

**Christeen Pusch Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Christeen Pusch  
**Interviewer:** Sally Waley  
**Date of Interview:** June 13, 2019  
**Location of Interview:** Austin, Texas  
**Length:** 39 pages

**Biographical Note**

Christeen Pusch served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras from 2005 to 2007 in a municipal development program.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed July 17, 2019, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Technical Note**

This transcript was created by Sonix software from the MP3 audio recording of the interview. The resulting text file was lightly edited and reformatted according to a standard template.

**Suggested Citation**

Christeen Pusch, recorded interview by Sally Waley, June 13, 2019, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

## DISCLAIMER

This transcript was generated automatically by Sonix software from the audio recording. The accuracy of the transcript cannot be guaranteed. Only the original audio recording constitutes the official record of this interview and should be used along with the transcript. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy or would like to recommend corrections, they are encouraged to contact the library reference staff.

Oral History Interview

with

Christeen Pusch

June 13, 2019  
Austin, Texas

By Sally Waley

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

WALEY: [00:00:01] This is Sally Waley. It's June 13th, and I am conducting this interview for the Oral History Project. Can you tell us your name and your country of service?

PUSCH: [00:00:16] Christeen Pusch, I was in Honduras.

WALEY: [00:00:18] What year did you serve?

PUSCH: [00:00:19] 2005 to 2007.

WALEY: [00:00:21] And what was your assignment?

PUSCH: [00:00:23] Municipal development.

WALEY: [00:00:24] Great. So going back to kind of the beginning of why you wanted to join Peace Corps, where did you hear about Peace Corps? What made you want to join?

PUSCH: [00:00:34] So I remember my senior year of high school, one of our teachers actually decided to join the Peace Corps the year after I graduated, and she was really excited about it. At that time, it wasn't anything that occurred to me. But then my final semester of college, all my friends had studied abroad, so I thought I wanted to do something like that too. So I spent a semester at American University in D.C., and I wanted to go on the one where we would travel far away. So I went to, it was International Environmental Development Seminar, and we went to South Africa for a month for that. And our, one of our professors there had done Peace Corps and he showed us a video and really was promoting it. And at that point, I was like, wow, that'd be really neat. But it took me almost a year to get up the guts to apply. So I kind of just lounged around for a year after college and then finally applied.

PUSCH: [00:01:34] Um, but the thing is too, I grew up, my, both my parents are German immigrants. So I actually learned German before I learned English and spent quite a bit of my childhood there. And so I think, I had actually have a lot of culture shock when I was younger. But I think that actually, it piqued my interest in travel. But I think also, um, kind of getting, jumping ahead a little bit. But I think, um, part of like the Peace Corps, what I got out of it too was just that understanding of where I stood, where I, where I fit in, I think, because part of it I always felt like an outsider because of culture.

WALEY: [00:02:14] Yeah, that's a really interesting reason to like consider going into Peace Corps. What, when you applied, did you have a concept of where you wanted to go, what you want to do, what it was going to be like?

PUSCH: [00:02:26] No, you know, I mean, I think another reason for wanting to apply was just I thought, I thought magically I would gain all these skill sets. So that was, you know, you don't gain the skill sets unless you actually really try and put something into it. But yeah, I mean, I was open.

A lot of my friends from college were actually, like my, two of my best friends were from Hong Kong and I had a lot of friends from there. And so I kind of thought it would be interesting to go to Asia. The lady who interviewed me had actually gone to Poland and we spoke a lot about Eastern Europe and we spoke about her experience as well. And so initially when I had the interview, it looked like I was going to go to Eastern Europe. And so it was only when I called to check up on my application like months later or something, they said they had an opening in Latin America. And my only reason for wanting to go to Latin America is I thought I would improve my Spanish and then I thought that would make me more marketable. And I thought I thought that would be useful in the future.

WALEY: [00:03:23] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:03:24] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:03:25] What was your application process like? You said it took several months.

PUSCH: [00:03:29] Yeah. I mean, for me it was pretty easy. I think maybe other times it's a little bit more rigorous. I think at the time when I was applying, it sounded more that a lot of people, when they had problems, it was more for medical reasons. And I didn't really ever have any medical issues. So it was pretty much just going through the steps and then I was accepted. I don't think they really denied anyone at that time for reasons other than medical reasons.

WALEY: [00:03:58] What year was that that you were applying?

PUSCH: [00:03:59] 2005. Yeah.

WALEY: [00:04:02] And when you, so you applied in 2005. How long did it take you from your application to staging?

PUSCH: [00:04:08] I don't remember exactly, but I think it was a few weeks. A few months, sorry. Yeah.

WALEY: [00:04:11] Yeah. Do you remember what month you left? And where are you met your group?

PUSCH: [00:04:15] Yeah, I left in September, so actually we, our, um. We went to D.C. September 19th. And we landed in Honduras September 21st, 2005.

WALEY: [00:04:27] Yeah. What was your group like when you met them at staging?

PUSCH: [00:04:32] Great. I actually missed a day of staging because I was living in Los Angeles before joining Peace Corps, and so I'm from outside Dallas. So I drove from LA to Dallas and got a speeding ticket on the way, one of two speeding tickets in eastern California. There's just nothing going on. And so I was bored and wanted to get there faster. But because I had the pending ticket, I had to make lots of phone calls to try to get that the process sped up and paid before I left the country. Because I couldn't leave otherwise. So, yeah. But yeah, no, I mean, um, my roommate in staging was actually Katie Long, who you've met, and she was really nice. You know, she's a very friendly person. So, yeah, we got along. But yeah, I think I was a little freaked out too, obviously.

WALEY: [00:05:23] Yeah, that's kind of a traumatic thing to happen right before you were leaving.

PUSCH: [00:05:26] Oh, no, no, no. But just even just leaving the country.

WALEY: [00:05:28] Oh, okay. Yeah. What, how many people were in your group?

PUSCH: [00:05:33] So I think the people, so we had. There was municipal development and there were youth development or something like that. And there were like about 30 of us total. And I think in D.C., I think there were some people there who were going to Guatemala or El Salvador as well. So we had something to do with them. But not too much.

WALEY: [00:05:56] Why were you picked for municipal development?

PUSCH: [00:06:02] I had a degree in planning and development.

WALEY: [00:06:05] That is a great criteria.

PUSCH: [00:06:07] Although I'm not sure that that qualified me. But yeah.

WALEY: [00:06:12] What were your first impressions when you stepped off the plane?

PUSCH: [00:06:16] Um, well, I remember, I think at the airport there was some guy who just kind of picked up my bag and was trying to take it, but he wasn't trying to steal it or anything. He was just trying to take it to his taxi so that he would get the business. And there was someone who had to kind of, one of the trainers kind of stopped him and took the bag from him, like, no, no, she needs that. You don't need it. Yeah. So just, yeah, I mean, that experience. I mean, I had traveled quite a bit, as I said, I had gone to South Africa, I had been to Hong Kong to visit my friends. I'd been to Mexico a few times, so it wasn't anything I had never seen before. And I do know that, I mean, I had Spanish in high school, but I never took it in college. So my Spanish level wasn't the best.

PUSCH: [00:07:08] And so the first day we got there, we were already staying with host families. And I just remember they were talking to us or to me, and I didn't understand half of what they were saying. And they kept on calling me *esperante*. And I was like, what? And I guess that's a trainee, right?

WALEY: [00:07:24] Okay.

PUSCH: [00:07:25] And so kind of and, you know, they showed me to, they were really nice and they showed me a book of all the old *esperantes*. And I was just like, oh, okay, this is, this makes sense. And, um. Yeah.

WALEY: [00:07:35] Where were you with the training family? You got off the plane and they took you to?

PUSCH: [00:07:38] So, yeah, so we got off the plane and then we all went to the training center and then the host families were all there and then they took

us to their homes. Yeah, immediately. Yeah. Um, which was probably good. And then, I mean, I love the town where we were. It was just a really pretty scenic town. I mean, very, very tranquil, you know, not much going on, but also in the mountains, that's one thing. Honduras has a lot of mountains. And it would be get really pretty because you'd see all the clouds up in the mountains and stuff. Very green at times, right? They had rainy season and dry season. So especially during the rainy season, it would be really green.

WALEY: [00:08:18] Yeah, yeah. Where was the, and that's where the training center was?

PUSCH: [00:08:21] Yeah. In Saint Lucia, outside Tegucigalpa, which is the capital.

WALEY: [00:08:25] How far or how far was the drive?

PUSCH: [00:08:28] I'd say half an hour.

WALEY: [00:08:29] Oh, it was close.

PUSCH: [00:08:29] Or something like that. Yeah, not far.

WALEY: [00:08:31] Yeah. And your host family there had had trainees before, *esperantes* before?

PUSCH: [00:08:36] Yes. Yeah. And so I think one of my favorite memories there was we would, uh, there were a lot of little kids. And so I feel like, I don't know if other people's experience is like this, but I think sometimes you make friends with people of different ages just because there aren't really, you know, you're lonely for friends or, you know, but they were really nice too. And so we would just kind of have, uh, dance parties to Britney Spears and Kumbia Kings. So like a mix of everything. Um, so, yeah.

WALEY: [00:09:07] Yeah. How long were you there at the training with your family and the training center?

PUSCH: [00:09:12] So we had training for three months. I think we did two months there, and then we had definitely a month somewhere else, in La Esperanza, which was closer to actually the site where I ended up later on. And then in La Esperanza, that was more, we had, we were separated. So when we were in Santa Lucia, we were with the youth development and then in La Esperanza it was just the municipal development.

WALEY: [00:09:37] Okay. So you then split up by sector.

PUSCH: [00:09:40] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:09:41] How many of them, how many of you all were there in the training group?

PUSCH: [00:09:45] And I think it was about 30, just over 30 for both groups. So I would say about half half.

WALEY: [00:09:51] Okay, so 15?

PUSCH: [00:09:52] Something like that.

WALEY: [00:09:52] Wow, that's small.

PUSCH: [00:09:53] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:09:55] What, um, you mentioned your first roommate, Katie Long. What, um, who, you know, did you end up being very close? Did you bond with everybody there at training or was everybody close or were you more focused on getting to know the language and your host family and?

PUSCH: [00:10:11] Um, I mean, I think everyone was like a good support system. I think later on I ended up kind of being the recluse who stayed at site really a lot. So I think maybe I didn't bond as much as others, as others did. But yeah, I think. It is a very intense experience, and when you have such an intense experience, I think you just, you bond. You're kind of almost forced to.

WALEY: [00:10:35] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:10:35] Just to have that support.

WALEY: [00:10:37] Yeah. Yeah, I know the feeling. What was your training like? What did you learn while you were there for your couple of months?

PUSCH: [00:10:47] I don't really, um, I learned Spanish. I don't remember. I think we went to some municipalities. But, you know, I was looking over questions before, and I think that's something that maybe could have been improved at the time, you know. I think later on they did do more projects and stuff. Um, but yeah, I mean, I remember the Spanish, um. We had people from Honduras teaching the Spanish classes, and I think they didn't speak much English, so it was almost purely in Spanish. And what they did was we all took a test and then we would, we were grouped with people of our like of similar level. So I was with two other people learning Spanish. So it was almost like one-on-one Spanish class. And then you're with the family as well. So I think, I mean, you learn very quickly. You're forced to. I mean, one of the things my dad always used to say, he learned English in six weeks. Don't believe him quite. But I think you do learn when you're forced to like that. You do learn a language pretty quickly.

WALEY: [00:11:49] Yeah. What were the levels of Spanish coming in? And were you and where did you fit in that kind of ranking?

PUSCH: [00:11:58] I was somewhere in the middle lower. I mean, there were, well, Katie again, because you know her, which she I think was like amongst the highest levels. So there were people who had, I don't know if she had her degree in Spanish, but there were people who had degrees in Spanish and were, I think, close to fluent just coming in. And then there were people who had almost, or had very little Spanish. But I think in order to go to a Spanish speaking country, you did need to know a little bit. But I know, um, one girl, Tonakita, who I've kind of kept in touch with, I know she wanted to go to Africa. And then they sent her to Latin America. And I know her Spanish really didn't, wasn't very good at the beginning, but she

improved it a lot. And I think she actually ended up working with an NGO later on with Honduras and stuff. And so, I mean, it just, yeah. I mean, I think by the end of it all of us spoke Spanish.

WALEY: [00:12:51] Yeah. And what was it like when you found out where you were going to be for the rest of the, of your service?

PUSCH: [00:13:00] You mean the site?

WALEY: [00:13:02] What was the process for like finding out? Did you find out in advance? Did they surprise you with it?

PUSCH: [00:13:06] Yeah. I mean, I think it was just a few weeks. I mean, a week or two before we got to site. One of the things is we had a site visit beforehand. And my site visit and my counterpart were both in the neighboring town. And so, um, with, you know, there was another volunteer over there too. So I did all that over there. And then when I got to site, it was like right around Christmas time which is vacation. And I had never met anyone else. And, and no, I didn't. My counterpart wasn't there. So I think that is the loneliest I've ever felt. That is the only time where I just needed to talk to anyone. I mean, it was like days where, like, the only conversation I had with anyone was like the lady at the corner store buying toilet paper and food with my broken Spanish. So that's, yeah, that was again, very intense.

PUSCH: [00:14:04] And, you know, it was, you know, we had cell phones, but you could only text. And there was an internet cafe. But, you know, I mean, you could make a call, but it would've been really crazy expensive.

WALEY: [00:14:14] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:14:14] So yeah, just sitting, I mean, I was just sitting in my house, cleaning it, you know, preparing.

WALEY: [00:14:20] Who brought you to, how did you find your house? Who brought you to site, did somebody?

PUSCH: [00:14:25] I guess one of the Peace Corps, you know, I don't even remember, but I think it was someone with Peace Corps. Yeah. You know, I don't remember.

WALEY: [00:14:36] How far away was your site from the training site? You said it was close.

PUSCH: [00:14:40] No, no, no. My, the site where I was stationed was actually pretty far away. So I was actually just like 30 minutes away from El Salvador. And again, distances aren't. Honduras is a very small country. But because, like, so, okay, sorry. To get to La Esperanza was probably like a three hour bus ride. And then to get down to my town was another 3 or 4 hours. The thing is, it was only, I think it was 89 kilometers. But like but because the roads aren't paved and you're in like the mountains and stuff, you have to take a bus and the bus is very slow. So yeah, I mean, it was always a day trip and then you don't have your own vehicle, so you have to go when the bus goes.

WALEY: [00:15:25] Right. So how did you, do you remember a Peace Corp staff or somebody like kind of escorted you down there and helped you get there or did they provide you a bus ticket?

PUSCH: [00:15:35] I don't, I don't remember.

WALEY: [00:15:37] Yeah, okay.

PUSCH: [00:15:38] I guess. I mean. Yeah, no, I don't remember.

WALEY: [00:15:40] Yeah, no, I'm just curious. And your house, was it just like a rental or did somebody own it in the village or?

PUSCH: [00:15:47] Yeah. So actually the house where I lived and there were actually two volunteers who stayed there before I was there. So it was a huge house. It had like two bedrooms, pretty big living room, kitchen. I mean, you know, a tiny kitchen, whatever, and then outdoor bathroom and shower, which was more space than I needed. And, you know, you have running water like once a day and you fill up what we call a *pila*, just a big

ol' basin. Cement basin. And then that's how you take your shower. And the kitchen was very basic. I just, I bought two, like I guess, two burners or whatever, and that's what I cooked on if I could. Yeah, but yeah, I mean, but yeah, I mean, yeah. It was nice though.

PUSCH: [00:16:33] Um, and then, I mean, one of the things too, I mean, I had studied planning and we always talked about new urbanism and building to the street and walkability. And I was like, the town where I lived was a perfect example of that, you know. You know, everyone, you could walk everywhere. There were three streets and they were all parallel and, yeah, and people would leave their doors open. So if you were ever bored later on when I got to know people, you just walk over to your neighbor's house and hang out.

WALEY: [00:17:03] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:17:04] Which is, I don't know, I kind of miss from that.

WALEY: [00:17:06] Yeah. Yeah. How big was the town?

PUSCH: [00:17:13] I mean, I want to say the whole area was like a thousand. I don't know. It was pretty small.

WALEY: [00:17:18] Yeah. Okay. And who did you report to or did you work? Did you work with the local government?

PUSCH: [00:17:23] Yeah, so well so they gave me, like my main assignment was actually working with the Food and Agriculture Organization. So it was me and one other guy was staying in the neighboring town. And so that was one thing maybe could have been better organized. And then also me being kind of inexperienced. It took me a while, but essentially we were assigned with that organization and what they did was they worked with farmers and they gave them some kind of some help, I think, with even seeds and stuff. But they also taught them about like farming techniques. But it was like me and one other guy who was from New York. And so neither of us had really ever lived in an agricultural society. Neither of us

had much experience farming. So who were we to go in there and give them advice about what they were supposed to be doing?

PUSCH: [00:18:23] And so both of us kind of tried for quite a while, for almost a year, to try to make it work. And then later on it was just like, no, let's just do what we want, you know, what we want to do, where the need is. The other thing for me, it was really difficult to get there because there was no, like the first year, there was no bus. Later on there were some people from the town who just had a van and they would charge money to get a ride in their van. But again, that wasn't very reliable. Because also, I think in Latin America, they tell you what you want to hear. So they'd go in the morning, but then you'd ask them, so when are you coming back? They'd ask you, oh, when do you want to come back? Well, at 7:00 or, you know, at 4:00 or something. Okay, we'll go back then. And then they would leave at 3:00. You know, just tell me when you're leaving. I can, I can come back, you know, I can leave early. But yeah. The first year too, it's like you'd have to get, you'd have to hitchhike more or less. You know, you ride in the back of people's trucks.

WALEY: [00:19:21] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:19:21] Um, and, you know, you didn't always know when they were leaving. So it was both difficult to get there, and then also just the work itself didn't really make much sense. The other thing I did was I worked with a program called Educatodos, which is like an educational program. And so it essentially, the program is also a USAID program. But it helps to educate people who may have dropped out of school. So in Honduras, you only have to go up to sixth grade legally. And then a lot of people don't even do that. And so what they have is they have little, they have little tape, um, cassettes, and they would have lessons on there. And so anyone could use that cassette to learn, um, or to teach someone else. So I was teaching classes. They wanted me to teach English. So I was teaching English.

PUSCH: [00:20:16] But I think again, when you look at it later on, you're like, that didn't really make any sense because these, I was teaching seventh and then eighth grade. And, you know, these people are people who, they

dropped out. We didn't, we had classes once a week. And so to focus on English, I feel like doesn't really make sense. It would have made more sense to like focus on math or Spanish or some of the other basic classes. I mean, another kind of, I had said before, there were a lot, there were a lot of regrets.

PUSCH: [00:20:49] But one of the other things was just I know that a lot of my students, or some of them, some of the students were motivated and they were saying, you know, they wanted to go to the high school. But I wish I had motive, I wish I had motivated more people to actually do that. So there were a few on their own who actually kind of ended up finishing high school, but I'm not sure with most of them whatever happened to them, if they ever went on. And I think the year I, I'm not sure. There were volunteers after me, but I'm, I'm not sure how much, how long that program lasted afterwards.

WALEY: [00:21:26] Yeah, yeah, it's hard. I mean, it's hard in hindsight to think like I could have done more, but at the time, you know, you're kind of doing the best that you can. And sorry, some of the background noise is.

PUSCH: [00:21:36] That's fine.

WALEY: [00:21:36] My cat wandering around, for anybody listening to this. So what, you said that you had a site mate.

PUSCH: [00:21:46] No, I didn't. So I had, he was actually, um, so he was with the same counterpart, but he was in the neighboring town. So it was probably like a 40 minute drive to there, you know, and I'd hitchhike to get there or walk or combination. And then, that was actually one of the bonding experiences I had was coming back from the town one time and it's like, we got to, we hitchhiked part of the way and there were some other girls there too. And then we ended up walking back, probably like 2 hours in the pouring rain. I had like a little tiny, I mean, I had some kind of rain jacket, but it wasn't very good quality. They had nothing. So we were all soaked and saw each other later, like, oh yeah, those. And you're all muddy because the roads aren't paved.

WALEY: [00:22:40] Right. What, um. How did you get to know people at your site and when did you start, like, forming those relationships?

PUSCH: [00:22:49] So again, you kind of, you form random friendships or you talk to random people sometimes just because. And so I kind of, there was one strange guy who lived next door to me and I kind of talked to him and he was kind of like, I guess the mechanic or he. I don't know, anyway. But he, one day he was like, hey, there's this, um, there's a *venado*. And I was like, what is a *venado*? You know, like, I want to show you this *venado*. And so I go, um, this is again, the very beginning. So I didn't know much Spanish. And so I go to this family's house and it turns out *venado* is a deer. And so we wanted to show me a deer at his family's house. But then he brought me there and I wonder, like I was thinking about it just recently. Like, I wonder if that was an excuse. But it was a family. And so I kind of started hanging out with them.

PUSCH: [00:23:37] And then I remember one girl, actually the cousin of the one family. She approached me one day and she spoke English, so she spoke to me in English. And then I think one other guy, he had been, the volunteer before me. She had tutored him, he was like 16 at the time. And he also, because the volunteer before me had taught him English, he spoke English. So, yeah, I mean, just randomly and, yeah, I think.

WALEY: [00:24:07] Was the deer alive or was it?

PUSCH: [00:24:09] Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

WALEY: [00:24:11] I didn't know if they were eating the deer.

PUSCH: [00:24:13] No, no. But I mean again, it was a fairly rural area. So yeah, people have deer there.

WALEY: [00:24:20] Was it a pet deer?

PUSCH: [00:24:22] No, I don't even remember. It was a small one too. I mean, it wasn't big. I don't. Yeah, I don't remember the whole story. I just remember that's how I got to know the family. The deer. Yeah, yeah.

WALEY: [00:24:35] And what, I mean, did you, do you ever have an office that you went into or was there? Were you working in from the neighborhood, from your house?

PUSCH: [00:24:44] So, um. The one organization, they did have an office. So I went into their office. The classes they, the people running the program. And there were two ladies and then one lady in the second year who ran the program, Educatodos, they had a secured place. And so we would just meet there. And it was, I think later on it was at some church, just using it during the weekday or Saturdays.

WALEY: [00:25:11] Yeah. Yeah. And the same for like the English lessons you taught or?

PUSCH: [00:25:16] That was the same thing.

WALEY: [00:25:16] That was the, okay, yeah.

PUSCH: [00:25:18] Yeah, yeah. Um, and I, I tried at the beginning to, I think that's one of the things too is like I was 23 at the time and so I didn't really have much work experience. So part of it was also trying stuff out, realizing I was really bad at certain things or really didn't like things. But I think one of the things they wanted me to do was like teach little kids English and I realized I would not be a good teacher for little kids. I like teaching older people.

WALEY: [00:25:42] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:25:42] And I'm better with, I'm not very good with little kids.

WALEY: [00:25:45] English is hard to teach anyway, I mean to anybody.

PUSCH: [00:25:48] Maybe.

WALEY: [00:25:48] Like especially to kids I would say.

PUSCH: [00:25:50] And then, I mean I really like numbers. So the second year I was there, I focused more on math. And that was cool too. I mean, some of the stuff, um, they, like USAID, they met with me and some other volunteers too, who were using the same program. And were asking for like suggestions on like how to improve the program. But, I don't know, just a random comment. It was funny that like the English, there was one lesson about vocabulary you would use if you landed in the U.S. at an airport. Like, what, why? But anyway.

WALEY: [00:26:22] Right. What are the chances? Yeah. Yeah. Think about practical English.

PUSCH: [00:26:26] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:26:27] What, um. So once you kind of. What were some of the projects that you tried with the agriculture stuff like in the year that you and your?

PUSCH: [00:26:36] I don't know if we actually did much on our own. We, we went, they took us around, they showed us what they were doing. Like I made some kind of poster for them. I did some kind of like talk or something.

WALEY: [00:26:49] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:26:49] At the talk. But I don't really remember doing too much useful. But I do remember, I mean, I remember going to the things they did and I mean, it was kind of fun to see. They would go to schools to and just, we did a lot with like teaching people how to cook, use soy, and so they would make some like soy milk thing, like sweet thing.

WALEY: [00:27:12] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:27:12] So and yeah, stuff like that.

WALEY: [00:27:16] Did you ever talk to Peace Corps, the country staff, about kind of your challenges working in that sector in the place that they, in the organization they placed you with?

PUSCH: [00:27:28] I think. I think they became aware of it. I don't know if I, I'm not sure if I ever really specifically spoke to. I mean, I think we would, somehow I think we had to submit reports. And then, you know, that's how they become aware. And I think they, they would also do site visits. Yeah. So I think they were just aware that like we both, you know, me and the other volunteer both felt like it didn't really make any sense.

WALEY: [00:27:54] Yeah. Were they a resource or were they kind of just like, okay?

PUSCH: [00:28:01] Um. I think they were fine. Yeah. I mean, I think, you know, again, I think one of the things. I mean, the volunteer, the other volunteer, I think he was like a super volunteer. And he got really involved with the municipality and did a lot. So I think just with Peace Corps, you have to be, at least the assignment I had, just had to be very motivated and just kind of a self-starter and a leader, you know. And so I think I was still developing some of those skills.

WALEY: [00:28:35] And you were just out of college and.

PUSCH: [00:28:37] Yeah, but I think too that, I mean, like looking back, it's like I also realized that I had pretty much the opportunity to do any volunteer work I wanted and I was still getting paid enough to live.

WALEY: [00:28:50] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:28:51] And I mean, I think, for me, I was paid like \$3,000 a year and I was like saving my money. And then after I was like, wait, this is worth nothing in the U.S. I better like, actually use it and enjoy it.

WALEY: [00:29:03] So how did you spend your money or did you pay for your house rent or just food or?

PUSCH: [00:29:08] No, I mean, house was separate, but yeah, I mean, vacation. I mean, you know, food. The thing is too, where I was, there weren't many options in terms of food. And so that's one of the things I missed the most coming back. But there was, there were like two ladies who would at the

time who would cook out of their, they would use their living room and cook. And so you had like rice and tortillas and beans and some kind of meat pretty much every day. And so, you know, that's what there was. So that's what I ate. I didn't really like cooking. And then the other thing is too, there weren't really, you couldn't get as many ingredients down where I was either. And now I think there are actually more like places opened. So actually I think the one thing I think I did that probably made the biggest difference that, I mean, what I feel was my biggest accomplishment was.

PUSCH: [00:30:04] There was this one girl and she worked for the lady next door to me, who I knew pretty well. And she was in fifth grade or sixth grade and she like, she just didn't go to her last, her final exam. So she was already, like, I mean, she was already in fifth or sixth grade and working for the lady next door, which was normal. Her mom, you know, had several kids. She didn't come up from very well-off family. Her mom also, no one in her family had gone past that grade. So I think it was just kind of psychological, like, I'm not supposed to go past this grade either. But she like a very sociable person. And I think that's why we got along, because I'm pretty introverted. So, like, she's, you know, just like a fun little girl.

PUSCH: [00:30:46] And, uh, she, um, so what I did was I tutored her, and I made sure she grad. She did two grades in one year. Because with Educator, you could do that. And so then she like was able to be with her old classmates again. And I think that's all really, that was really important. And so then she ended up graduating high school and all her younger siblings have graduated high school or are on their way to graduating high school. And then she actually has her own cake business now. So she sells cakes. So it was just like thinking about food.

WALEY: [00:31:20] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:31:21] So she, you know, she started working for the lady next door to me when she was really young and cooking and cleaning. And so she learned a lot of those skills really young. And so she, she was able to use those. Um, I was hoping she'd go to college, go further, obviously. But, um, I mean, I think with a high school degree she's okay. And I talked to her somewhat recently and she like was building her own little house. I

mean, it's, you know, fairly simple. It didn't look very big. She showed me, sent me a picture. But yeah.

WALEY: [00:31:50] What was her name?

PUSCH: [00:31:51] Karen.

WALEY: [00:31:52] Karen. Yeah, that's easy.

PUSCH: [00:31:53] Yes.

WALEY: [00:31:54] I was in Cambodia. I try and tell people the names, they're like, say that again. What was your and Karen's relationship like? Did you tutor her also or was it just a social?

PUSCH: [00:32:05] Yeah, no. I mean, I think, I tutored her, so we did, um, I kind of tutored her on the side, um, kind of doing those two grades with Educatodos so I used their curriculum. Because I like math, I would focus on math and she, you know, made fun of me just like, oh, you're all about numbers. But yeah. And then I would also go over. It was like she and this one other girl who's probably like 20 at the time. Um, so, yeah, I remember Karen turning 13. So she, you know, pretty young, but, um, we would just hang out and like talk and like clean. I would help them clean dishes and they'd be making food or whatever else. But yeah, again, you have random friendships.

WALEY: [00:32:49] Yeah. Who are some of the other important people in the village to you? You talked about one of the families and.

PUSCH: [00:32:55] Yeah. That one other family. Yeah. They were, um, they. Yeah. And I actually I went back so. I finished Peace Corps end of 2007 and I went back end of 2010. And so I stayed with that other family and kind of still keep in touch with them. And then actually, you know, I'm like Facebook friends or Instagram friends with people. So I kind of see what they're up to, kind of talk to people like every once in a while. But yeah, I mean, the one boy who, um, the volunteer before me had tutored. He ended up going to med school. I think, you know, the volunteer before me,

she always wanted him to go to med school or to school in the U.S., but actually he went to med school in Honduras, ended up getting his degree. He was practicing as a doctor and now he's in med school in Spain.

WALEY: [00:33:46] Wow.

PUSCH: [00:33:47] And I think his plan is to stay there. And then another girl I knew, she also, um, she was the one, the daughter of the lady who lived next door to me. And she actually also went to Spain. She also got her degree in pharmacy in Honduras and then went to school there in Spain. And now she's back in Honduras.

WALEY: [00:34:07] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:34:07] I talked to her a while ago. I don't know what, you know. Because I was thinking, you know, she could stay in Spain, but I think, I don't know. She had a boyfriend who was Spanish. So I don't, I don't know. I don't know what's going on with them.

WALEY: [00:34:19] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:34:21] Um, yeah.

WALEY: [00:34:21] Do you feel like, what do you feel like your impact on, on those families and those relationships were and what do you feel like their impact was on you?

PUSCH: [00:34:31] Um, I don't know. I don't know. I think maybe like people, they get to see you as a person. I know I definitely got to know people as people. I think sometimes you see people in one dimension and I think even going I would say like. Sorry. So, yeah, I mean, I think it just, just seeing people as people, um, and I mean, I think even. Sometimes I question how, I mean, I think a few of those people, yeah, a few of Hondurans see me as a person but I think a lot of, most people still probably see me as an American. And I think it's very difficult. And I think that's one of the things that like because you're one of the first Americans they've ever met. And so it's, you're always afraid about like your behavior

or what you do. They're going to say, oh, all Americans are like that. And it's like, no, no, no, just me, you know?

PUSCH: [00:35:39] And I think even, even when you're first coming into that society, it takes a while for you to figure out what's cultural and what's actually that person. And I think for me, it was kind of like, it makes, it made me also question like, who would I have been if I had been from Honduras? And just really made me also think about just, I'm very interested in philosophy and sociology and all that. And so just kind of thinking again about just what is learned behavior and what is actually like us. Like, I don't know. I don't know.

PUSCH: [00:36:14] Yeah. What were some of the impressions? What were the differences in the culture that you did learn about?

PUSCH: [00:36:21] Well, I think, okay, the first thing that, I mean, you know, and I think. Sorry, the first thing that came to mind was like, ah, the Hondurans, they just say what you want to hear. They never tell the truth. And so that, yeah, I mean, I think that's one of the big ones.

WALEY: [00:36:37] Do you think holds both for like Hondurans talking to other Hondurans, or do you think it was?

PUSCH: [00:36:40] Yes, yes, yes.

WALEY: [00:36:41] Oh, okay.

PUSCH: [00:36:42] So I think, well, so I think, okay. So my family is German. So I think that's the one extreme, where Germans are very blunt. They say exactly what they mean. You know, my family, it's like I haven't seen them for like years. And like as a kid, they were like, you're getting fat. I'm like, I'm eight. I don't, you know, like, I can't do anything about this, you know, just please don't, you know? Or just like, oh, you look so tired. I'm like, yes, I got four hours of sleep. Yes, I'm tired. Versus like the Hondurans is the other extreme. So like, they would also be like, even when you're like looking awful, just to be nice and, oh, you're so beautiful and you may

actually look like crap. But it's like a compliment. It's trying to make you feel better. And so, and I think the U.S. is somewhere in between.

PUSCH: [00:37:27] And so it's not always like meant in a bad way. Sometimes it really is just trying to, it's like actually complimenting the person as a person. But sometimes when, you know, when you're trying to get that right and you just want to know when are you really leaving? And they don't want to tell you. It's annoying, you know. Or you know, yeah. So stuff like that. I mean, I think one of the other. See, I'm coming up with all of the bad, but so there is some good to that, to just being complimentary.

WALEY: [00:37:59] Right, right.

PUSCH: [00:38:00] The other thing is, I mean, I feel like Latino men are kind of, you know, just the stereotype of very *machisto* and, you know. But those are the big stereotypes. But it just, I think also like another thing is just like where you fit in your society too. And I mean, I think. So. Yeah, I think just that.

WALEY: [00:38:29] Yeah. And you lived in a very small, rural place. What was people's mindset about kind of where they were inside of Honduras and where Honduras sat inside the larger world? Did they have a perspective that they shared with you?

PUSCH: [00:38:40] No, not really. But I think, like one thing that struck me was that I feel like Hondurans don't have much pride. So like coming from the U.S. or having the German family, those are both cultures with lots of pride.

WALEY: [00:38:53] Mm hmm.

PUSCH: [00:38:54] They're very proud of their heritage. Versus Honduras, I don't think they are. And I think that even, like. I think, like, the whiter you are, the more attractive. Like, it's almost like they have the, you know, and I think I think one of the other things that struck me was just like, I mean, I think that affects you in any country. It's just like just the dynamic between the countries. And so I think they, like U.S., being American. You're

somehow put on a pedestal, but then you're not really a person either. So it's kind of a strange dynamic.

WALEY: [00:39:30] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:39:31] And just, yeah. And you know, I mean, even the fact that like some of the placement, you know. I was pretty much straight out of college and I'm, you know, being placed fairly high, you know?

WALEY: [00:39:42] Yeah. As a, you know, again, coming back to like kind of the macho society. Was, you know, did you run into gender issues? Or was it because you were an American you were kind of granted a little bit of a different status?

PUSCH: [00:39:56] Well, so I mean, one of the things, I mean, I think, when like. I don't think I'm very, okay, so I don't think I'm necessarily the type to be just, especially at that time, to really want to take the leadership role over, like dominating. So not really. I would say though that, you know, as a white American, or as I mean, as a woman just walking down the street sometimes you get the catcalls, you get certain comments, you know, and but I think some of that's also cultural. So it's like, you know, and it's just going to be bad. It sound bad, but it's like I'd get used to it. So like all of a sudden I'd be walking down and no one would say anything and I'm like, wait, do I look really bad today? You know, I mean.

PUSCH: [00:40:44] But, but so but yeah. And I think and I mean more, I think, I mean, just inequality, even in relationships and stuff like that too. Um, so, but yeah, I mean, I think in any culture, um, like, or any society, there's going to be women who are going to dominate the men and dominate stuff. Yeah, I don't know. Yeah. I was thinking about, this is going to get way off topic, but when I went to South Africa. It was just interesting because we like one of my most interesting experiences there was we stayed with the chief's first wife and just the dynamics. And he had to have several wives. Yet the first wife was this very strong woman and then he kind of did what she said, but then like society told him he needed to have more wives. And so that's something that, anyway, that's way off topic. So

probably should go back to, but yeah, it's interesting like, yeah, gender roles and like kind of the way society set up.

WALEY: [00:41:43] Yeah. Was there, what was the leadership in your town like? Was it kind of like a village chief structure or?

PUSCH: [00:41:48] Oh, no, no, no, not Honduras. Honduras, um, there was like a, I think it was a mayor and there's a municipality and stuff.

WALEY: [00:41:57] Kind of that like Western.

PUSCH: [00:41:58] Yes.

WALEY: [00:41:59] Democratic style. Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:42:00] Yes. Except probably more corrupt. I mean, that's one thing too, is just like any time there'd be elections, pretty much anyone from the opposite party would like get fired. It just very much tied to politics. And I think people like had a long history of just voting for certain parties. I mean, just so much corruption.

WALEY: [00:42:23] Peace Corps left Honduras shortly after you were there because of the danger and the politics. What was your experience in that?

PUSCH: [00:42:30] Um, so, I mean, I never really, I mean, I was never a victim. I mean, I know other Hondurans. I mean, a friend, Honduran friend of mine, she was held up at gunpoint for her phone, you know, like in front of her house. Another friend was, Honduran friend was also, like a guy got on the bus. He had a gun, held up the gun to everyone, and again said cell phones. And I think he like, he freaked out. He had like panic attacks from it, you know, um, but, you know. And I remember too going again with this same friend who got held up in front of her house, but her little sister. And going to get something. And I think I needed like new headphones or something like that. And so we were going to buy that and like we were getting out of the cab in this little like, I don't know, five year old maybe, he runs up. She has a necklace on, grabs it, and runs away. Now, we didn't even see his face, you know, he was already gone, you know?

PUSCH: [00:43:30] I mean, I think there were other Peace Corps volunteers too who got, I mean, assaulted. The thing is, in the town where I was, it was really safe. Like everyone knew everyone's business, so like nothing happened in terms of violence. But you got to the bigger cities, and yeah, it was. And I don't know, right now, I mean, the political situation is really bad. I don't know. I mean, it just sounded like, based on what I've heard, that the leader who came into power just kind of, there was some, something sketchy going on in that election.

WALEY: [00:44:03] So you said you were located near El Salvador?

PUSCH: [00:44:07] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:44:07] Was there, what was the relationship between Hondurans and El Salvadorians?

PUSCH: [00:44:12] Well, so actually my town in the eighties or like, you know, when there was the, um, there were, there was the war in El Salvador. They had refugees. They had a refugee camp like outside of the, um, the community. Um, yeah, there wasn't really much crossover. Yeah. And I think, I mean, yeah. So the relationship, I mean all I'm just thinking about is going to El Salvador and it's like as soon as you cross the border, the roads were paved. But I think, I mean, El Salvador, I think because of the war, there's something kind of eerie about some of those towns. Just, I don't know, not quite as pleasant I thought.

WALEY: [00:44:54] Yeah. What did you do much traveling inside the country and outside the country while you were in service?

PUSCH: [00:44:59] I did some. So I mean, like the. So the first year, we had just gotten to site in December. And so I remember going with other volunteers. We went up to the beach for New Year's. And so that was, I mean, kind of cool, that like you spend New Year's, which is usually so cold, like up in this beautiful beach and swimming and everything. And then another thing we did, I mean, I went. My mom came to visit me. We went to like some Mayan ruins in the Copán. And then we went up to

Roatan as well. I think still one of my favorite experiences. I went to Antigua, Guatemala, for Semana Santa [Holy Week] and that was really cool. And it's during like a.

WALEY: [00:45:42] Holy week.

PUSCH: [00:45:43] Holy week, exactly. Yes. And they had all the *alfrombras*, the rugs is what they call them. But essentially what they do is they just use colored sand and they create these really intricate decorations on the streets. And they're all like, I mean, really old streets and old buildings like colonial style. And those decorations were only on the roads for like, the streets for a few hours. And then like pretty much, I mean, like at sunrise more or less, the processions come through and walk over them. But there's just so many people. And I mean, just to see that artwork was really amazing. Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:46:23] And then got to travel another time down to, for the second year Semana Santa, we traveled down to all the way to Costa Rica, did Central America.

WALEY: [00:46:33] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:46:33] So haven't gotten to go to Belize. Haven't gone to Panama, but covered all others.

WALEY: [00:46:38] Everything else. Who did you travel? You said your mom came. Who else did you travel with?

PUSCH: [00:46:41] Other volunteers. Yeah.

WALEY: [00:46:43] What, um, what was what was your favorite part about Guatemala?

PUSCH: [00:46:51] I think that experience or like, what do you mean by?

WALEY: [00:46:54] I meant Honduras.

PUSCH: [00:46:56] Honduras.

WALEY: [00:46:56] Sorry, I lost track.

PUSCH: [00:46:57] So, I mean, I actually I really like, I love the nature. There's, I like hills and mountains and that has lots of mountains. And so just the beauty of that.

WALEY: [00:47:08] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:47:09] Um, yeah, I think so. I mean, honestly, the buildings are really nothing special and yeah, I mean. Really, the nature is beautiful. And I think that a lot of Hondurans don't really realize what they have.

WALEY: [00:47:25] Yeah. Are there parks, are there kind of nationally organized parks or anything?

PUSCH: [00:47:28] Not really.

WALEY: [00:47:28] Or is it just kind of everywhere?

PUSCH: [00:47:29] I think it's everywhere.

WALEY: [00:47:30] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:47:31] And then again, they have rainy season and dry season. So they, pretty much it rains all the time for six months and then not at all. I mean, I think the weather there is pretty good, I mean especially where I was, I think it was pretty much 60 to 80 something year round. Like right around February, and so they also have a fair like once a year on February 14th, you know, for. And not necessarily for Valentine's Day, but it kind of coincides. But I remember too, right around that time it gets really cold. Really cold by like maybe high fifties, you know, and so, but there's no AC or heating. So it does make a difference, but people freak out and bundle up.

WALEY: [00:48:14] Did you have, your house, did you have electricity and plumbing and any of that?

PUSCH: [00:48:18] I did, yeah. So I had electricity. Electricity goes out a lot in Honduras. Even just when the government is trying to save money, they'll turn it off. And then I had running water once a day. Yeah. So we just filled up our *pilas* and used that.

WALEY: [00:48:37] What's a *pila*?

PUSCH: [00:48:37] Oh, it's like the basin. The concrete cistern.

WALEY: [00:48:42] Yeah. What, did you have to make many life adjustments in terms of like kind of what your living situation was?

PUSCH: [00:48:49] What do you mean by that?

WALEY: [00:48:50] Like not having running water all the time? Or was that a?

PUSCH: [00:48:55] Kind of, yeah. I mean, you do, yeah, you do get used to it. And I mean, I think, again, I think the things I missed most were like food and hot water and like my, hot showers, I guess really. So that was really nice. But yeah, I mean, even though sometimes too you get used to it. I remember where I had the host family I had, they had running water all day but it was only cold, so I'd always take cold showers. And then when it got really cold, the town where I was actually a little cooler. They boiled the water for me and I had a hot bucket shower. But I remember going, we had our swearing-in at a hotel in Tegucigalpa and it was a really nice hotel. So we all had our hot showers. And I was like excited about it. But then afterwards I had to turn it on cold because I was so used to those cold showers. So yeah, yeah.

WALEY: [00:49:44] How often did you regroup with the group for trainings or to just meet and hang out?

PUSCH: [00:49:52] Again, I was one of the site rats. We didn't really do, I think we had something like maybe it was like once, like halfway through service.

WALEY: [00:50:01] Mid service training or something?

PUSCH: [00:50:02] Yeah, yeah. But we didn't really do too many trainings and then I didn't, I mean, I saw like some people like again for Semana Santa for like a few like travels, but not too much.

WALEY: [00:50:12] Yeah. What, you've already mentioned that you missed food and things. What else were you excited about coming home to when you were getting towards the end of service?

PUSCH: [00:50:24] I really think food and hot water are like the biggest things I missed.

WALEY: [00:50:28] Um, where is your, where are you from originally? Where's your family?

PUSCH: [00:50:31] Outside Dallas.

WALEY: [00:50:32] Okay.

PUSCH: [00:50:33] Yeah. Um, but I mean, I think the other thing is too, you realize what you can live without.

WALEY: [00:50:38] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:50:39] So, um. Yeah. I don't, yeah, I don't think there was. You know, and obviously people, you know, stuff like that. But like in terms of like things, not really.

WALEY: [00:50:49] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:50:49] And again, I think, you know, I'll go into my bigger philosophy, but I think so much of what we have, it's about how we compare to others. And so you want the nice clothes or the nice car or whatever. Almost to like show.

WALEY: [00:51:02] Keep up with.

PUSCH: [00:51:02] Yeah, exactly. And I think, you know, being in a country like Honduras, I mean, I think there's more and more wealthy people, but, or there's more and more inequality. But I think it's overall, it's been a fairly poor country, so not many people have that much. And so and then the other thing is being a white person, it doesn't matter how you dress, your hair, your seam has a bump, which for better or for worse, I mean, just yeah overall it's sad. But yeah, I mean, you don't I mean, as a Peace Corps volunteer you don't. I mean, I had all my old clothes. I mean, they were in pretty bad shape afterwards.

WALEY: [00:51:34] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:51:34] So yeah, I mean, that's one thing coming back, you don't have much money, so you have like hardly any clothes and it takes you a lot of to build them up.

WALEY: [00:51:41] How was your health?

PUSCH: [00:51:43] Um, I, um. So, yeah, I mean, I, I had stomach problems pretty much like that. I mean, that, that host family in Santa Lucia, they were really nice. But I think there was something with the food because I had a lot of, like, stomach issues there. I ended up having worms at the very end, which I don't know. Yeah. And I also I think I had some, a case of food poisoning somewhere in there. I had a cough that wouldn't go away until like I went home for like a visit and then all of a sudden it went away. But they gave me all these antibiotics.

PUSCH: [00:52:22] I know I had a filling done there. And I wanted one friend or one other girl from Peace Corps. She was also posting about her bad dental experience there. And I was like, yeah, I had a filling down there and now I have a crown on that one tooth. That's the only crown I have. So that was not necessarily like the best care and we were still going to one of the best dentists. I mean, that's the thing too, is that, I mean, a lot of people. Like that one girl, the older one I hung out with who worked for that family, the lady next door to me. She was 20 and she had some cavities. She was

like, pull my tooth, don't, don't even bother filling it. Like, we were both like, no, fill it! You know, but I think also if you have such a bad dentist, I don't know.

WALEY: [00:53:05] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:53:05] But I mean, the thing is too, I mean, the dentist we went to, I'm sure it was more expensive, but you can go to really cheap dentists and you can get really cheap health care, although I'm sure the quality's not that good either.

WALEY: [00:53:16] Yeah. How did you, you mentioned that you went back to the States once.

PUSCH: [00:53:21] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:53:22] How often did you visit? How did you communicate with your family back home?

PUSCH: [00:53:25] So I went back actually twice. So I went back like towards the, I mean towards the very beginning. Again, like my two best friends from, or two of my best friends from college. One was, they were both from Hong Kong and the one was leaving to go back. So I was like, I want to see you before you leave. So I went to visit her, but I had just gotten to site, so kind of maybe it was a little too early. And then the second time I went back, I went back for holidays. And so I went back for Christmas and then I went back to Honduras for New Year's because like for them, New Year's is more like Christmas and Christmas, like it's reversed in terms of how they celebrate. So I spent. The family like. I spent Christmas with my family and then the whole family New Year thing in Honduras. Yeah.

WALEY: [00:54:10] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:54:11] That type of celebration. Yeah. And I. Yeah, I mean, I don't know. Yeah.

WALEY: [00:54:16] Did you, how did you communicate with people back home?

PUSCH: [00:54:19] Oh, I had a blog, I think, and then just internet. Again, there was an internet cafe. It was before smartphones. But, um, yeah, I would go and write people emails that way. But sometimes it was closed or something like that.

WALEY: [00:54:34] Yeah. And who came to visit you while you were there?

PUSCH: [00:54:38] Just my mom. Yeah.

WALEY: [00:54:39] Yeah. That's great that she got to see.

PUSCH: [00:54:41] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:54:41] What did she think about what you were doing?

PUSCH: [00:54:44] Well, I think sheg liked it. And so I think, you know, when I first got or first got interested in Peace Corps, my dad was really excited for me. He was very like adventurous. And he also, I think he moved to the U.S. for adventure pretty much. And he would, you know, they had, my parents had their own business and he would travel to Asia also to buy the merchandise and stuff like that, and to Mexico and he spent a while in England as well. So he like, that's his, that was his nature. So he was excited about it. My mom was freaked out, like, you're leaving here and going so far. But yeah, she came and I think it really eased her. I mean, she came to visit me and she, you could tell she was really stressed out. And then also, like we, you know, I had already gotten used to certain things. So we got on a bus or a little minivan, you know, the, um, you know, just to get somewhere. And it was like people leaning out of the van and, I mean, completely crammed. And I think that was just more than she.

WALEY: [00:55:43] Too much.

PUSCH: [00:55:43] Yeah. But when we went, I took her again to Copan to see the Mayan ruins and also to the beach. And by the end of it, she said, wow,

this is more like a vacation than I thought. So, yeah. And I think it also eased her mind, you know, to kind of see where I was.

WALEY: [00:55:58] Yeah. That's good. What would you say you're most proud of from your service?

PUSCH: [00:56:06] As I said, I think tutoring that one girl.

WALEY: [00:56:08] Yeah. Yeah. And watching her, the one who had the, who ended up with a cake business and.

PUSCH: [00:56:14] Yeah.

WALEY: [00:56:14] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:56:15] Yeah. I mean I, yeah.

WALEY: [00:56:17] And her siblings graduated from high school.

PUSCH: [00:56:19] Yeah. Because I think, you know, some of the students I had with Educatodos, they, they were self-motivated and so they, they did something with themselves. But I think I can't really take that much responsibility for that. I kind of, you know.

WALEY: [00:56:31] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:56:32] Helped them, you know, maybe start.

WALEY: [00:56:34] Yeah, yeah. You have to have a spark somewhere.

PUSCH: [00:56:37] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Versus I feel like, you know, with one girl, you know, she said like, I'm stupid. I'm like, yeah, you're stupid for not going to your exam, you know? And just like, I mean, we were friends, you know, and I think I really, I feel like I had a big part in that.

WALEY: [00:56:50] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:56:51] Helping her and her family.

WALEY: [00:56:53] What advice would you have for Peace Corps volunteers that are going into service?

PUSCH: [00:57:02] That's too broad. Um.

WALEY: [00:57:06] Perhaps to make the most out of their service.

PUSCH: [00:57:08] I would say to do exactly make the most out of it. Just make the most out of it, really. I mean, enjoy what you have there. I mean, because it is really kind of a very unique, special situation. I mean, I know for me I regretted not doing more. So really kind of being self-motivated. You know, I think I know people too who kind of took Spanish classes before, really did some stuff to like kind of prepare themselves for it. I think it's great that there's a lot of people who do it later in life when they have more experience. I guess maybe also don't beat yourself up too much. I mean, one of the things I was thinking about too was I really did, I think, beat myself up for it a lot. But it's also like for me, it also changed my life.

PUSCH: [00:57:55] I think it, you know, I think a lot of the times people will make themselves into the victim, you know, like you want to say, oh, I was denied this or this. And when you're in a developing country, it's in your face. Look, you were given so much and, you know what I mean? And it is your responsibility to actually do something with that.

WALEY: [00:58:19] Mm hmm. So.

PUSCH: [00:58:19] And I think, you know, a lot of times, too, it's like, yeah, I beat myself up for it. But I also have like quite a bit of my career, quite a bit of my life, to actually do something with it. And I think with also the social media now, you can stay in touch with people much more easily. Um, you know, and I think maintain that friendship too.

WALEY: [00:58:39] Yeah. So you said that it changed your life and your perspective on kind of what, what you can do, that you think that Peace Corps was kind of a spark for what you want to achieve and now that

you're back in the States? Or how would you, how exactly would you say it affected the way that you see the world and how it changed you?

PUSCH: [00:59:02] I'm trying to think about that. Um. Yeah. I mean, I, I think, I mean, just what I said before that, you know, not seeing myself as a victim. I think kind of also it sparked an interest in different things.

WALEY: [00:59:17] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:59:20] And really motivated me, I think. I mean, I think sometimes. Sometimes you have to go through some kind of uncomfortable situation or you have to feel somewhat bad to be motivated. I don't know if that makes any sense. Like if you're really happy and comfortable, there's no motivation.

WALEY: [00:59:37] Mm hmm.

PUSCH: [00:59:37] So maybe even in that sense.

WALEY: [00:59:39] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:59:39] Like that, that feeling of failure was a motivator.

WALEY: [00:59:43] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:59:44] And I think the more and more that you realize, like you can do with yourself and in your situation, the more empowering, the more fun it is to actually do something.

WALEY: [00:59:55] Yeah.

PUSCH: [00:59:55] Like, you know. you know what I mean? Like, it just. I think sometimes too in life, like, maybe, like actually doing the work is not that much fun, but like actually like seeing yourself move forward is. And I think the more and more, I don't know, the more and more I live, the more I'm like, oh, I don't want to just sit in front of the TV and do nothing. You know,

that's not, it's fun and relaxing sometimes, but if that's all you're doing. You know, like, I don't know, I, yeah, I think you're not as happy either.

WALEY: [01:00:25] Yeah. Yeah. So a major motivator from your service. That's really cool. What, um. How did you feel when you were leaving Peace Corps, when you were coming back to the States?

PUSCH: [01:00:37] Um, I think I kind of even thought about extending. I didn't end up, um, I said maybe a little, like a few extra weeks or something, just to finish out some stuff.

WALEY: [01:00:47] What kind of things would you, did you have to finish out?

PUSCH: [01:00:50] Um, just the classes and stuff like that. Um. And then I think I was kind of lost a little bit. And then, um, you know, I think, I mean, I think that's kind of normal, like, right? You're trying to figure out what to do, what's the next step? Yeah. And then I just kind of, it took a few, like it took me a few months and then finally I was like, oh, I'm going to go to grad school and then kind of.

WALEY: [01:01:17] Okay. So you came back, you went to grad school.

PUSCH: [01:01:20] Like, I mean, I got back in December and went back to grad school the following fall. So I had a bit of time. I tutored a little bit, um, and kind of, yeah, didn't really do too much of anything. But yeah, I think it was pretty difficult.

WALEY: [01:01:36] Reacclimated.

PUSCH: [01:01:37] Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I think that the feeling of failure was still there. Um, and then, yeah. And that kind of being lost. And then I think also kind of reality hitting. I mean, I was like, I turned 26 a little bit afterwards and I feel like you get into your late twenties and, you know, you're kind of more and more like just in general, right? You're like, oh, wait, I need to actually do something with myself. What am I doing?

WALEY: [01:02:03] Yeah.

PUSCH: [01:02:04] All of that was hitting me. And then, you know, it's also like I feel like every story you want to tell is like, oh, in Honduras, you know? And just like. Um, but yeah, I mean, I think, you know, one of the questions was talking about culture shock. I don't know if I had too much culture shock. As I said before, I had traveled a lot before and I think actually being in Honduras helped me with that. Kind of finding my place and figuring out, like, again, myself and like, I don't know. Yeah. Just finding my place in the world.

WALEY: [01:02:36] Yeah. What, um, so where are you now? And how did you end up in the, in your current role and in Austin and?

PUSCH: [01:02:44] Yeah, I've been in Austin since fall 2008. I started in grad school and just stayed here. I work for TxDOT now. Um, we do travel surveys. I love the work. I mean, I think there's some frustrations at this time, but that's fine. Yeah, yeah. That's really where I am. I don't know. Still figuring out stuff in a sense.

WALEY: [01:03:09] Yeah. Yeah. And you said you still keep in touch with a few people from Peace Corps?

PUSCH: [01:03:13] Mm hmm.

WALEY: [01:03:13] And you're involved in the local returned Peace Corps group. So you're still.

PUSCH: [01:03:16] A little bit, yeah.

WALEY: [01:03:19] Yeah.

PUSCH: [01:03:19] I, I think it's partly I, yeah, when I start, I mean, I, I want to make sure I maintain that connection.

WALEY: [01:03:24] Yeah.

PUSCH: [01:03:25] And I would love to do more. I mean I really miss, I think that, yeah, where I'm right now, it's like, okay. So when I got back from Peace Corps, I was like, I do not want to live abroad again. Like just because you build, I mean, I think that's maybe one of the things too, is you build a connection to a place and then you leave it. And that, it was kind of missing, missing home. Like I did, I actually felt like a Honduran immigrant and like, I said that to someone and they're like, what are you talking about, you know? But, you know, just because there's so many memories attached to it. And so, um, but now I'm kind of itching to kind of. I wish I had a job that was more like international focused or where I got to travel a little bit more and stuff.

WALEY: [01:04:04] Yeah.

PUSCH: [01:04:06] Yeah.

WALEY: [01:04:07] Yeah. That leaves you with a lot of impressions and.

PUSCH: [01:04:10] Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think that's one of the things too about Honduras. Sorry. Just one of the things I thought about was just like when we were there, it's like every day, especially at the beginning, every day there's some new experience there. You're learning something new and like that's so rare here.

WALEY: [01:04:27] Yeah.

PUSCH: [01:04:28] And I think it's such a special, fun, amazing thing.

WALEY: [01:04:31] Yeah. Is there something you want to say to wrap up, kind of a last thought on what you feel like your, you know, what did you, what was your overarching impression of what your service was? Is there a word or a feeling?

PUSCH: [01:04:47] Life changing?

WALEY: [01:04:49] Yeah, yeah. You've given us a lot of examples of how it affected you. Yeah, well, thank you so much for the interview.

PUSCH: [01:04:56] Yeah, thank you.

WALEY: [01:04:57] This was great. Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]