo. Uh, the, the bulk of the younger ones were in another community I forget the name of. And then it was, I think, one other community they were in. We were not, we didn't interact with each other too much. I think there were two times when everyone came together for large meetings with the country director or with the training host country nationals in the Peace Corps. In my village where I was with the other volunteers, we all got along very well and it did well.

HEMMER: [00:16:15] My experience as an older volunteer was different because my ability to learn was different than their ability to learn. I'm a visual learner and they weren't. They could deal with it auditorily and I just had. I even met separately with my language instructor, who was a Macedonian, and she was fine. She was wonderful. But I met separately with her several times to encourage her to use the, the easels or the blackboard or whatever. If I could see things more, see the language, see the words, see the letters.

WIGGUM: [00:16:59] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:16:59] Um, she tried to adapt, but I think she was locked into a protocol of her own that the Peace Corps pretty much.

WIGGUM: [00:17:08] So the language was not easy for you.

HEMMER: [00:17:11] No.

WIGGUM: [00:17:11] Despite your pre-study and everything.

HEMMER: [00:17:14] Ah, yes. And if I hadn't done my pre-study, it would have been impossible, which I heard from some other older volunteers happens too, in other countries. So it went well. That language instructor, by the way, you know, you edit this out of this, but she lives in Bethlehem.

WIGGUM: [00:17:36] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:17:37] So, I mean, you know those things. You follow people on Facebook probably. So anyway, uh, that, that's, sort of sums it up. The rest of it went well. I think, and I told them at the time, cultural instruction was lacking in that they didn't put holidays in chronological order for us.

WIGGUM: [00:18:00] Oh.

HEMMER: [00:18:00] They told us all the holidays, but I had no idea when they fell in the year. Or maybe I just missed it. You know, it could have been. They could have said it and I missed it. Um. That I recommended to them when they asked for recommendations. Um. And they did help somewhat. But my language tutor that I had during my initial part of my work assignment was wonderful. He, he. He included me into their family.

WIGGUM: [00:18:34] Oh, nice.

HEMMER: [00:18:34] And I went to birthday parties and I went to religious events and so on, like so many other volunteers did.

WIGGUM: [00:18:41] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:18:41] But he coached me a lot. Like when holiday time, what to say, how to respond to things, and all of that. And that endeared me to some of the local people very nicely, so that when they saw me on the street then they were typically Macedonian, you know, very accepting and warm and so on.

WIGGUM: [00:19:05] Nice. So what was your living situation in training?

HEMMER: [00:19:10] In training? It was a challenge. Um. I have a picture. The house I lived in, the family, they were a very nice family. They had an adolescent and a young adult daughter. The young adult daughter had recently finished university and was living in the capital city. I was in Kratovo, a small town up in the mountains, and their adolescent daughter was there. They gave me her bedroom, or the two girls had lived in the bedroom together, and that was awkward for me because I felt not right taking their daughter's bedroom. But they assured me that because the only source of heat in the house was the wood burning stove in the kitchen, they assured me that the daughter would prefer to sleep on the couch that was in the kitchen.

HEMMER: [00:20:14] And, and subsequently, because of that, my bedroom was quite cold. I slept with a sweat suit on and a jacket and heavy socks and a blanket and a quilt and I was still cold. The Peace Corps gave me an electric heater, which I tried to use very little because that would affect the electric bill of the family. So I only used it when I was, uh, after I would bathe and getting dressed. You know, at special times, I didn't have it on all the time. So it was, it was cold in the winter. And winter came early up in the mountains and, uh. I guess, I guess I was, it was compensated for by the how nice the family was.

WIGGUM: [00:21:15] Nice. How did you feel at the end of training? You're about to leave and you're about to go out to your site. What, what were your feelings at that point?

HEMMER: [00:21:25] Well, I was really eager to find out where I was going to be working. And the Peace Corps arranged for pre-placement visits to go. But at the same time, leaving the family was, uh, a bit of a challenge because I'd come to depend on them and they were very supportive and helpful. So there I was again, as when I left the United States and went to the country, I was having the same sort of feelings. Okay, wow. Now I have to go do something totally strange again.

WIGGUM: [00:22:02] Yeah, now you're on your own again.

HEMMER: [00:22:03] But I tried to do, I tried to take it in the sense of adventure, with independence. Instead of taking a long bus ride to get, as I was told about, I found out from locals how to take the train. And not from Kratovo, but from the, from the capital. I took the bus to the capital and I found a train. And got pretty frightened on the train.

WIGGUM: [00:22:37] How come?

HEMMER: [00:22:38] It was a very nice train, probably World War II era Soviet built train. And it was okay riding on it, but I had no clue where to get off. And I was constantly, every, every stop. And it stopped at every little town. But every stop I would really try to see a sign of where we were. And of course, it didn't matter if I saw a sign with a town name, I could pronounce it, but I had no clue what that meant, and I didn't know whether that was ten stops or 15 stops from where I was going. So I.

WIGGUM: [00:23:20] And nobody else was going to the same assignment as you?

HEMMER: [00:23:24] No. I was the only one assigned there. And in the pre-service training, they tried to tell us a little bit about our, our assignment. So that brought up a whole nother scare. When everyone was given their assignments, we were amassed at the [inaudible], the city hall, and going in one at a time into a, into a room to meet with one of the Peace Corps staff, Macedonian staff in the Peace Corps. And given the assignment packets, which would be all the information about our assignment and location and counterparts and all of that. When I went in, I was given an excuse and an apology that they didn't have an assignment for me.

WIGGUM: [00:24:16] Oh, no.

HEMMER: [00:24:19] I had that wide eyed look too, of what does this mean? And they said, well, they had planned for me to be in eastern Macedonia in a bicultural training with Albanian language and Macedonian language. And I had told them that I was having enough trouble with Macedonian. I doubted that I could really get through even with struggle that, and I didn't want to do it. So I would have been assigned, I found out later, to the Red Cross over in eastern Macedonia.

WIGGUM: [00:24:55] Oh, over in Ohrid.

HEMMER: [00:24:56] Which would have been apropos for my background because I have background working in hospitals and community health and so on. And when I found that out, I was a little, well, I was very full of second thoughts, like maybe I should try it. But they said they had a place for me anyway, but they didn't have any information available except where it was and who my counterpart would be. And I could go off and meet my counterpart and get familiar with the site and come back and finish training.

HEMMER: [00:25:34] So I took the train. And I get on the train with my limited language. I talked with a little old man who was watching out the window and told him I needed to go to Negotino. And he was very nice. Yes, Negotino. Yes, I know Negotino. And I'm looking and, and having limited conversation, everything, of course, in very present simple sentences, present tense. But anyway, the train stopped, came to a stop, and he went, *sega, sega*, which was Macedonian for now, now, now. And he pointed, Negotino, Negotino! He pointed out the window and I grabbed my bags and jumped out the window, or jumped out off the train. And there I was.

HEMMER: [00:26:28] So I, I, I walked from the train station to a hotel that they had for me. And I asked somebody where the hotel was. And it was a, it would have, should have been a taxi ride away. But I walked and that was nice because I, it turned out for the better because I saw things and all, and had a better idea of the lay of the land at the town. I was outside of the town. Got into the hotel and had difficulty registering because we were supposed to have a special rate and I had been given in advance local currency to pay for the hotel. But the hotel wanted a different rate.

WIGGUM: [00:27:09] Hmm.

HEMMER: [00:27:10] So with my limited language, we had another discussion and we got through that. I got to my room and I called my job assignment. And a pleasant woman answered in Macedonian, and I tried in

Macedonian to tell her who I was and ask for my counterpart. And I was told my counterpart wasn't there and wouldn't be there for several days. She had gone off to a meeting someplace else or training someplace else. I didn't know. But the woman right away knew who I was. They knew they were getting a volunteer. She turned out to be the accountant for the organization that I was going to be assigned with. And she also, on the telephone, began speaking English because the Macedonian was horrible.

HEMMER: [00:28:04] So she, she sent a taxi for me and I went to the agency and she was the only employee there that day. So we had a conversation, an introductory conversation, and I told her what I could tell her about myself, both in English and Macedonian, about having a family and my children and all that. And a little bit of my background, professional experience. And she was very, very nice, very enthusiastic that I was there. And instead of being there two days as everyone was supposed to be, I left the next day and went back to my training site. Took the, took the train. It was easy at that time because it got to Skopje and I knew where Skopje was. I got familiar with the train and bus station that way.

WIGGUM: [00:28:55] Yeah, good.

HEMMER: [00:28:56] And I was back in my training site. And then I had difficulty getting from my training site to my work site when training ended.

WIGGUM: [00:29:07] Because you had so much stuff?

HEMMER: [00:29:08] I had two large bags and a backpack and didn't know how I would manage that bus, train, all that sort of thing. And everyone in my training site, the other volunteers, their host families took, drove them to their to their work sites. My family couldn't, there was, something came up and they couldn't do it.

WIGGUM: [00:29:34] Oh.

HEMMER: [00:29:34] But they introduced me to a neighbor who agreed to do it.

WIGGUM: [00:29:39] Good.

HEMMER: [00:29:39] And that worked out good. And he was very familiar with Negotino because he was a woodworker and he sold his, some of his things in Negotino in the, in the bazaar. So then they took me down there and took me to my, my apartment, where it was. Only to find out that my apartment would not be my apartment because the volunteer previous to me did not want to leave right away. Tracy.

WIGGUM: [00:30:14] Hmm.

HEMMER: [00:30:15] She just needed to stay another week or month. She just wasn't ready to go. Didn't have a real extension of a six month or a year. But so my landlady and her husband arranged for their parents. I think my landlady's parents took me into their house and gave me a bedroom. And it was very cold. And now it's December.

WIGGUM: [00:30:48] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:30:48] And it's really cold. They were very nice. Um, they, they provided me with my meals and, uh, had me sit in the warm room where their wood burning stove was at other times when I wasn't in the bedroom. And I got to watch a lot of Turkish soap operas and they, they loved them. And I had a real difficult time sitting there. But they were so nice. They were a lovely, lovely old family.

WIGGUM: [00:31:22] Now, you were a community development volunteer. What did you do as a community development volunteer?

HEMMER: [00:31:27] I was assigned to a non-governmental organization, an NGO, and it's, its role was to take individuals, adults, who had previously, because of intellectual and physical handicaps, been labeled as defective by the previous Yugoslavian government, the socialist government, which was trying to have 100 percent employment.

WIGGUM: [00:31:59] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:32:00] They achieved it by taking people who absolutely couldn't work and putting them in state institutions, government institutions. When Macedonia became an independent country and Yugoslavia collapsed, some organizations were created, governmental creations, much like in the United States. Community mental health associations and so on. They, they took the people from the institutions and tried to integrate them back into towns. And my organization had a series of group homes with staff to help them learn ADLs, basic activities of daily living. How to, how to shop, how to cook, how to clean, how to maintain a house, all of that. Hopefully that they could eventually have their own living, but if not be able to manage living in a group home with minimal support.

HEMMER: [00:33:02] And they had nice group homes. They really did. They had several nice ones. I went to all of them. And what I did then in my role with the home organization, it was, it was one of the first in the country to be formed. So it had a lot of experience. And the director of the organization had been an engineer in her career, which she gave up because she had an intellectually handicapped daughter. And so she got so involved, became so involved in services for the handicapped, that she became actively involved in establishing and operating the organization. And because of her prior career, she was very well connected with a lot of important people in, both in the town that we were in, but also in Skopje, the capital. So as it turned out, they called it a non-governmental organization, but 80 percent of its budget was from the government.

WIGGUM: [00:34:20] Yeah, I was wondering about that.

HEMMER: [00:34:21] I found that out as I was working there. I also had a dual secondary goal for myself. I developed not only a primary project but a secondary project, but I had my own personal secondary goal. I had to get all of the staff of the, of the organization to stop calling the beneficiary, they called them beneficiaries, but they called them defectives.

WIGGUM: [00:34:54] Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:34:57] That was a burr under my saddle blanket. And also I had to get them to stop calling themselves defectologists.

WIGGUM: [00:35:06] Oh.

HEMMER: [00:35:07] They had degrees in defectology.

WIGGUM: [00:35:10] Wow.

HEMMER: [00:35:10] They were, they were experts in defectives.

WIGGUM: [00:35:14] Wow.

HEMMER: [00:35:15] So we had to talk about caseworkers and social workers.

WIGGUM: [00:35:21] Different ways of thinking about stuff.

HEMMER: [00:35:22] Therapists.

WIGGUM: [00:35:23] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:35:23] And I developed some in-service trainings with them to understand causes of behavior and ways to ways to redirect behavior and to stop trying to eliminate behavior, but replace behaviors because all behaviors served a purpose and so on. And that was all new to them, even though they had degrees in defectology.

WIGGUM: [00:35:49] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:35:51] And they, they, they slowly, over the two years I was there, it came about.

WIGGUM: [00:35:58] Yeah. Great.

HEMMER: [00:35:59] It came about. My primary goal, my primary project that I worked on to help with, to help maintain or achieve the goals of the organization, was to introduce sporting activities and get these people

active. They, they spent, they spent their evenings and weekends in their group homes sitting and listening to music or watching TV. Very little interaction. Some of them would help the staff with meal preparation and so on, and they did have their assigned duties for cleaning the house and doing, learning to do their laundry and so on. But otherwise, in their, in their free time, they, they were sedentary.

HEMMER: [00:36:44] They became sedentary in the, in the offices of the organization, which was called a daily center. And they always corrected me when I called it the day center, which I was used to. They were very sedentary. They would just do coloring, little arts and crafts projects. Um, so I decided that they needed to have more activity.

WIGGUM: [00:37:13] What was your biggest challenge in effecting this change?

HEMMER: [00:37:17] Good question. The biggest challenge I faced was, was getting the staff to, to take active participation in, in designing and implementing a sports activity.

WIGGUM: [00:37:35] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:37:35] And I decided to make it all sports and everything, except they didn't seem to have tennis. But we had basket, we created basketball, baseball, soccer, bicycling. And through a grant that I had written without any help from the staff, they just would not help me. That was, all they wanted from me was to get some money for their program, their program that they had been running before I arrived. And when I got the money, the grant for the sports activity, I decided to do it as a, not a, not an assignment type thing, but a, but a fun thing. Starting with the title of it. I call it "sports for the health of it." That it would be good for their health if they got active.

HEMMER: [00:38:33] And I, I found in the community a young man, a Macedonian man, young man, who had at one time been trying to become a personal trainer. And we hit it off pretty good. Um, and I asked if he could come and help, and the organization was receptive to him coming and helping. And he was very helpful in designing a lot of the activities. Although one

thing he didn't know anything about that I introduced was they wanted to learn American baseball. When they found out we were going to do sports, they wanted to learn American baseball. And I was really concerned about someone throwing a hard ball around.

WIGGUM: [00:39:18] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:39:18] And batting a hard ball. So. Another volunteer up in the northwestern part of Macedonia, Beverly, was involved with schools, with elementary school, and through her friends back in the United States, got a supply of Wiffle ball supplies, bats and balls. And she was gracious and gave, she got, she got such a large supply that she gave us four bats and half dozen balls, I think. And that was wonderful. We were able to teach them how to bat and throw the ball outside of the building of the daily center. It was a small area, but we could do it.

HEMMER: [00:40:04] They had a small activity court that had been paved. It was big enough to play half-court basketball on and they had a basketball backboard but no net. So we, we were very successful in everything we did that way. The Macedonian young man that helped me shared my experience, my concern with hardball and so on. But how to teach them to bat and hit was difficult because throwing a Wiffle ball to somebody even easily, it's so unreliable to have them learn to hit. So I remembered youth baseball in the United States.

WIGGUM: [00:40:51] T-ball.

HEMMER: [00:40:52] And we improvised with pieces of plastic pipe and railroad spikes and so on. Made some t-ball standards to hold a ball and they could learn to hit. And what was really fun was some of the females were better at it than the males, which annoyed the males to no end and created a challenge among them to get good. But the females were wonderful. They were so excited that they were doing something.

WIGGUM: [00:41:22] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:41:23] So we got to where they were hitting really well, and I took the Macedonian fellow who was helping me out to the community park and did some real practice with t-ball. I pitched as hard as I could and he was learning to hit and he loved it so much that we then took all of the beneficiaries. We walked across town, twice a week I think we took them, in the evening after their daily activities were done and everything. They came back from the group homes on their own. And we met at the daily center and we walked across town to the park and they started playing t-ball, learning the rules of baseball that way. And this wonderful secondary thing happened.

HEMMER: [00:42:10] Up until then, any time the beneficiaries were outside of the community center where they had a little pavilion where they did arts and crafts and we had that play area, neighborhood kids came by and taunted them, called them all kinds of names and threw things at them and stuff. And when we started going to the park and doing the t-ball, the kids riding their bikes discovered us and more and more started showing up and they started watching us through the fence. And then they started asking. And older adults who were playing basketball in that area got intrigued. We got, we got enmeshment with the community.

WIGGUM: [00:42:58] Nice.

HEMMER: [00:42:59] By just that one activity.

WIGGUM: [00:43:02] Nice.

HEMMER: [00:43:03] Which led us, and it was wonderful, led us to then back at the community center invite the kids to come on the property and play basketball with them. Because through the grant that I got for the sports program, we got basketballs. We got, through Beverly's help, got the Wiffle ball. We got basketballs, we got hula hoops. What else did we get? Bicycles. A whole lot of different sporting equipment. And so the kids joined in on half court basketball. They joined in on, we played soccer as much as we could on that size pavement. And they started coming in asking, even, when are you doing it again? When are you doing it again?

WIGGUM: [00:43:48] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:43:48] Right from the beginning, the name calling stopped.

WIGGUM: [00:43:52] Nice.

HEMMER: [00:43:53] Yeah.

WIGGUM: [00:43:54] Nice.

HEMMER: [00:43:55] So I was proud of that one.

WIGGUM: [00:43:56] Oh, I bet you were.

HEMMER: [00:43:57] And, and, that, that young man from Macedonia who helped with the sports, he continued the sporting things. He worked elsewhere, but he continued coming and helping with the sports after I closed my service.

WIGGUM: [00:44:13] Nice.

HEMMER: [00:44:14] And we've, we've stayed in touch. I've stayed in touch a little with my counterpart. And through Facebook, the internet. We get a lot of exchanges with other staff there. But that young man is now employed by, uh, the NGO.

WIGGUM: [00:44:35] The NGO? Good.

HEMMER: [00:44:36] He now works in one of the group homes and does, still does stuff there. So that was, I was happy with that, with that part of it.

WIGGUM: [00:44:45] What was your daily life like?

HEMMER: [00:44:47] Boring. I was alone. I had a, I had another volunteer, Austin, who was there. He was in an earlier cohort and he was there my first year, but he left. He extended his stay, but left to go back to the capital city for another project that he extended his stay for. So there were no

other volunteers in my community. I soon developed some friendships. They were very superficial friendships, but some good ones. One was with, I called him the greengrocer. He had, he had a table on the sidewalk where he sold vegetables near my apartment, and I talked with him most evenings and he had some English language. So we sort of went back and forth that way. He laughed at my Macedonian. I laughed at his English. We, we got along that way, and he told me about some other things in the community.

HEMMER: [00:45:46] There was a, there was a, oh, at one point, I guess it was when I was applying for my grant to pay for the sports equipment, I had to do an overview analysis of the community in terms of the diversity of the population, the religions, and the ethnic background. And when I asked people, my counterpart and other people at the center, how many Roma were in the community, I was told none. No Roma. And I said, no, you have Roma. I see them. And they said, no, we have none. It turned out that they had none living in the community, so they had none. They all lived in the outskirts.

WIGGUM: [00:46:29] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:46:30] But there was one man that I saw daily on my walk to and from work, and he was a trash picker. He was sometimes leaning over the edge of the trash bins and sorting through the trash because he was collecting plastic bottles for the recycling that he could get. And that was his meager income. He was always dressed the same way, even in warm weather. He still had that dirty, heavy topcoat on. He had quite an odor, noticeable odor, and he was noticeably dirty from trash picking. And he had a dog with him that seemed to be his buddy. He talked to the dog all the time. And any time I saw him, I'd wave to him and say hello. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, that sort of thing. And he would respond nicely.

HEMMER: [00:47:29] I started hesitating and standing nearby to talk with him a little bit, asking him things like, do you have a family and where did he live? And that sort of thing. And he was always receptive. But his dog wasn't. His dog was very protective of him and would growl at me and bark at me

if I, if I took any forward step toward him. So I always had to maintain my distance.

WIGGUM: [00:47:51] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:47:53] Well, through the greengrocer I mentioned down on the street near my apartment, I saw that, that man. It turned out he was a Roma, and I saw him at a distance. And I said to the man that I bought the vegetables from, you know, who is that man? And he told me what his name was. And I told him my experience talking with him. And he said, oh, you know him? And I said, yeah. And he said, oh, not many people talk to him. And I said, I know. Then I asked him about the dog, you know, what a nice dog he has. And he corrected me that that's not his dog. Yes, I was very intrigued. I said, well, he follows him everywhere. He seems to understand the man's spoken word because the man will just say, you know, just stay here. And the dog wouldn't even move.

HEMMER: [00:48:50] He didn't walk around or anything. He just, any time the man was picking trash, that dog was sitting by his feet, except when he wanted to move on. And he'd say, okay, let's go. And the dog would get up and go with him. Well, it turns out the dog belonged to a family on the outskirts of town, and this man had always treated the dog nicely every time he went past it. And the dog took a liking to him because of his dependable treatment of him. Then the family eventually said to him, it's okay if the dog spends the day with you, just bring him back at night. And the dog didn't go in the house per Macedonian custom.

WIGGUM: [00:49:31] Yeah, yeah.

HEMMER: [00:49:32] He lived in the yard. But that man would pick up the dog every morning and take him home every night. And that was that. So one day he came walking by, close enough that the vendor, I forget his name, but he, he yelled to him and called him over. And he came over and he introduced us and I shook his hand and it was slimy and greasy. Oh. But we talked.

WIGGUM: [00:50:04] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:50:05] And ever since then we talked much more in the community to the point that when I would see him in the town square, which was full of, they called them pensioners. Pensioners or whatever. A lot of old folks sitting around. They, all eyes were on me every time I walked through. I walked to work and from work. Once in a while one of them would say hello and where was, where was I going? And I would say I was going to work. I'd tell them where. But when I started crossing paths with the Roma, the trash picker in the square, and we would shake hands and we would talk. It turned out later the people in the square stopped calling him names.

WIGGUM: [00:50:51] Hmm. Nice. Did you travel at all while you were there?

HEMMER: [00:50:56] Yes, quite a bit.

WIGGUM: [00:50:58] Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:50:58] Not. I started out traveling within Macedonia just to go visit some other volunteers. But it wasn't that enjoyable because they wanted, the younger volunteers just wanted to drink and sit at a, at a bar or something. So I traveled on my own a bit to see like the fortress and the Roman ruins. And so who helped me an awful lot was my language tutor. The Peace Corps arranged for me to have a tutor for a bit. They had a limit on it. Um, we became such good friends that he continued to be friends with me, even though I couldn't pay him to be my tutor anymore. And we would often meet after my work.

HEMMER: [00:51:52] Um, he wasn't. He was working part time at the time. He had a master's degree, but he couldn't work as an English teacher because he couldn't, he wouldn't. He refused to join a political party, so they essentially fired him when it came election time. Um, but so I paid him gas money when he took me places and he took me to a lot of nice places.

WIGGUM: [00:52:21] Nice.

HEMMER: [00:52:22] Um, and we talked and, and I learned more cultural than language wise from him because his English was perfect. He spoke with a decided British accent, although it turned out he could talk with any accent. He could imitate different American accents. He was pretty sharp that way. His father ran a very large wine making business on his side. He, as so many people there did, they had his own still. He had his own vineyards. He had a couple of vineyards, but he made so much wine. He sold some years more than 1,000 liters. And it was all black market. And he was the retired chief of police.

WIGGUM: [00:53:15] Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:53:15] But what a wonderful family.

WIGGUM: [00:53:16] Yeah, nice.

HEMMER: [00:53:17] Very nice family. They invited me over for many meals. Very, very, uh, cohesive family and warm family. My tutor now lives in Oman in the Middle East and teaches English at a private school there. Um. And in our community, we're still in communication. We stayed in touch. He has two daughters who are in elementary school, maybe getting ready for middle school. And we talk about when they get to high school, maybe, maybe they could come over as an exchange student.

WIGGUM: [00:53:57] Ah, that'd be great.

HEMMER: [00:53:58] Yeah. So I made a lot of good things. About traveling. Beyond that, traveling in Macedonia, I traveled a lot in Europe. And, uh, it was expensive airline ways, airline wise for my wife to come and visit me in Macedonia. So we met in different places. You know, we met in Dubrovnik, we met in Tel Aviv. We met in Germany. At one time, she had a business flight to Germany because years ago she had been sent there to work for a year. They sent her back for some more. She worked for an international pharmaceutical company, pharmaceutical research, not manufacturing. She was in safety. So they sent her back over. And then I went up and met her there. And we, we traveled a bit on my vacation time. Um, so.

WIGGUM: [00:55:07] So that's one way you kept in touch.

HEMMER: [00:55:08] Some of the places were revisited from when she had been in Germany. And I had, um, in my younger years spent six months on a farm in the south of France. Um, well, my younger years when I was in graduate school. And from there I had traveled a lot. So we went. We tried to find new places that neither of us had traveled to, like Normandy. We went to to see that. And Israel, that was, that was a good. And Turkey. Although Turkey we couldn't get to. I wanted to go to Cappadocia, but it was when there was some sort of uprising going on, some things where the State Department said, the Peace Corps said we couldn't go.

WIGGUM: [00:56:00] Yeah, well, that's too bad.

HEMMER: [00:56:02] In fact, at one point we were going to meet in Istanbul and the country director said I couldn't go because of something that had just happened. It was some, um, gang fighting in Istanbul and couldn't go. So.

WIGGUM: [00:56:18] What a shame.

HEMMER: [00:56:18] Well, I went.

WIGGUM: [00:56:20] Oh.

HEMMER: [00:56:20] But I didn't go in defiance. I worked out a deal with him. I said, I'm just going to go to the airport and I'm just going to go see the Blue Mosque. And I'm not going over to that part of Istanbul where the troubles are. And he agreed.

WIGGUM: [00:56:32] Oh, nice. Good.

HEMMER: [00:56:34] So we did that. The same thing with when we went to Israel. The Peace Corps had a pause on any anyone, could not go to Jordan because of the fighting that was going on, could not go to Israel because of problems with the fighting at the West Bank. So I assured him that I

was not going to go anywhere near there. And he agreed that I could go if I checked in every day with where I was. Some days I forgot. I was, it was okay. We didn't go anywhere near that and I was okay and it was okay with him. So we did travel around. I got to go to the River Jordan and the Dead Sea and Masada.

WIGGUM: [00:57:20] Nice.

HEMMER: [00:57:21] That sort of stuff.

WIGGUM: [00:57:22] But what was communication like for you in Macedonia? How did you talk to your kids? How did you communicate?

HEMMER: [00:57:31] Local?

WIGGUM: [00:57:31] Well, both locally and back home.

HEMMER: [00:57:34] Communication, you know, was so much different from the experiences of the volunteers I had previously spoken with who had served in the Peace Corps in the '60s and '70s.

WIGGUM: [00:57:46] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [00:57:46] Because now we had the internet and we had, I even had free international phone service with WhatsApp, had video contact with family at home, and I tried to use that to show them things. So I had good contact. Of course it was a six hour time difference, but it was pretty good. And they were busy. My wife and I spoke frequently. I spoke with my, my kids, not weekly, maybe. It was when they had free time in their schedules and so on.

WIGGUM: [00:58:28] Yeah, yeah.

HEMMER: [00:58:28] Um. So that, that was, that was. The young people in Macedonia, I had trouble with. My difficulty, not theirs. Well, their difficulty, they didn't understand my Macedonian, but they didn't speak English. And it was odd and I was old. The thing with the age in

Macedonia, as you found out, well respected by adults, but not so much by kids, except as they had to. Except as they had to. I mean, I, I don't know about your experiences. Probably similar. I've had women get up and give me their seat on a bus, or be told to by the bus driver.

WIGGUM: [00:59:13] Yeah. Yeah.

HEMMER: [00:59:15] I had, I had people address me, if I was in a group, they would address me first before they addressed anybody else. People stood up if I entered a room, um, people that didn't know me. Didn't happen at my place of work, of course, but they were respectful at my place of work. They were also, um, how do you say? Concerned about my age. You know, you can't do that. You're too old, type thing. I got that. My, I wanted to learn as much as I could about the culture and so on. So my tutor invited me to come out with him and his family and all the people they had hired to harvest grapes in the autumn. And I was immediately met with silence by all the workers. And they said to each other, my tutor told me later, what's that old man doing?

WIGGUM: [01:00:16] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:00:18] But worse than that it was, but he's an American. Americans don't do this kind of work.

WIGGUM: [01:00:23] Huh. Interesting.

HEMMER: [01:00:25] And they said, and he's old. Why is he working like this?

WIGGUM: [01:00:28] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:00:28] By the end of the day, my tutor was so happy. He said as they were leaving they were saying to each other, that old American could really work.

WIGGUM: [01:00:40] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:00:43] It was hard work.

WIGGUM: [01:00:44] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:00:44] Oh, it was hard work. But I was happy I did it for that reason. I was happy also I did it because while we were working, we had some interchanges and so on. And people would offer me some food or offer me water and they were considerate and I think more so because of my age than just their general, general nicety that they have. They're very nice people.

WIGGUM: [01:01:08] How did you feel when it approached time to leave?

HEMMER: [01:01:11] Yes, I was eager to get home. But sad.

WIGGUM: [01:01:19] Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [01:01:21] Yeah.

WIGGUM: [01:01:23] And after being gone for 27 months, was it strange coming home?

HEMMER: [01:01:29] Um. It was strange in many ways and difficult in some ways. Um. And I've heard this from many volunteers. You've had wonderful experiences and you want to share them. And most people don't want to listen. Well, they, they ask the usual, how was your trip? Like it was a weekend vacation. And they don't really appreciate the impact that it had on you as a person.

WIGGUM: [01:02:05] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:02:06] You try to tell them. The better friends and the better family members would listen, but a lot of them was just sort of changed the subject.

WIGGUM: [01:02:16] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:02:16] Yeah. Okay. That's nice. What about, you know, the football game this weekend, that sort of stuff. But, and, uh, I was, I was aware of the differences culturally in terms of shopping. You know, I did, I grew up in an agricultural area, so I was familiar with farmers markets and so on. And that was not a whole lot different over there. But that's all it was. When I, when I got home, I remembered that supermarkets were big, but it hit me and it still hits me.

WIGGUM: [01:03:04] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [01:03:05] And the one thing that has lasted with me is the driving. Not being able to drive in the Peace Corps was one thing, but when I did get to ride with other drivers, they drove sensibly. The ones I rode with, they drove sensibly within the speed limit, courteous to other people, letting other people pull out of driveways, or stopping if there were animals in the road or whatever. And over here, everyone's aggressive. And when I, when I came home, that really hit me. That really hit me. And I was disoriented even in my own community. I remembered where things were, but I forgot how to get there.

WIGGUM: [01:03:47] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

HEMMER: [01:03:48] So, um. But even to this day now, I returned home in the end of November of 2013, so that was six years ago now. Will be six years ago. Um, I still drive more sensibly.

WIGGUM: [01:04:06] Hmm. How did Peace Corps change your life?

HEMMER: [01:04:13] In many ways, one is realizing that governments are corrupt everywhere. And I'm not, I'm not necessarily pointing a finger at Macedonian government, but everywhere I went and talked with people within the, while I was in the Peace Corps, and in Israel. And hearing the news differently, you know, it made me, uh, what is it? More distant, less caring about some of the craziness that goes on in this country. Um, I'm still concerned about everything that goes on, but in a, in a more objective way.

HEMMER: [01:04:52] Um, uh, politically, I'm definitely independent. I'm concerned about how schools are run now. I wasn't concerned before because I was distant from them. I was actively involved in the schools when my children were small, but we were in a good school district. You know, um, I was very actively involved. And my children were in classes, when they graduated from high school their class size was over 600. But, but the teachers and the principals knew my name.

WIGGUM: [01:05:34] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [01:05:35] Um, I was at meetings at my, my children's school where there were only like six other parents in a class size of 600. You know, that's, that was sad for me. So locally now I try to encourage parents to be more involved. Um, and maybe it got me more community minded, being in the Peace Corps, and more grassroots community minded. I even say to people, you can be involved.

WIGGUM: [01:06:09] Yeah. Yeah. How long were you home before you volunteered to do a Response job?

HEMMER: [01:06:16] Well, I was home no more than about three months before I started looking on the internet.

WIGGUM: [01:06:24] Uh huh. And why? What, what got you thinking I want to go?

HEMMER: [01:06:28] Actually, I was staying involved in the internet to see what was happening with the cohort that I had been with and so on and exchanging a lot of things. But no, when I came back to resume retirement, I realized that I really didn't want to do nothing. I wanted to be active. And I was a volunteer at the local library and a volunteer at the YMCA and trying to do things in my neighborhood and so on. But it just, it just wasn't enough. I felt a little empty about that.

WIGGUM: [01:07:07] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [01:07:07] Um, so the Response program of the, of the Peace Corps, I saw things about it and I was intrigued by it. I didn't want to serve another

27 months particularly, and my kids and my wife at that point were opposed to it. They were, they were very supportive of the fact that I did go in the Peace Corps, but it was.

WIGGUM: [01:07:37] Enough's enough, Dad.

HEMMER: [01:07:38] Yeah, exactly. Enough is enough. It's time for you to stay here with family. But I saw the Response programs had shorter assignments. Three, six, nine, 12 months. I don't think they have any more than 12. So I was looking at some of them, and I was intrigued that they were specific to people who had relevant career experience and even higher level of education. And so that was intriguing me. And then I saw one that sounded very interesting to me. It was in the eastern Caribbean sector, which made it a whole lot more acceptable to the family. That would be not that far away.

WIGGUM: [01:08:30] Yeah, easier to get to.

HEMMER: [01:08:31] And it was in Saint Lucia on top of it, which everyone has the idea that that's a vacation.

WIGGUM: [01:08:38] Paradise.

HEMMER: [01:08:39] Paradise. But what I was really intrigued with, it was working with youth, which had been my whole career. And. And something really meaningful was to help reduce the suicide rate among teenagers. Unbelievably, for most people in Saint Lucia, they were having a spike in suicides among 12, 13, 14 year olds, particularly girls. And why would teenagers in an island paradise be committing suicide? Well, it turns out that their culture couldn't handle the internet. Cyberbullying was really big there. It's a problem in this country, but it's really a problem there. And they have no supports, no emotional supports to deal with it.

HEMMER: [01:09:34] And that goes partly in the understanding that that corporal punishment was rampant there. Parents hit kids, teachers hit kids. So they, the children had no support. And the Ministry of Health tried to start a program, wanted to, wanted to start a program to try to teach resiliency

among the kids. And that's what they put a call out for, was a Response volunteer to come and help build a program to teach adolescents resiliency. That was me. I applied and got accepted right away. So I went there.

HEMMER: [01:10:25] Now, from that point on, there's a big, big contrast with my previous Peace Corps experience. I had no, um, no staging.

WIGGUM: [01:10:40] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:10:42] I went straight there. I had no orientation program with the other, other volunteers because they had already completed their orientation and they were at their work sites. The ones who were there. So I was lucky that there was one more Response volunteer who went at the same time as I went. And I met her on the airplane. Um, we were, I found out we were supposed to be seated beside each other, but when I got on the airplane, I realized these vacationers weren't.

WIGGUM: [01:11:18] Weren't going to Peace Corps.

HEMMER: [01:11:19] They weren't a Peace Corps volunteer.

WIGGUM: [01:11:21] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:11:22] Um, and, uh, but I saw a person across the aisle at a window seat on the other side who seemed to fit the description that I was given about the Response volunteer that I would be going with. And I just called to her, excuse me, is your name? And she said, you know, how do you know my name? And I told her who I was. And we had had an exchange of emails.

WIGGUM: [01:11:52] Uh huh.

HEMMER: [01:11:53] So we, our, we had three days of orientation together, real compressed orientation in the Peace Corps office in a conference room, sitting just at a table with all the people who had to come and tell us all

the policies and procedures real fast. And we had four hours of language training in Creole, which just was, they might as well not have.

WIGGUM: [01:12:24] Yeah, four hours.

HEMMER: [01:12:24] But I had, because of my prior experience in going to Macedonia, I did the same thing again. I got some self-study books on the Creole. The problem is in the Caribbean, Creole is different in every island.

WIGGUM: [01:12:37] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:12:39] It's almost like someone from New Hampshire trying to understand someone from Alabama.

WIGGUM: [01:12:44] Yeah. Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:12:46] In English. So anyway, we had that compressed orientation and then we were assigned to opposite ends of the island.

WIGGUM: [01:12:56] Oh.

HEMMER: [01:12:57] So we would see each other occasionally, especially if I came to the Peace Corps office. She was in the capital city where the Peace Corps office was, in Castries, and we'd have lunch together and share our stories and our miseries. Um.

WIGGUM: [01:13:12] How long were you there?

HEMMER: [01:13:14] I was there a year. Yeah. No, not quite a year. Nine months.

WIGGUM: [01:13:18] And did you have a counterpart there?

HEMMER: [01:13:21] I had a supervisor because I was working for the Ministry of Health, and my supervisor was the head nurse of the local hospital who had the whole, the whole health network of, of the island under her. And I was told when I arrived by her that I would address her as a Nurse Siraj.

No first name. So I said, will you call me Dr. Hemmer? And she said, I'll call you Lew. Okay.

WIGGUM: [01:13:59] I'm the boss and I want you to know it.

HEMMER: [01:14:02] Exactly. So anyway, she was very nice and I think did a good job from what I could see in her role. The problem was she was hardly ever around. She was always in the capital at the ministry office, the Ministry of Health office, being told what to do.

WIGGUM: [01:14:30] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:14:30] It was a really rigid hierarchy in their government there, which adds to my thoughts now on governments and so on. And, and I'll tell you another thing later. But, uh, she pretty much gave me the guidelines of what she expected and I was on my own to do it. So while I was there, I wrote a training manual for each department of health in each parish of the county. The country was 27 miles long, 14 miles wide. So governmentally, because of the history of its development from colonial days and all, they, they had, it was divided into parishes. Catholicism was the ruling religion. And the government followed the parish lines for everything.

WIGGUM: [01:15:31] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [01:15:31] It had in its, that country in its history had been a colony. When it was a colony of the Europeans, it had exchanged hands between the French and the British 14 times.

WIGGUM: [01:15:44] Wow.

HEMMER: [01:15:45] It was a pawn in every treaty negotiation that this country's had. Yeah, we'll agree to this and you give us Saint Lucia. Or if you agree to this, I want Saint Lucia. Because at one point that was a major source of bananas until the global economy caught on and you had fruit and Chiquita bananas found out that they could grow and ship bananas cheaper from Central America because the labor was cheaper, and that

decimated the banana. Well, first it started with sugar cane. Back in the slave trading days, sugar cane was the major crop there and the major economy. But some bright American discovered beet sugar was cheaper. So sugar cane bottomed out. Then they went to bananas. And then that's what I just said.

HEMMER: [01:16:41] They lost their economy to Central America, except it was supported through a treaty with the United Kingdom because they felt some responsibility to their former colony until the large companies made such amazing, cheap offers to the United Kingdom to break the treaty. And they broke the treaty and then the economy collapsed and that happened there. So everyone was poor except investors in, uh.

WIGGUM: [01:17:18] And what, you wrote the protocol, did you work directly with the youth or?

HEMMER: [01:17:22] Somewhat. I got it, I got it started. But what I wrote for the protocol was to be implemented in each parish by a group of presenters. I wrote a series of training meetings for the youth, 21 of them as a matter of fact, covering everything from personal hygiene to, to, you know, sexually transmitted diseases and, oh, civic responsibility, to instill, to instill resiliency in the children. It had to be built on self confidence and to instill the self confidence, we gave them a lot of training that they just weren't getting from families and from schools.

HEMMER: [01:18:18] And in order to do that training, I said that somebody in the community, in each community, should address each aspect of the training. So obviously for things like sexually transmitted diseases, we had a physician or a nurse, depending on each parish, who they chose. For civic responsibility. I met with the police people and we chose a policeman to do a presentation. But I, but I wrote an outline for every session, what they should cover. And, and we had icebreakers to start the session, the content of the session, and wrap ups at the end. So and I wrote all those out so that they wouldn't be intimidated and feel that it was too much for them to do, that they were easy and fun things to do.

WIGGUM: [01:19:17] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HEMMER: [01:19:18] They bought into it that way.

WIGGUM: [01:19:20] And what was your life like there?

HEMMER: [01:19:23] Well, there was one other couple, a young couple, American couple, who were volunteers, and they, they were lovely. We didn't spend a lot of time together because of the age difference. They were straight out of college. But they invited, they had been there earlier than me because they had their orientation and everything. They were six months ahead of me, I guess. So they introduced me to a lot of local people. And we sometimes did things together. They helped orient me a whole lot. I had no orientation to my community.

WIGGUM: [01:20:05] Did you have your own apartment?

HEMMER: [01:20:07] I had an apartment that was the size of your living room. It was everything except it had a door for the toilet. But my stove and my refrigerator were on, my stove was on one bare wall. It was all concrete.

WIGGUM: [01:20:24] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:20:24] And my refrigerator was on another wall. And I had, um, I had a table that was about two feet in diameter that I could sit at and a half-sized couch and that was it. And a bed. My landlord, it was, it was in the basement of my landlord's house. My landlord worked. He had a government job. He was educated. His wife was a schoolteacher. They had two young children who were, I'd have to guess, eight and ten years old. And they were very nice. And of course, as in most of the Caribbean islands, everyone could speak English.

WIGGUM: [01:21:08] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:21:09] So communication wasn't difficult. They didn't help me much with Creole. They laughed at my Creole and chose not to use Creole with me.

WIGGUM: [01:21:20] Did you cook for yourself and?

HEMMER: [01:21:22] Oh yeah, I cooked for myself. I had a, I had a little gas stove and something that had scared me. I finally got used to it, but I was frightened at first. It was a gas stove and the gas canister sat in the room. And in this country that would not be legal. And it scared me occasionally if I smelled gas. But everything went well. And the Peace Corps gave me a nice filter system for water purity. It was a wonderful filter. I'm surprised that in our United States foreign aid, we don't give those filters out to other countries. It was a perfect filter and over the course of several hours could give you a couple gallons of water.

WIGGUM: [01:22:10] What was your takeaway from that experience?

HEMMER: [01:22:15] Well, it helped me a lot coming back to this country. And my subsequent experience on the next island helped me a lot too. I got a lot of discussions with local people about race relations in America. They could not understand why we have problems, because everyone they've met from America is nice.

WIGGUM: [01:22:46] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [01:22:47] They had their own philosophy or their own theory of why we had problems. And oddly enough, they blamed it on the, on Black people in America, African Americans in America. And all for the same reason. They said that they thought that the people in America who call themselves African Americans were wrong. That they, too, had come from slaves. The slave trade that brought slaves to the United States frequently stopped in the islands to trade slaves. There were a few ships that came straight to the United States from Africa, but mostly they came through there. And they all had strong heritages to the, to the slave trade because they had very little, uh. What do you call? Mixed, mixed marriages.

HEMMER: [01:23:49] The few that they had were mostly because of plantation owner, European plantation owners, who still were part of the slave problem, just like plantation owners in the South, I suppose. So they said

that, and I don't know. I have trouble talking about this with people here in this country because of the strong feelings, both Black and white, about our issues in this country. But they felt that a big problem was back to our civil rights days when the Blacks justifiably did not want to be called colored and started to insist on being called Black. But moved from that to being called African American. And so they attributed our problems to African Americans in this country insisting on being called African American, which perpetuates the divide.

HEMMER: [01:24:51] And they said, for instance, in Saint Lucia, everyone's a Lucian. Not one person in Saint Lucia calls themselves an African Lucian. They're Lucians. And the white people who came and lived there and worked there are called Lucians too. They aren't called American Lucians or French Lucians. And they said, we all one. We all, we all one. Kept saying.

HEMMER: [01:25:23] Interestingly enough, after that experience, I came back to the United States and went again as a Response volunteer for another assignment in Dominica, which is two islands away from Saint Lucia. And they told me the same thing. We all Dominicans, we're not African and Dominicans, we all Dominicans. And they had a, in the, in the capital, there was a fair number of Caucasians, but they're all Dominicans. Or if not, they were called Brits or French.

WIGGUM: [01:25:59] Now, what did you do in Dominica?

HEMMER: [01:26:01] In Dominica, that was, boy, what an amazing thing that was. I came back from Saint Lucia feeling okay, fine. Done. But I had some of the same feelings come up again. Like, I just I'm not, I just want to contribute more, do more. I'm not doing anything meaningful. I volunteer at the library, I volunteer at the YMCA. It's, it's not that meaningful for me. It's not that satisfying.

HEMMER: [01:26:29] And lo and behold, as I'm watching things happen on the internet, up pops a thing for Response volunteers in the eastern Caribbean again, and this time it was on the island of Dominica. And I clicked on the job description and immediately called out to my wife. I

said, you won't believe this. Look at this. They have there, they have a Response volunteer position in Dominica and the description could have been taken from the job description I had before I retired. It was like my match. Why didn't I have that the first time?

WIGGUM: [01:27:10] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:27:11] That was my feeling, well, this is me. And what it was, was to work with the Ministry of Education in Dominica to, uh, do staff training with teachers, but also community education with parents regarding helping children with autism. That was my job when I retired. When I retired I had, previous to my retirement, I had created an early intervention program throughout the city of Philadelphia where we went into homes and helped the families help the children who were under age three, not yet diagnosed, but likely to be diagnosed with autism, to help them behaviorally so that they could not be too far behind their same age peers when they went to kindergarten.

WIGGUM: [01:28:07] So they recognized autism?

HEMMER: [01:28:10] Oh. Oh yes, they over recognized it.

WIGGUM: [01:28:15] Ah.

HEMMER: [01:28:16] When I got there, I met my counterpart. I had two counterparts and they were under the Minister of Education. Um, my, my primary counterpart was in charge of special education. I forget what they called it, but it was special education throughout that country. And my secondary counterpart was her assistant. And they did primarily, they, they either coordinate. They did some diagnostics or coordinated with a psychologist, not a psychiatrist, but not a child psychologist either, just a psychologist who I don't think was certified to do autism diagnoses, but did them anyway. They didn't use any of the testing modules that we use here, especially not the gold standard, the ADOS.

HEMMER: [01:29:16] But anyway. Early on when I was there and talked about things we would do, which would be me going around to schools and having

meetings with teachers and either during school time with parents or in the evenings with parents. Um. And I, and I laid out some of the modules that I had worked on in my career. I said, well, first, let's start at the very beginning. How many children are we talking about?

WIGGUM: [01:29:51] Yeah, that's what I was wondering.

HEMMER: [01:29:52] In this country, what's the incidence of autism in this country? The population of the whole country was under 80,000.

WIGGUM: [01:29:58] Yeah. I was wondering how many kids they had that were.

HEMMER: [01:30:01] It was an incredibly spread-out population.

WIGGUM: [01:30:03] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:30:04] Um, they had schools with small classes because they were very, what we would say, very rural. They were just hard to get to. It was maybe only five miles, but it would take you two hours, you know, the roads were so bad. Uh, so they told me that they had identified ten children with autism. And I thought, dear me, why would they ask for some specialist to come?

WIGGUM: [01:30:32] For ten kids.

HEMMER: [01:30:33] For ten kids.

WIGGUM: [01:30:34] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:30:34] So I said, well, let's go see them. Ten kids. I could see ten kids and I can see ten families and I can talk to 30 teachers that are involved with these ten kids. And we started going first to the schools. And I would observe. And I saw characteristics of autism, but not enough to say that that child probably was autistic. There were other behavioral problems and other developmental delays. And we got, we narrowed it down to maybe 2 or 3 of the children were really autistic. And my work became for me very boring. They asked me to go and help administer standardized

tests. They asked me to, to go with them in their school meetings with faculty where they talked about everything.

HEMMER: [01:31:30] And I was the behavioral specialist from the United States who was just coming along to answer questions if the teachers had any. And I was introduced to some special, special needs teachers who were doing wonderful with their classes that were way too many children for the one person to be with, you know. And my biggest recommendation was they need a teacher's aide or they need another teacher. And then I found out that the teachers were what we would call teacher's aides here. So I was thinking, oh, dear me, you know, I've got to watch my step. I'm recommending things that are.

WIGGUM: [01:32:09] Are beyond the pale.

HEMMER: [01:32:10] Beyond what they are wanting to operate as. Um. So anyway, the, what happened was I grew a little tired of that. And fortunately, I had a very good country, well, she wasn't a country director. The country director in the Caribbean is the country director for seven countries. Seven islands. And so she, at the time, she would only get to visit each island every several months. Um. And so on each island they had what I was used to in Macedonia was an assistant director.

WIGGUM: [01:32:58] Yeah. Sort of local coordinator.

HEMMER: [01:33:00] Yeah. And they, and they were not an American Peace Corps volunteer. They were a host country national. And the one that was in Dominica was fine. She was really good. But there was a lot of dissension in the office. The office, I don't know if her title was really office manager or office secretary or whatever. There were the, the supervisor that I reported to, the assistant country director and two other host country nationals that ran the office. One was pretty much what we would in this country consider a secretary, took care of the mass mailings and things like that. The other one coordinated an awful lot of things, your medical files and everything else.

HEMMER: [01:33:55] And, and it was, and she was very, um, upset with the fact that that's what she was doing because she wanted the director's job and had been passed over for it. The director, I thought, was very capable. But she had to deal with that. She had dissension in the office and it was difficult. It was, it was difficult for all the volunteers in that, in that country.

WIGGUM: [01:34:27] How did it affect you?

HEMMER: [01:34:31] It affected us in that when we asked to have things done or asked for help for things, it was done begrudgingly. It wasn't what I was used to in Macedonia and in Saint Lucia, a very nice, cohesive group who, even if they had some personal issues, you didn't know it.

WIGGUM: [01:34:52] How long, how long were you in Dominica?

HEMMER: [01:34:56] Six months. That's why it only says 2016.

WIGGUM: [01:35:01] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:35:01] I went there in June and left in December.

WIGGUM: [01:35:04] December.

HEMMER: [01:35:06] Well, I could have stayed a little bit longer, but the terrain was so rugged. Um, and walking a lot, walking was very difficult, even in this capital city in Dominica. The capital was Roseau, is Roseau. The sidewalks are broken up and uneven and rocky. The roads, they were paved, but they were full of potholes and rocks and everything else. Really bad. Driving on a paved road was like skiing a slalom course. The drivers in the little jitneys we rode in knew their roads. I swear they could have done it blindfolded. They didn't hit a single pothole. And it was just, and it was slow because they'd go around one and around another.

HEMMER: [01:36:04] But getting to why I didn't go extra months, my knee started to hurt. And it really started to hurt to the point that I did ask to see a doctor. And they sent me to the only orthopedic doctor in the country, and he was Cuban and he spoke broken English. But he did send me to get an

x-ray. Well, first an x-ray and then ultrasounds. And that was so-so, those experiences. The medical care in that country was a lot less than what I was used to in the other countries. Um, they had the one hospital, Saint Elizabeth Hospital? No, the Saint Margaret Hospital named after Princess Margaret. Um, that was inadequate. It didn't have much in the way of even emergency services.

HEMMER: [01:37:00] Um, but anyway, he looked at the x-rays, he looked at the report from the ultrasound, and he injected my knee with steroids. I was a little apprehensive about that, but I got immediate relief, which confirmed his diagnosis, and he sat me down in his office and he said, you're American? I said yes. You go America. You have surgery. And I told the Peace Corps that and I was.

WIGGUM: [01:37:33] You went.

HEMMER: [01:37:35] I got, rather than a close of service, I got an administrative separation, in case I could get my surgery and come back.

WIGGUM: [01:37:42] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:37:43] I got my surgery and I went to rehab. And it took longer than it should have for them. It was fine for me because it was a lot faster than my previous knee surgery. It went very well, but that was the end of that.

WIGGUM: [01:37:59] Well, that was going to be my other question was, as an older volunteer, did you have any other health issues during all these years of service?

HEMMER: [01:38:09] I'm trying to think. I had health issues when I was in Macedonia, but they were of doctor's office visit nature. I had, uh, I had some allergy cropping up but managed it with Sudafed. Um, I had a hearing problem in Macedonia. I decided I had a hearing problem that, uh, I just couldn't, in group meetings I could hear, I couldn't understand. And I would sit in the front and that, and I went to, uh, what was our medical doctor? I forget her name.

WIGGUM: [01:38:50] Started with an M.

HEMMER: [01:38:51] Yeah, I wanted to call her Mimi but.

WIGGUM: [01:38:53] Yeah, it's Mimi.

HEMMER: [01:38:54] Mimi.

WIGGUM: [01:38:55] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:38:55] Um, I went to see her. She was lovely I thought. She was very helpful in some other things, very critical things regarding volunteer support network. I was one of the members and I had to go to her confidentially about some other volunteer issues that were, that they brought to me. But anyway, I went there and I described. I said, and this is, I guess I told her the right thing. It tipped her off. I said, I feel like I'm underwater. It sounds whoa whoa whoa. She examined my ears. She said fine, but had me take a stronger dose, stronger or more frequent Sudafed.

WIGGUM: [01:39:40] Clean out all those inner ears.

HEMMER: [01:39:42] Yeah. It helped. So that was an older adult problem, I think, just the hearing. But that was it. Otherwise I had no other health problems. I had none in Saint Lucia, except I could hear too well in Saint Lucia. In Saint Lucia, there was, I was in that concrete room that had only one window. So I had no, and I couldn't even have *promea*. There was no two windows. I couldn't have that through, through ventilation. And I was on the side of a hill and my window was a beautiful setting. It looked out across the village. I could see the ocean and I could see the sunrises and so on.

HEMMER: [01:40:27] But downhill from me was a principal of the local school who had his own, um, own operation going where he could do anything he wanted because he, he threw parties for the community all the time. Booze parties, a lot of alcohol, um, and a lot of music. And he had a house, a huge house that also had in it. The reason he had a huge house

was he had in it a canteen for the students who had to cross the highway from the school. But they came over there all the time for all their candies and everything. And he was real popular with the students and the parents because of that. And he threw parties and had the parents, and every important person in the community was invited every Friday and Saturday night. Every Friday and Saturday night. That was their community center, which I'm sure he was doing something taxation wise about.

WIGGUM: [01:41:35] Mm hmm.

HEMMER: [01:41:35] He lived upstairs and it was big and lavish. But he had a nice courtyard, and not a courtyard. He had a courtyard in the back where he had gigantic speakers the size of Volkswagens, and he played Frank Sinatra songs from 8:00 p.m. till midnight or 1:00 at top volume every Friday and Saturday night. So I couldn't open my windows to get fresh air because the sound was bombarding. And if I turn my volume up on my TV, I had a TV, if I turned the volume up on the TV loud enough to hear it, I was then getting loud, painful, painful sounds in my ears. My ears actually hurt. I did go to the Peace Corps about that, that my ears were painful and of course I couldn't sleep. And I took medication to sleep. I tried Ambien and other medications to sleep. I couldn't sleep because this music was, it was like torture.

HEMMER: [01:42:39] And I talked to my landlady, or landlord and his wife about it. What do you do? And the lady across the street, I talked to her about it. What do you do? They just throw up their hands and say, you can't do anything about it because he's so well connected in the community. The police at one time had given him a warning that he had to turn the music off at 10:00, and he just kept it going until midnight or 1:00 and they had no power to enforce anything. They had no ordinances. It was just the dirt, dirt road village. And he just got away with it.

HEMMER: [01:43:16] And so the Peace Corps was so helpful and supportive. They actually tried to find other housing for me in the village. But for one reason or another, I didn't take any of the options. There were various reasons about them.

WIGGUM: [01:43:34] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:43:36] One of them was that it was just arduous to get from that apartment to where I worked. It was very mountainous island and had to go up some, some, some paths were so steep that they should have been stairs. And it was, you could almost bear crawl up. I could almost reach out and touch the path in front of me. And I'm going up there every day to the, my office was in a modern hospital. It was a beautiful hospital, except the hospital hours. It was only open from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 at night. They had, they had no nighttime patients.

WIGGUM: [01:44:18] Oh.

HEMMER: [01:44:19] If the, if a person was needing overnight hospitalization, they had to go to the capital. It was, there were no overnight hospitals in my area. So it was essentially a clinic. The waiting room for the different exams was outdoors. Beautiful patio at the top of this street drive. I don't know how an ambulance got up there. I really don't. But anyway, and everyone there was nice.

HEMMER: [01:44:48] One day I got to work and the hospital was closed and there were people scrubbing the cement where the waiting area was and the walls. And I said, what the heck is going on? They said, you didn't hear? I said no. There had been a machete fight the night before at there. Some woman had come up there for some reason and two men came and fought over her. Everyone there carried a machete, partly to clear brush along the side of the road and also for their lunch or snack time during the day. Anyone who was thirsty would just climb a tree and get a coconut and whack it open.

WIGGUM: [01:45:36] Smash it open.

HEMMER: [01:45:37] And drink the coconut water. And the coconut water was wonderful. I loved it. Um, but it was a volatile community. And as I said, corporal punishment was rampant. If a parent went to the school and said

to the teacher, I can't get the child to do his homework, the teacher would say.

WIGGUM: [01:46:01] Beat him.

HEMMER: [01:46:02] Beat him. And if the teacher said to the parent, they're misbehaving in school, the parent would say, beat them. And they did. And the volunteers who were teachers were having a real big problem with that. Uh, because they just, no, I'm not hitting the children, you know, and they would stop the teachers from hitting them, which got them in sort of a.

WIGGUM: [01:46:22] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HEMMER: [01:46:23] Bad, bad stead with, with the teachers. So I did talk with teaching, teacher groups all over the island about alternatives. And to understand what, what hitting a child does in terms of their self esteem, but also teaching fear, not respect. Um, and they were, you know, had had to deal with that carefully that, that it caused fear not respect, because they said, no, they respect. They wouldn't do it again. I said, well, then you taught them to be sneaky. You know, they're doing what they're doing because that behavior is pleasant to them, you know, and you got to find an alternate behavior. And I tried to do those things with them. And talking with the parents was so-so. The teachers tended to go along with it more so.

HEMMER: [01:47:14] But I ran out of working with autism. I ran out of that. And the nice thing was the assistant director who was the country director was very understanding about this because I went and talked to him. I said, I really don't have enough to do.

WIGGUM: [01:47:35] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:47:35] And she said, let me introduce you to somebody who runs a special school. It's a private school, a special school. And I walked across town and across the bridge. There were a lot of bridges there too. That little island had 365 rivers and streams.

WIGGUM: [01:47:55] Wow.

HEMMER: [01:47:56] It's the nature island.

WIGGUM: [01:47:57] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:47:59] Because it rained a lot in the mountains and it was very mountainous. Well, most of the islands were formed volcanically. They did have a really nice place to go swim. It was not sandy. It was a stone beach, but it was hot. The water was.

WIGGUM: [01:48:20] Wow.

HEMMER: [01:48:20] Hot tub hot because thermal springs were coming up from underground and bubbling. So it was actually called Champagne Beach.

WIGGUM: [01:48:29] Uh huh.

HEMMER: [01:48:30] But these streams of bubbles were coming up and you could swim and feel the warm rise up. But anyway, the, um, the, the travel was difficult. And this, this woman had a private school that had been created, again, corruption in governments. It was created by a woman who worked for the Ministry of Education and realized that kids weren't getting what they needed, special needs children. So she funneled money from the public education into her private school that she ran. And the woman who ran it was a woman from Connecticut who had been a teacher, I think, in Connecticut, and ended up down there for a variety of other personal reasons. She and her husband ended up there.

HEMMER: [01:49:26] But a white woman and sharp. She knew things. She knew. She's running a good program and doing really well with the kids. And so I shared a lot what I could share with her that she didn't already have. And then I was pretty much done. I mean, that was over a couple of months' period, um, that I went there instead of going. And we worked it out. My assistant country director worked it out with my counterparts that I would be going down there to that school and that was fine with them. I

think they were just as happy that I had another assignment because they didn't have enough for me.

WIGGUM: [01:50:01] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:50:02] And I would stop back and talk with them and let them know what I was doing, but it just didn't really matter much.

WIGGUM: [01:50:09] So that wasn't as well developed as a Response job as your other thing.

HEMMER: [01:50:14] And that again was a benefit of being older.

WIGGUM: [01:50:17] Yeah.

HEMMER: [01:50:18] I knew it was time to talk with her and it had to be careful of how I did that. And I didn't complain and all that. I just worked that out.

WIGGUM: [01:50:27] Well, is there any last thing you want to say before we wrap this up?

HEMMER: [01:50:35] Well, overall about the Peace Corps, nothing but good to say. I have concerns. But what organization doesn't? I'm, I am, I am sad that the Peace Corps doesn't help the younger volunteers truly understand the importance of their role, not only in their assigned work, but in their personal time use and the communities. I think what I observed or what I was aware of, there was a lot of negative portrayed about the United States on the part of the students. I mean, there was one volunteer who, because we were told in Macedonia to not associate with the embassy at that time. And I understood it because local people asked me, you have a family back in America? Yes. And you're here alone? Yes. And you're not getting paid? Yes, volunteer. Are you a spy?

WIGGUM: [01:51:58] Yeah. Why would you do this?

HEMMER: [01:52:00] Yeah. And there was one young volunteer who thought, oh, that's funny. And he wore a hat that said CIA on it.

WIGGUM: [01:52:07] Hmm.

HEMMER: [01:52:09] You know who that is? That's that sort of thing. That's just uncalled for. And it, it disturbed me. It just that, not just that, but the drinking parties disturbed me because their culture wasn't that way. Um, and I didn't think that that was helpful enough. I heard too many young people, especially when I was a Response volunteer, not in Macedonia, but down in the Caribbean. I heard too many people thinking they were on a paid vacation and they talked about it, they called it that openly. This is the best vacation I ever had. Not for me. I was working and I was seriously trying to help some changes and so on.

HEMMER: [01:52:58] They didn't like teaching and that was what they all were assigned to in the islands. They were all teachers. So, no. The other Response volunteer who went with me was a librarian and she was very serious about helping the library grow and improve their services. But, no. So that's, that took the luster off of Peace Corps for me. But I still am glad I did it. I would do it again. And I encourage older people, I encourage to now look at Response positions because now you're no longer need the prior basic volunteer experience. So I encourage a lot of people and I give them the websites and I think it's wonderful.

HEMMER: [01:53:45] I still think the Peace Corps gets a bigger, the United States gets a bigger bang for its buck for foreign aid out of the Peace Corps than they do with foreign aid. I think we, I think the Peace Corps does terrific things in all sectors that they're in. So. That's that. Thank you for the interview.

WIGGUM: [01:54:10] Well, super.

[END OF INTERVIEW]