

Anne Baker Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Anne Baker served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji from 1984 to 1986 as a math and science teacher.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Anne Baker

December 20, 2016
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:01] This is Evelyn Ganzglass. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968. And I'm interviewing Anne Baker, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji from 1985 to 1986, actually end of '84 to '86, I guess. And then a trainer also in Fiji from 1986 to 1987. Anne, why did you join the Peace Corps?

BAKER: [00:00:36] I get asked that a lot. Every time I answer it, I think it's roughly the same answer, but sometimes it varies. Yeah, when I grew up, my grandparents actually were world travelers, and after they retired, they started traveling the world. And every year they would come back with these amazing stories and photos. And, you know, it just really got my curiosity going at this. They had incredible trips and they made incredible relationships with people. They would stay in touch years later. They would be, of course, not emailing. There wasn't email in those days, but you know, it was calling and writing letters with people they'd met all over the world. So that kind of got me thinking

from, you know, that I would like at some point to do more travel and all that. And then there was a, um, I guess, actually one of our our trips as a family. We were in Central America and we were in El Salvador and we stayed at this hotel school and there was a Peace Corps volunteer there. And that didn't, really didn't, I think that just put a little seed in my brain.

BAKER: [00:01:44] And then in college, a recruiter came by one time and I went to an event. So just little events here and there have made me think about Peace Corps. And after college, I was a physics major in college and I started working in industry, which is what you do when you're a physics major and went on and started taking some courses for master's degree and all that. And it just, sitting in a lab all day and industry. And I said, there's got to be something better, than better than this. You know, I like being around people and not just sitting in a lab and also just. I was working at General Electric at the time in the lighting business group. I said there's got to be something better than perfecting the light bulb, you know. And I was talking with some friends and a friend of mine said, well, I. You know, I mentioned Peace Corps, and he actually had an application and he'd been holding on to it for a while and had hadn't filled it out. He said, eh, it's just not the right time. He said, here, you want this? And I said, sure. So I took it, I filled it out cold, never talked to a recruiter, never, nothing, just sent it in.

BAKER: [00:02:46] And of course, Peace Corps looked at it and said, physics! They had requests for physics teachers, and they just didn't have people with the skills of physics. So as soon as they saw physics, I think they just, I literally was on the plane within three months, which is a really quick turnaround. They'd never heard of me before until I filled this out and sent it in. And they did the interview over the phone and checked all my references and did all that stuff that, you know, and three months is probably about the fastest they could turn it around. But that was also the timing. They said it would either be in Africa or the South Pacific, which is where their requests were for physics teachers. And timing wise of when I sent it in, they had a program leaving that fall for Fiji.

BAKER: [00:03:28] I talked with a college friend of mine. Her boyfriend had served in Tonga. And I had talked to him and he said, you know, he loved the Pacific. Peace Corps said, which would you prefer, Asia, I mean, Pacific or Africa? I said, it doesn't matter to me, but I have a friend who served in the Pacific. They loved it.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:47] So why not.

BAKER: [00:03:48] And then got the thing in the mail, it said Fiji. And I said, great.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:53] So you quit your job and hopped on a plane?

BAKER: [00:03:56] Quit my job. I hopped on a plane and off to Fiji.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:59] And by this time, all the training was overseas, right?

BAKER: [00:04:03] It was in country, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:04] So talk a little bit about the training. How did you meet the people here or are you virtually flew by yourself or did the whole group fly together?

BAKER: [00:04:12] We had our staging at that time was five days in San Francisco, so started meeting people at the airport. Because when you look at the baggage claim and you see people with these big duffel bags and things. Like, OK, I think I know where you're headed. So it didn't take long for us to find all each other. And of course, we were all together for five days in San Francisco, and then we flew all together to Fiji. And so the training was all in country. Fiji has two main cultures, the Fijian culture and the Indian culture. There were a lot of Indians in Fiji because they originally came as indentured laborers in the sugarcane plantations, and then they stayed.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:59] And when was that, when did they come?

BAKER: [00:05:01] Oh, they came in the 1850s, 1860s. So they'd been there for generations, most of them. And so we had part of our training was in, the cultural language training was in a Fijian village and then part of it was in an Indian settlement. So we had about two weeks in each of those.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:24] Indian settlement. You used settlement and village. What's the difference?

BAKER: [00:05:28] Yeah. Now those were the terms that that Peace Corps was using and that generally in use in Fiji at the time. A village, a true village in the Fijian sense will have a certain structure to it. Will have a community center, will have a church. It will have, you know, just even the layout of the village. It's all kind of contained in one community. Whereas a settlement doesn't necessarily have, you know, it may not have a church, it may not have a community center. It's more, I think it also reflected the feeling at the time that, you know, Indians were there to settle. I mean, they were settled in their.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:17] Temporary?

BAKER: [00:06:17] Temporary. It kind of. Right after I left Fiji was the first coup and the coup was because of the Indian-Fijian tension actually. Mostly, well, mostly the military felt that the Indians were taking over Fiji and they just had elections and the Fijian was prime minister. But he pointed an Indian deputy, half the government was Indian, which reflected the population, but that made the military a little nervous. And so they staged a coup and overthrew the government. And so this was all right after I left. But you could sense some of the tension. You know, the Indians were, I'm vastly stereotyping here, but you know, a lot of them did run the businesses.

BAKER: [00:07:10] I mean, even in my community, which was actually it was a farming community of about two hundred farms about an hour and a half or two hours by bus from the capital. And it had been established since the 1960s. And about, I'd say, about 85 percent of the population was Fijian, about 10 percent was Indian, and about five percent was

Rotuman, which is, Rotuma is another Polynesian culture. I think it's Polynesian. Yeah. Fijians. Fiji is Melanesian, but Rotundo is more of Polynesian culture, and the island is way north of Fiji, but geographically it's way far away. Politically, it somehow got lumped into Fiji. So but in our community, as I mentioned, you know, 85, about 85 percent Fijian. The shop was run by the Indian family, and so and that was in a lot of places. The economy was run probably more by Indians than the Fijians.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:25] Very much the case in Uganda.

BAKER: [00:08:26] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:27] Very similar to a lot of other places.

BAKER: [00:08:30] Yep, yep. Yep.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:33] So I diverted you. So you were.

BAKER: [00:08:37] So training, yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:38] So you were in training.

BAKER: [00:08:39] So I was in training. So two weeks in a Fijian, living with a Fijian family in the village, learning the culture and a little bit of the language. And then shifting gears and doing two weeks with an Indian family, again learning the culture and the language, which is kind of a Fiji version of Hindi. And then off to summer school. We essentially taught summer school for six weeks. So and that was our technical training. And for a lot of us.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:18] And that was in the capital?

BAKER: [00:09:20] That was just outside the capital.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:22] And what is the capital?

BAKER: [00:09:23] Capital is Suva.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:25] Suva.

BAKER: [00:09:26] And the town next to Suva is Nausori and there's a teachers college there, and there's also high school there. So we were at Nausori Teachers College for about six weeks where we did our technical training. And since a lot of us had never taught before, they taught us to teach and they taught us how to teach in Fiji. So, you know, learning about the education system and how to teach in Fiji, and then put it to use in our crash course in teaching.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:56] Did you teach in high school or?

BAKER: [00:09:58] High school. Yep.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:00] So you had your training and then where were you stationed?

BAKER: [00:10:08] So I was stationed in a place called Lomaivuna. That's L-O-M-A-I-V-U-N-A.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:16] Thank you.

BAKER: [00:10:18] As I see you're writing it down there. As I mentioned, it's about an hour and a half, two hour bus ride out of the capital on a good day. And the school had just gone from being a junior secondary school to a full secondary school, so had just added form six, which is the equivalent of the 12th grade. And so I was brought out there to teach physics and mathematics in form six and physical science in form five. So, the high school level.

BAKER: [00:10:58] Just before we finished our training, one of the worst cyclones to hit Fiji in years hit and we were in a direct hit and that was the night before our swearing in. And so they actually canceled our swearing in party and just came to us at the staging site, our training site, and swore us in there, and then Peace Corps staff all left. And

most of us had to continue staying there because there was another cyclone coming the next day. And another one coming two days after that. The third one actually changed course and didn't hit Fiji, but the two were back to back and the worst ones they'd seen in a long time. So we were stuck at the training site on our own for a few days before we could get to our site.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:46] But not extensive damage?

BAKER: [00:11:48] Oh, there was a lot of damage. Yeah, yeah. Part of the reason I couldn't get to my site. I actually literally couldn't get to my site because there were two bridges that the bus had to go over to get to my site. And any rain basically, the bridges were flooded and you couldn't get past. So it took, it was about five days I think before we could get.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:09] So a cyclone is basically a hurricane.

BAKER: [00:12:11] It's a hurricane. Yeah, they call it a tropical. Yeah, it's called a tropical cyclone there, but it's a hurricane.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:16] Same. Same wind, same water?

BAKER: [00:12:18] Same wind, same rain, same damage. Same. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:21] All of that.

BAKER: [00:12:22] I think it goes the opposite direction, though, because it's a southern hemisphere, so it spins the opposite direction.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:27] But when you're in the middle of it, it probably doesn't matter.

BAKER: [00:12:30] Right. No. And we actually literally did. The eye came right overhead.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:33] Wow.

BAKER: [00:12:34] Yeah. So that was.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:36] So eventually you got.

BAKER: [00:12:37] Eventually got out there.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:38] OK. And then talk a little bit about the town you were in.

BAKER: [00:12:42] It wasn't a town, so this was unusual.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:46] Oh, you were in a village?

BAKER: [00:12:47] No, it wasn't a village either.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:48] OK.

BAKER: [00:12:48] This is what was so unusual about it, because it wasn't that set community that you have in a village or in a settlement. It was a farming community with two hundred farms divided into nine sectors and in the middle of it there was an agricultural station. And then about a kilometer away was the school. And there were actually a couple of Peace Corps volunteers right by the agricultural station. They were working in fisheries, and I knew them, certainly knew them well, and we visited every once in a while. But we didn't cross paths otherwise while we were working, because they were off in different villages around the area and I was basically at the school. So the school had, uh, there was a primary school and then there was a secondary school right next to it. And then the housing, most of the teachers lived right at the school. So I had a house right in the school compound.

BAKER: [00:13:43] And probably about, I don't know, maybe 300 students, 200 to 300 students, 250, 300 students, something like that, in the high school. I had two streams, as they called it, of physical science in form five, so 11th grade, and each one had about 30, 35 students. And then, in the sixth form, 12th grade, I did, I taught both their physics and math and there was just one class and it was 24 students in that class.

I'm trying to remember if it was different. Now I'm trying to remember if it was different first year and second year.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:20] That doesn't seem so large.

BAKER: [00:14:20] It isn't, no. Because the school had just added that form six. And the way Fiji, the education system worked in Fiji at the time is a lot of it was actually based on the New Zealand system. So they had exams they took at the end of form four, form five, and form six, and you have to pass those exams in order to get on to the next level. So overall in Fiji, the form five pass rate at the time was about 50 percent. And the form six pass rate, which they called a university entrance exam, which is interesting, because there's only one really one university in Fiji, but the university entrance exam form six, the pass rate nationally was something like 25, 30 percent. And so students would sometimes just repeat the year if they didn't, if they didn't pass, or otherwise they would just go back to the farm or whatever.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:26] How was their knowledge compared to American students at that level? Was it a good school system do you think?

BAKER: [00:15:35] It was a pretty good school system, but it was a New Zealand school system, so that was one of the things that I think I struggled with. First of all, well, I struggled the first year just because I was a new teacher. I think anywhere, whether it's here in the U.S. or in another country, the first year of teaching is just really hard. So but I learned a lot that first year too, you know. I thought, oh, my students are really getting this, and then their, you know, would get their exam results and they were, you know, not as good as I'd wanted them to be.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:04] And you were teaching in Fiji?

BAKER: [00:16:07] Teaching in Fiji, but in English.

BAKER: [00:16:08] Oh, you were teaching in English?

BAKER: [00:16:09] Yeah. It's a former British colony. In fact, the students were punished if they were not speaking in English in school.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:17] Oh. I thought you were teaching physics in Fijian.

BAKER: [00:16:20] Oh gosh, no, that would be weird. I'm not sure that they even have the vocabulary for all that. There's no need for the some of the physics terms in Fijian, there's no need for it. So. But that was one of my challenges. And that's actually why the second year I really found it really interesting and the students did a lot better too. And I did a lot better because I learned to figure out, OK, what's applicable to them? How do I make this? Because what do they need this physics for? They didn't really. A lot of it. Some of it, yes, they need. Some of it on a day-to-day basis they don't need. And again, this was based on a New Zealand system. So the New Zealand physics curriculum, there are certain things that were on there. I said they really don't need it. Why do they need to know this nuclear physics? I mean, come on. So I.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:10] Other than passing the exam?

BAKER: [00:17:11] Other than passing the exams. So but then my decision was, well, OK, I'm going to take that out. But now they're not starting at 100, they're starting at 95. You know, a pass was a 50. So they're, you know, they literally just had to get the majority of the exams. So they had to get a 50 to pass. But so I was making a conscious decision to say I'm going to lower that upper limit, because they don't need that, but then they'll have a better understanding of what the other parts that they can apply and they can use in their daily life. But that was the challenge is, how do I make this applicable to them in their daily life? And the school built a new science lab while I was there, so it was beautiful new building. No equipment, no supplies really. You had a very limited budget, which they asked me to figure out what to get. So we did get some supplies for other things.

BAKER: [00:18:06] For most of it, I just had to figure out, well, what's, how can I demonstrate this? So you're looking at wave motion, for example, and I

went, OK. There's a little pond out here and there's a little pool of water. All right. Let's look at, you know, dropping things in the water, the wave patterns, and let's put something in there and see it refract around that barrier and things like that. So just trying to get them to use what's already there. Or looking at, you know, how motors and generators work. Luckily, the school had one. It didn't always work, or they didn't always have the fuel for it. But they had a generator. So to be able to then take them, you know, crowd the whole bunch of students around.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:48] So you figured all of that out. Did you have training or was there a teacher who came out, a supervisor who came out and helped you with your teaching?

BAKER: [00:18:59] Not really. That's what training was all about.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:01] But just the initial training?

BAKER: [00:19:03] Initial training.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:03] You didn't have anybody come out.

BAKER: [00:19:04] No, no.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:06] See, we had somebody who came and visited us.

BAKER: [00:19:09] No, no, we didn't have anybody coming out. And they also didn't really have textbooks. All they had, well, in the form six in particular, form five, they did have some, but in form six, the textbook quote unquote was literally a book called Notes and Examples. And that's all it was, was notes and examples. OK, here's the topic, and here's a couple of notes and a couple of examples and then some exercises to do. And that was it. So no written text, no explanation. And the students were pretty much, I mean, they were rote learners. You know, they would write down word for word everything you wrote on the board. But if you said something, they won't just take notes and write it, they'll only copy what you write on the board.

BAKER: [00:20:05] So all of my, when I was teaching all of this, I had to literally write things in full sentences on the blackboard and they would copy it down. And I still kick myself. What I should have done at the end of that is I should have, you know, gotten one of my students' notebooks, because I could have published a textbook. I wrote a textbook, essentially, because they would just copy literally everything that I wrote down.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:30] So is that the New Zealand school system, is that Fiji, or what is that?

BAKER: [00:20:34] That's more Fiji, that they just copy. They didn't, I don't think they were trained in how do you take notes. That's just the way they.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:42] Maybe that's how the Fijian teachers learned and just transmitted that way of learning.

BAKER: [00:20:49] And they also, their expectation was that students would bring their notebooks to the teachers and have them check it and sign it, saying that they checked it and they have all the notes and everything they were supposed to have. So that kind of reinforces that idea of, OK, you've got to write down everything the teacher writes down and make sure you get that down. But I don't. They never really. Yeah, it wasn't expected for them to listen and take notes.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:12] And were the exams just regurgitation of all of that? Or did they have to do some more creative things?

BAKER: [00:21:23] Um, probably most of it was more a regurgitation of a lot of that. And the, well, for form five and form six, the only thing that mattered was how they did in the exam at the end of the year. So I could give them quizzes and tests and things during the year. It didn't mean anything to them, other than it's practice for the end of the year. So one of the things that that I did, and I really have mixed feelings about all this, you know, because they needed to pass the exam. So a lot you're just teaching to the test. But me personally, I want them to

understand how they can actually use this. So for example, we do a lab and we have to, whether it's, you know, whatever it's on, whether it's on, you know, mechanics or electricity or whatever. And we set it up as a lab and they work on it and then they have to write it up.

BAKER: [00:22:27] Well, they're not going to write a lab report for the exam, but I would have them write a lab report. And again, this is not things on the exam, but you know, have them thinking about what are the things that are that are sources of potential error. So you look at, OK, we have, we're looking at the motion of something on a track or whatever. Well, we don't have a nice frictionless track, so there's got to be some friction in there. Or maybe we didn't set it up straight, you know? So thinking about what are the things that could influence why this may or may not come out perfectly the way you want it to. They're not going to put that in the exam, but I want them to know that and think about.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:08] For life.

BAKER: [00:23:08] For life, right. So that they understand, here are some of the other things that are influencing this, whether it's in physics or whether it's in something else, just being able to think outside the box a little bit. So there were things like that that I did because I felt it was just really important that they know how to do things like that. And then at the same time, teaching to the test. Each one of the exams in physics, they had a, they were given one sheet of standard equations, so they had to memorize and that they just had these standard equations that came as part of the exam. And we had covered them all over the course of the year, and I assumed that they remembered what they all were. And then I realized that they didn't necessarily remember. So my second year, that's another thing we did is constantly go back and just remind them, OK, what is this equation? What is it stand for or how do you use it? You know, what are the letters in that equation stand for, you know?

GANZGLASS: [00:24:09] So you learned a lot about teaching.

BAKER: [00:24:11] I learned a lot about teaching and I learned a lot about physics.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:16] Interesting.

BAKER: [00:24:17] Because as an undergrad and majoring in physics, sure, I could solve the equations and, you know, write down these numbers. What do they mean? And so coming back and having that experience in Fiji really helped me better understand how the physics worked.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:37] That's why they have kids, in a lot of schools the older kids teach the younger kids.

BAKER: [00:24:44] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:44] And it's exactly for that reason.

BAKER: [00:24:47] The best way to learn something is to teach it. Right. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:51] I mean, even having to explain it in a simple way is really hard.

BAKER: [00:24:55] Right. And even just the simple example of how a generator works. Sure, I could explain it and I read it in the book and I understand, but then I'd actually never gone and physically started a generator. And so I did. And that's what they relied on in the community. That's the only way they had electricity was to have the generator. And so I was like, oh, OK. They talked about it. I've never actually done it myself.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:19] And now you know how to do it.

BAKER: [00:25:20] Now I know it. It was like, wow. So I learned a lot about the physics, just having to teach it to the students.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:26] So talk a little bit about the farming community, trying to use the right word, that you lived in. What kind of a house did you live in? Who were your neighbors?

BAKER: [00:25:42] Well, first, the farming community, because the school compound was a part of that, was in one of the sectors of this. Again, it was about 200 farms and nine sectors. And each sector had, actually each sector did have a church. So in that sense, it was kind of like a village, but not really. And the sectors would kind of do things on their own. And then once a month, they would all come together, generally around church. The Fijians are a very Christian community so.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:16] Missionaries got there.

BAKER: [00:26:16] Oh yeah, missionaries got there. So the farming was started actually in this community was started in the '60s as a banana plantation. Or maybe it was even started earlier than that. But in the sixties at some point, something came through, some, whether it was a pest or a disease or something came through and essentially wiped out the banana trees. So they shifted to one of the, well, they did a lot of the basic crops for that. They would then take to the market in the capital on the weekends. So basic, you know, eggplant, and the taro root is a staple in the Fijian diet, and the cassava root, beans. I mean, any sort of vegetable type things that they would grow there. But then the other crop that they actually grew for export was ginger.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:16] Hmm.

BAKER: [00:27:17] So, and I think of that every time I go to the store and I buy ginger. Like, that could be coming from Lomaivuna. So they're basically, they're a little above subsistence farmers, I mean, because they would take their crop into the market in the weekend and sell a lot in the capital. But then when you have a cyclone come through and it throws everything into a tizzy. And in my second year there, there was actually really heavy rains. One day I was in my classroom and they came around that, they didn't have, you know, a PA system, the way they came around and make announcements is somebody would write

in the notebook, here's the announcement and they'd put all the teachers' names and they'd pick a student to walk around and the teacher would have to read it and then initially that they read it, you know, and that's how they got messages around to all the classrooms.

BAKER: [00:28:19] So one day one of these comes around, they said, school's closing at noon because of the weather. It came out over the radio. And I'm like, it's this bright, sunny day like today. So obviously there was a big something coming. So we closed the school at noon. The students all went home. I stayed to catch up on some things at the school. I mean, the school is only a three minute walk from my house. You could see my house from the school. And mid-afternoon it started to rain and then it got heavier and heavier. And by the time I wanted to go home at like four or five o'clock, the little footpath with the little plank over a tiny little stream was completely submerged and I couldn't get to my house. So I had to go all the way around another way to get to my house. By the middle of the night, it was like up under the floorboard of the house next to me. And so basically just horrendous flooding, which closed all the roads for a month.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:14] Wow.

BAKER: [00:29:14] And submerged a lot of the crops and everything, submerged the generator, of course. Because the generator was in, for some reason, the lowest part of the community, that never flooded except in something like this. So we had no generator for probably three or four months. But it flooded the crops. And so, you know, there was, it created real hardship, because first of all, they couldn't sell the crops and they also couldn't eat, because they were eating their, people had to rely on their own crops to eat as well. And since the roads were closed, the shop, you know, slowly all the staples were sold. You know, no sugar, flour.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:53] So what happened?

BAKER: [00:29:54] So, uh, I mean, somehow people made it through. At one point.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:00] How did you have food?

BAKER: [00:30:04] Well, I had some, I had a couple of things in cans basically, but there was no refrigeration. So I mean, I had some things or like, you know, pasta or something that none of them ate pasta, but I would sometimes go to the capital and get something like that where I could boil it if I had to. Of course, then they ran out of kerosene after a while too. My neighbors were really good too. They would often just share some of what they had with me.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:33] So it was really very tight for everybody.

BAKER: [00:30:36] It was very tight for everybody. At one point, they did come and bring some supplies by helicopter. The entire country had one helicopter. And this is a country with somewhere between three and six hundred islands, depending upon what you define as an island and the tide at the time. About a hundred of those islands are inhabited. But they had one helicopter, so they came up at one point and brought some supplies by helicopter.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:09] And was school open?

BAKER: [00:31:11] School closed for one day and then it was a weekend, and then it opened the next Monday. A lot of the students were absent.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:20] Because they couldn't get there.

BAKER: [00:31:21] They couldn't get there. There were some students that came by bus and the busses weren't running for a month. The roads were literally washed away or the bridges were underwater and all that so. And some students came. One of the more amazing stories was actually that, I think it was that first Monday, was teaching in the first period class and partway into the class a student came to the door. He was late, late for school, and he had to stop. And they were very, very polite, very formal. You know, he had to ask permission to come into the class and all this, you know, so, you know, madam, can I come in?

And so I started to think about it and I said, wait a minute. How did you get to school? Because he was one who took the bus every day. And I said, how'd you get to school? And he said, I walked.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:10] Wow.

BAKER: [00:32:11] I said, How long did it take you? He said about three hours.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:17] And three hours to go home.

BAKER: [00:32:18] But no, he stayed. He stayed with somebody until Friday, and then he walked home for the weekend, essentially. The amazing thing about this kid, he and his sister were actually both supported at the school by Save the Children.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:35] Mm hmm.

BAKER: [00:32:35] Um, his father was sickly, couldn't really work on the farm. They couldn't afford the school fees. School fees were not a lot, but they couldn't afford any of that, and Save the Children actually was great. They would come out a couple of times a year, just check attendance records, making sure they were actually in school and all that. But he was an incredibly hard worker. I mean, that just highlighted to me that he was walking that far to come to school. School was so important to him. And it was that, that's right. The previous week was actually, it was Peace Corps' 25th anniversary.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:14] Mm hmm.

BAKER: [00:33:15] So in Fiji, we had a poster contest for our students. Um, happiness is a world at peace, I think was the theme. So invited students from all over the country to make their poster that reflected that theme. So he worked really hard on his and made this beautiful poster. I think somebody lent him the money, whatever, to take the bus into the capital and turn in his poster. And he turned in his poster and then the rains hit. And so he actually was stuck in the capital for, well,

you know, to get home from there and then to come in. Long story short, he won the contest, and the grand prize was a trip to Australia.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:02] Wow.

BAKER: [00:34:02] And here's a kid who had just barely even been out of the, off the farm, won a trip to Australia. It was a trip for two, so he had to have somebody with them, and he invited one of the teachers who had a brother living in Australia. So they had a place to stay, and all the teachers and students contributed.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:22] How exciting.

BAKER: [00:34:22] Contributed some money so he could go. And then so he, and he went on that year, he passed his exams. I think his dream was to be an architect or something, and I always wondered what happened to that kid.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:33] I was going to ask whether you know.

BAKER: [00:34:34] I don't know. I don't know. I have to go back. But I mean, that's the amazing thing is, there are a lot of those kids have a story like that. That one just kind of stands out, I think, because of when he walked into school after the big storm.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:51] Did you, have you stayed in touch with any of the students or teachers?

BAKER: [00:34:57] I try. Not very. I haven't been very good at it. Well, they never were a letter writing culture or they didn't really have telephones even. The closest telephone when I was there was just down the road at the AG station and then the second year they did get a telephone at the school, but there was nobody to call. Nobody had phones, really, and they would, you know, occasionally write letters. But when I left, I wrote lots of letters and I got some back, but not really very many. Of course, this is the days before email.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:32] Yeah.

BAKER: [00:35:35] Occasionally I'll get an email. I was in touch for a while with one of the teachers who emigrated to New Zealand later. So I got some emails, but kind of lost touch with that. And every once in a while, I'll, you know, somebody will find me on Facebook or somewhere and I'll get an email out of the blue.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:53] How would you characterize the Fiji culture?

BAKER: [00:36:00] Uh, characterize the Fiji culture. It's, um, it is very community oriented, I mean, I guess if you have that, you hear that phrase, it takes a village. I mean, that is very, that is very much the Fijian culture. What's yours is mine. You know, a lot of it's communal. Occasionally I would ask students to come help me and, you know, with my garden, which I try, I'm a terrible gardener, but I try. You know, I'm in a farming community. I've got to try growing some food. You know, I tried it, and it was, I think my eggplant produced one eggplant. You know, it was about the size of a quarter and it was tiny. But you know, I'd occasionally hire students to help me with that or something. And then. And they didn't really want to be paid, but I'd give them a T-shirt or something. Well, then I would see that T-shirt on about six different kids over the next few weeks. They just, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:57] Shared.

BAKER: [00:36:58] Everything just gets shared. And it's actually, there's a term for it. Fijians call it *kerekere*. And so, you know, if you see something and you want it, just say, oh, *kerekere*, can I borrow something or other? Or I would never say to somebody, oh, you know, I really like that necklace. It's really pretty. You know, because they would be expected to take it off and give it to you, which made it. This is one reason why a lot of the shops were actually run by the Indians because they, you know, they expected to be paid. You could put things on credit and then, you know, pay it at the end of a month or something. But some of the Fijians would try to have a shop and people would say, well, *kerekere*, I just need a little bit of sugar, you know. And then

they would just give, end up giving out a lot of the things without getting.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:43] Getting paid.

BAKER: [00:37:43] Getting paid for it. So it just wasn't, it wasn't their culture. You know, if somebody needs something. Somebody needs something. They will give it to them.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:52] That's really nice.

BAKER: [00:37:54] Yeah, it's wonderful, you know, so if, you know, occasionally I would get sick or I'd get, you know, maybe get a sore throat or a cold or something, you know? And the neighbors would all bring me food and all take care of me. And actually, I never really had to worry about lunch at school. You know, I'd lived at the school compound, but it would take me, you know, two or three minutes to walk home. But if I only had a half an hour for lunch, how could I go home and cook something up fresh? Because, you know, you don't just keep a loaf of bread on hand. If you don't eat it in the first day, it molds. And you can't just cook up something and then eat it for one, especially just one person. But others of the teachers would cook up, you know, of course, for a whole family or whatever. So people always, the first year, one of the other teachers, just the first day she just gave me what they call a roti parcel. The roti is the bread that the, the flatbread that the Indians use as a staple of their meals. And they would take the curry and just roll it up in the roti. And they called it a roti parcel. So one year, the first year, the chemistry teacher, who was an Indian woman, she just said, I'm just going to bring you your lunch every day. And she just every day gave me a roti parcel, you know?

GANZGLASS: [00:39:10] Very nice.

BAKER: [00:39:10] And then the second year, one of the other teachers at the school, she also had her brother and sister and they had a whole family, so she would cook for them anyway. And she said, you're just coming for lunch every day. And they also had some of the Fijian

women in the community would come in and cook lunch for whatever students could pay for it. And it was only, you know, maybe 10, 20 cents. So there was always something there, but just incredibly generous. It's kind of interesting because it's, on the one hand, is generous. On the other hand, it's like, well, you have something and I'm just going to use it, you know. So it's kind of an interesting dichotomy there.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:51] Which is hard for an American, right?

BAKER: [00:39:52] It's hard for an American, right. Because it's.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:55] It's mine.

BAKER: [00:39:55] That's mine. That's right. I worked hard for that. That's mine. I like that, and you can't just have it. So getting used to that idea is interesting.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:04] When you talked about that communal attitude, did that extend to Indians among the Fijians and Indians as well?

BAKER: [00:40:14] Um, not so much. Not as much. To some extent, but not as much.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:22] So that's among the Fijians. And then the Indians had their own community.

BAKER: [00:40:26] Right, right. And out where I was because it was primarily a Fijian community, the Indian families, most of them spoke Fijian. But the Fijian families usually didn't speak Hindi. And some of the, some of them would speak English, not the older generation, but the younger generation, because they had to speak it in school. So it was interesting. I'd go to the shop and my Hindi wasn't that great. My Fijian was better than my Hindi. The shopkeeper was Indian, but the two of us would communicate in Fijian.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:07] You need some language, right?

BAKER: [00:41:09] You need something.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:10] Yeah, right. And he didn't speak English?

BAKER: [00:41:12] No, he did not speak English. No.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:15] So did you get to travel around the country?

BAKER: [00:41:18] I did. I used my vacation time to travel within the country. Some people, some of the Peace Corps volunteers, would go to Australia and New Zealand because it's so close, over their school holidays or whatever. I waited until after I finished to do that. And I used the time to travel around. I mean, there are a hundred islands that are inhabited. And so there's, it's quite a spread.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:44] How far apart are those islands?

BAKER: [00:41:47] Some are right next to each other and, you know, within sight and a short boat ride away.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:53] And people go back and forth all the time? Or did they really stick to their island?

BAKER: [00:41:57] Pretty much stuck to their island. But it's spread out over a pretty large area. I was on the main island and the main island is about the size of the Big Island of Hawaii.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:10] So pretty good size.

BAKER: [00:42:12] Pretty good size. And the that was the largest island, that and the second largest island. And then you go down to the third one, there's a huge gap then. I mean, so the two big islands, a handful of smaller fairly substantial islands, and then a lot of tiny, tiny islands.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:31] So people are pretty isolated on those islands I guess?

BAKER: [00:42:35] People on those islands are pretty isolated. Yeah. I could go into the capital by bus and, you know, on a Saturday morning, I could go in and do my shopping and come home that day. Quite often I would go in and I would do my shopping and then I'd stay with a friend and, you know, go to a movie and get some food, you know, get some protein because I was eating mostly vegetarian at my site, mostly because it was just more practical. And also without refrigeration, you know, how do you get a tiny piece of meat and cook it up just for one? And the meat, meat and fish and all that. You'd think there'd be a lot of really good fish in Fiji, but there was no real fish market at the time with, you know, ice and all that to keep them fresh. So I'd see the boats coming in with fish, but they were sitting out in the hot sun and, you know, I didn't really trust it. And again, how do I get a fish just for one?

GANZGLASS: [00:43:31] How big was the capital, or is the capital?

BAKER: [00:43:37] The capital at the time was, I think, what was the population, like 30,000 or something?

GANZGLASS: [00:43:42] So, little.

BAKER: [00:43:43] It's little. I mean, the whole country had 750,000, if that's it. So actually maybe it was more than that in the capital. I'm terrible with numbers like that.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:52] But not a big place.

BAKER: [00:43:53] Not a big place, no. I mean, there was a university there and there was, you know, there was some embassies and all that. So it was, I mean, it's fairly good size. So it's got to be bigger than that then.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:07] OK.

BAKER: [00:44:07] Whatever.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:08] Whatever.

BAKER: [00:44:09] But pretty much, you know, whatever I needed, I had to go to the capital to get it.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:14] When you went from island to island, was it culturally different or pretty much the same?

BAKER: [00:44:23] Uh. Mostly the same. There were some variations from island to island, um, but not real significant. Culturally pretty much the same. It's interesting, though, there is one island and there was a Peace Corps volunteer stationed there. Again, during training they teach you the Fijian and the Hindi, and then he gets this assignment and he's going to this other island called Rabi.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:50] Oh yeah, you mentioned it.

BAKER: [00:44:51] No, that's Rotuma.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:52] Oh.

BAKER: [00:44:53] That was a different one. But the Rabi is an island that is, gosh, what's the, I can't even remember what country it is right now. Anyhow, the Banaban culture, pretty sure that's what it is. Anyhow, there it's from a totally different part of the Pacific, but their island was essentially mined to death of with phosphates. That's another issue in some of the Pacific. So that these other countries, the U.S. included, had gone in and mined the phosphates. And then they just totally, the island became unlivable. They had to have a place to live, so they relocated them. They found an island in Fiji and they just basically. So here in the middle of Fiji, is this totally different language, culture, people, everything on this one island.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:46] Oh, so they're, where they came from?

BAKER: [00:45:49] Where they came from.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:50] And they were relocated?

BAKER: [00:45:51] Relocated to this island in the middle of Fiji. So you have issues like that in the Pacific. One of the other issues at the time was trying to get the Pacific, or Fiji at least, to be a nuclear free zone. I don't know if you remember the, uh, shoot, what's the? What's the name of the organization that?

GANZGLASS: [00:46:20] Greenpeace?

BAKER: [00:46:20] Greenpeace, thank you. Yes. Greenpeace had a boat, the Rainbow Warrior, that was going around the Pacific, you know, and somebody bombed it in Auckland and it sunk and it killed a couple of people, whatever. And so there were just a lot of, that was when I was there in Fiji. And there's just a lot of anti-nuclear things that. I have a t-shirt, I think I still have the T-shirt that says something like, you know, um, you know, test it in Paris, something in London, things in Washington, but keep our Pacific nuclear free. And of course, climate change is going to be, that's an issue right now that's really becoming very big in Fiji. A lot of these islands.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:05] Aren't going to make it.

BAKER: [00:47:06] They're only a couple of feet above sea level. So the sea level goes up, the island's gone. They're already having problems with some of the islands because the saltwater is leaching into the water tables. So it's already becoming very salty.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:23] And what are they thinking about doing?

BAKER: [00:47:28] Um, yeah. Well, a lot of those little islands, they'll just have to abandon the islands and they'll have to find somewhere else to live. I mean, the main island is huge. And so that part of climate change won't be a factor. You know, severe weather is another factor. The biggest tropical cyclone I think anywhere hit Fiji last year, a tropical cyclone Winston.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:53] So they're right in the.

BAKER: [00:47:54] They're right in that path. In fact, right now, I was reading this morning in my email some, there's heavy flooding in Fiji right now. It's really affecting things. But there was literally one island last year in the tropical cyclone that just pretty much got flattened. I mean, everything just wiped out. All the trees are stripped of all the leaves. Buildings were all flattened.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:14] So what does that do for people who get wiped out all the time? How do they think about that? Well, how do you think about it now that you've lived in a place like that?

BAKER: [00:48:24] Yeah, I know. I mean, they're resilient. I mean, they're used to having storms come and they deal with it. I think it is getting worse. But it was. It's interesting. I did a one of my, um uh, one of the people in my training group was actually an architect, and she taught at the Fiji Institute of Technology and taught architecture. And she was studying housing and she still studies housing and all that, actually. But so it's interesting to hear from her perspective as we sometimes went to some of these villages to look at how the houses are constructed. And they did construct the houses to withstand, to some extent, the hurricanes. So and at that time, when there were deaths due to the hurricane, if it wasn't due to flooding or something like that, it's quite often it was due to something I think that was, you know, the houses that weren't.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:28] Built the right way.

BAKER: [00:49:28] Built the right way. So, you know, they'd be in a church or something and the cement wall would collapse. Or one of the biggest problems, every house, pretty much every house had a tin roof.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:39] Mm hmm.

BAKER: [00:49:39] And I can remember sitting in my house during a hurricane and hearing my roof starting to peel off. And a lot of these roofs would just peel off and then they're just flying knives, really. I mean, these big pieces of sheet metal are just flying across, you know, that's a huge

danger. But in the interior, a lot of the houses, either they're made from, if they're made from woven bamboo, the sides are woven bamboo that the wind just goes right through it, you know, so it doesn't. I mean, it works for Fiji.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:10] It doesn't collapse. Yeah.

BAKER: [00:50:11] It wouldn't work here, obviously, the cold and everything else. But in there it worked because the wind just kind of went right through it. The roofs were thatched and they were constructed in a way that, and this is what I was told at least, even if the, even if the building collapsed, the roof would stay intact and keep you safe underneath it. It'd be kind of hard to get out, but eventually you could. But so they were really designed to be appropriate for that climate and that culture. Whereas, you know, the houses that then they were started building and my house was a wooden house on a platform with a tin roof and my water came from the rain. So there was a water tank on the side of the house and the gutters would just drain into there and, you know, the toilet outside. But yeah, it wasn't great for that climate.

BAKER: [00:51:11] You get hurricanes and, again, the roof could peel off. But when it rained, it made it challenging. I could hear. We were right by kind of a, I guess you'd call it tropical jungle, pretty dense. You could hear the rain coming. And it was, first of all, when it rained, it was a really hard rain and you could hear it coming. So if I could hear it coming through the trees, and if I was teaching, I would know that I had, you know, OK, I've got a few seconds here. I would say, OK, you know, quick, do problems one, two and three on this page or whatever. Because as soon as it hit the building, it got too loud on the tin roof, because you couldn't hear a thing. And then it got so dark and they didn't have lights on at the school during the day. There's no reason to keep the lights on otherwise. So made it interesting.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:06] Here's a skill you learned, right?

BAKER: [00:52:08] That's a skill I learned. Also made it really hot. You know, it's really and you get it. You get the sun on one of those tin roofs. It's just,

it was pretty brutal. But so, you know, and like I guess reflecting on some of that is it's interesting that, you know, they thought this was their advancing and this is the way you've got to do things. You've got to build things out of wood and concrete instead of. But that doesn't necessarily work as well.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:39] Yeah. So let's just. So you then traveled to Australia and New Zealand on the way home, and I know you're now at the National Peace Corps Association.

BAKER: [00:52:51] Mm hmm.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:52] Talk a little bit about the path from Fiji to that.

BAKER: [00:52:58] Path from Fiji to that. Well.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:00] Was it a straight line?

BAKER: [00:53:04] Um, not exactly. But it wasn't that not straight.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:09] OK.

BAKER: [00:53:09] I mean, I came back in, uh, when was it? After I finished my travels, I spent a month in New Zealand, a month in Australia, came back through Fiji, and then kind of took my time getting home. So I got home in like May, April, May of 1987, and I realized in. Well, when I left for Peace Corps, I mentioned earlier I was at General Electric. I actually technically was on a leave of absence. I talked them into a leave of absence so that if I decide to come back to it, I could. And but I decided that was just not right for me, but I love the teaching. And so I decided that's, I wanted to shift gears and go into teaching.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:04] Physics?

BAKER: [00:54:04] Teaching physics. Physics or mathematics or physical science. Any of that. Well, more physics than the math. But I wasn't certified, so I couldn't really apply for the public schools. And actually I

went home to Cleveland, which is where I was born and raised, and Cleveland school system was actually, there were articles in the paper that they were desperate for physics teachers because they couldn't find anyone. I was like, great, here I am. I've got a couple of years teaching experience, blah blah. Not certified, so they wouldn't touch me. So I figured, well, at that point it was early summer, you know, the school year's starting in a couple of months. I put in application with an independent school placement service and say, well, OK, if I can get a job with an independent school, I'll teach. And if I don't have a job by September, then I'll work on my certification.

BAKER: [00:55:05] And mid-August I got a call for an interview with a school where they had, um, a teacher had abruptly resigned just before the school year started, and so they needed a math teacher. And so I was, I flew out there for an interview. They offered me a job on the spot. I said, let me think about it. And they said, well, not too long because we got to, we got to make sure we have somebody in two weeks to start school. So I said, well, at least let me fly home, you know, I'll think about it on the plane.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:33] Where was that?

BAKER: [00:55:34] This is in Rhode Island. So I went home and I accepted the job and moved there and stayed there for nine years. And along the way, I went and got my master's degree in international education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. And so I was teaching just math there, but also doing a lot with the students in terms of international and intercultural understanding. You know, the other teachers knew that I had been in Peace Corps, and they kind of encouraged me to help do that, and that's third goal.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:11] Third goal.

BAKER: [00:56:11] Third goal. And so after a number of years there, I wanted to do more than just teaching in one school. And so I left the school, started job hunting, came to D.C. It was actually right when National

Peace Corps Association got a grant to start their global teaching at Global Educators Network.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:39] Oh.

BAKER: [00:56:39] And so I got hired to start that.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:41] What is that? I don't know what that is.

BAKER: [00:56:42] Well, and it's, it actually, we're phasing that aspect of it out now, but it was designed as a resource and a network for primarily returned Peace Corps volunteers who come back from Peace Corps and they go into teaching. And how do you bring more of that intercultural and international understanding into the classroom? We quickly realized it's not just our RPCVs, it could be.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:10] Anybody.

BAKER: [00:57:11] Anybody. So we became essentially a resource for teachers who needed more support and training and materials for bringing that international understanding into the classroom, into the curriculum. All grade levels, all subject areas. So it's not just, OK, in social studies today, we're going to talk about this and boom, we're done. But how do you infuse it into your math class? How do you infuse it into your physical education class? How do you infuse it into all different subject matters? I mean, this is 20 years ago, and this is something that wasn't done much.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:47] Is it done much now?

BAKER: [00:57:49] Oh yeah, definitely. It's a lot more, which is one of the reasons we're kind of phasing it out from NPCA, because there are so many other organizations that are doing it.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:57] That's great.

BAKER: [00:57:57] There's a lot. In fact, there's almost so much that now it's the opposite problem. How do the teachers kind of wade through all this and figure out what's going to work best for them? So, yeah, so I was NPCA, brought on to do that, and really develop our global education program. And so now, as I mentioned, there are so many other organizations that are doing it that we're focusing now on what's really key to our mission. It's not really working with other educators. And also Peace Corps has their worldwide schools program, too. So there are a lot of resources already there, but focusing now on how can we help like our affiliate groups do more third goal and global education. How do they infuse that into their work? And of course, NPCA is just doing a lot, a lot more in other directions as well.

BAKER: [00:58:56] So my role there has evolved from the Global Teach Net program to then I became the director of global education, and then director of global education and technology, and then global education and programs, and then eventually was asked to be the vice president. So I've had the role of vice president for quite a while now, but all those other pieces are still there underneath it. It just.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:23] You just keep changing titles.

BAKER: [00:59:25] I just keep changing titles, and there's not much more they could do with this title. So but still doing a lot of the same type of things, but really focusing on my job there is to focus now on, um, I work with our affiliate groups. We have 162 affiliated groups that are scattered around the country and around the world, and so how do we help those groups carry out the third goal? How do we help them be stronger? So it's really how do we help our community thrive? So individuals and our affiliate groups. That's one of our three goals. Our second is to help Peace Corps be its best, and that's primarily through our advocacy program. And then how can we continue that development impact? So, you know, how can our community continue to make a difference around the world? And uh.

BAKER: [01:00:20] So, yeah, my job at NPCA now is mostly around the affiliate groups and some of our program areas. We have a travel program

now where we take returned volunteers or members of our community to other countries to really see things from a Peace Corps perspective, a Peace Corps lens. So I work on that program and a lot of also just general office type things, finance and governance and things like that aren't as sexy. But.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:55] So you're talking clearly a lot about the third goal, but from your personal experience, talk, reflect a little bit about goal one and two.

BAKER: [01:01:06] Mm hmm.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:09] Do you think you provided real assistance to the country? Did you get more out of it than what you put in? All those questions people always ask.

BAKER: [01:01:21] Yeah, well, I definitely got a lot out of it, and I think they did too. And actually my students the second year. The first year, as I mentioned earlier, the exam results were kind of on par with the rest of the country. Nothing very spectacular. But I learned a lot of things and I taught much better the second year. And second year, they actually did really well. And especially in the form six, where the national pass rate was like, you know, 25 percent something like that. I think our students had 50 percent pass rate and I was told that we had like the number four school in the country for the pass rate of that form six that year. And I think a couple of my students did go on to get scholarships at the university. And there's only one university, University of the South Pacific. But there's also a Fiji Institute of Technology, and there's a couple of, a number of other sort of technical programs. So my students did very well in that regard and they're, from what I hear, that they've. I think I did a good job.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:36] So you were a good teacher.

BAKER: [01:02:37] So it sounds like, it sounds like I must have been a good teacher. I did something right. But I also feel like, you know, you can't just be isolated and just one teacher. And then the next year, when you

leave, it can't all fall apart. So I think I put some systems in place that helped them to continue to do well, I hope. There was a Peace Corps volunteer that had followed me. I was one of a string of Peace Corps volunteers at the school, but they also hadn't had a female at the school for a while. So in terms of goal two, I think that's the area I think where they really learned more about Americans and American women in particular. They at one point told me, you know, women don't live alone out here. I'm like, well, I do, you know.

BAKER: [01:03:24] I had to adapt in certain ways. I did have, um. They did. I did have somebody come and visit me one night and want to come in and I'm like, no, I'm not letting you in. And that's when they said, well, women don't live alone out here. I said, well, how am I going to make this work? You know, I really want to make this work. And Peace Corps actually came out and looked at the school to make sure I was safe and secure. And the school is like, we have to take care of her because.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:50] Was this teacher, another teacher?

BAKER: [01:03:52] No, I think somebody from the community. Anyway, then I looked at my neighbor and she had a house the same size of mine. And it was she and her husband and four kids and then a niece from the nearby village and another cousin from some, you know, so like eight people living there. And so after a while, I said, this is silly. You know, one of the, at least some of them can come down and sleep here at night, and that's what they did. Two of the girls would come down at night and just sleep there and then that.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:20] So you had company.

BAKER: [01:04:21] So I had some company. Yeah. And we actually didn't do that the second year. But the first year it was actually OK I think.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:31] Well, they got to know you better. And you got to know them.

BAKER: [01:04:34] Right. And what I was up against too is, what do they know about American women? They didn't have TV at that time in Fiji. They do now, and they've got a couple channels.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:49] Are you thinking that's good or?

BAKER: [01:04:50] Well, yeah, I mean, they had television sets because that's what they had, the videos. So the videos would be these horrible American movies or TV shows or whatever. So what did they know about women? Well, the show that they had they watched the most was Dallas. So certainly well all the women are sleeping around and they all carry guns, you know? It's like, well, no, sorry, that's not how it really works. So, yeah, trying to combat the stereotypes, but they didn't have a whole lot to go on in terms of, you know, what are, what's it like? You know, so yeah. So I think I helped in some regard in the second goal as well.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:31] That's interesting because you're a woman, especially.

BAKER: [01:05:33] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Especially because I was a woman.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:37] So, anything else you'd like to say? We're about out of time.

BAKER: [01:05:45] Yeah. Well, it went by quickly because, you know, I love talking about my Peace Corps experience and thank you for the opportunity to kind of reminisce and think about it. I mean, I think it's, uh, it is a wonderful program. You know, I'm grateful that the community that we have at NPCA is working real hard to make sure Peace Corps thrives. And I hope more people have the opportunity to do Peace Corps. It's a life changing.

GANZGLASS: [01:06:15] For everybody.

BAKER: [01:06:16] For everybody, it's life changing. I actually started the trend, the Peace Corps trend in my family.

GANZGLASS: [01:06:23] Oh.

BAKER: [01:06:24] I came back. When I came back in '87, my stepsister was applying to Peace Corps. She went to Guatemala, where she met her now husband, who was also Peace Corps Guatemala. And when I moved to D.C., through the Friends of Fiji, our affiliate group, I met my now life partner, who also served as an Indian man in Fiji, which is interesting, post-coup. So, yeah, he had a very interesting experience.

GANZGLASS: [01:06:53] I'd love to interview him.

BAKER: [01:06:56] We were doing the same thing. We were both teaching physics and math.

GANZGLASS: [01:06:59] Interesting.

BAKER: [01:06:59] But I was in the interior in a Fijian community. He was on the coast in an Indian community. And of course, as an Indian man after the first coup, after the coups. Interesting experience.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:09] Yeah, I'm sure. Very different.

BAKER: [01:07:11] Very different. And then in 2001, my father and stepmother, after they retired, went off to Peace Corps as a couple and served in Romania. And now my niece is serving, the daughter of the two Guatemalan RPCVs who got married. Their daughter is now in Peace Corps right now in Namibia.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:36] That is amazing.

BAKER: [01:07:37] Teaching, well, she will be teaching. The school year hasn't started yet, but she will be teaching math.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:41] Yeah, but so many of you in your family.

BAKER: [01:07:42] So many of us in our family. Yeah, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:44] So there's a military tradition and then there is a Peace Corps.

BAKER: [01:07:48] In our family, it's definitely the Peace Corps tradition.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:52] And I'd love to talk to your parents about seniors going into the Peace Corps.

BAKER: [01:07:57] Yeah, yeah. Well, my father passed away a couple of years ago, but my stepmother is going strong. And yeah, they, in fact, my dad used to go all the time to the recruiting events and talk about being a senior in Peace Corps. I mean, they made some amazing lifelong friendships. I mean, she gets phone calls all the time from their friends in Romania, and they email all the time. And she hasn't been back recently, but she went back, probably, you know, three or four times to visit in Romania. And I think that's actually pretty cool that five of their seven grandkids got to visit them in Peace Corps. You know, how cool is that to go visit grandma and grandpa in Peace Corps, you know? The only two that didn't get there was just they were just too young to make a trip like that.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:44] That's wonderful. That's great.

BAKER: [01:08:46] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:47] Well, a good tradition.

BAKER: [01:08:48] It is. It is a good tradition.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:50] So thank you for the interview.

BAKER: [01:08:52] Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]