

Rowland Bennett Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Rowland Bennett served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nyasaland (Malawi) from 1962 to 1964 as an English teacher.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Rowland Bennett

October 5, 2004
Maplewood, New Jersey

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:02] Today is October 5th, 2004. This is Bob Klein. I'm interviewing Rowland Bennett, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in 1962 to '64 and served in Nyasaland I, a secondary education project. So let's go back maybe year before you joined and talk about where you were and what was going on.

BENNETT: [00:00:28] Well, I was a college student. I was at Wheaton College in Illinois, and Kennedy had been elected.

KLEIN: [00:00:37] What were you majoring in?

BENNETT: [00:00:39] I was a literature major. English literature major.

KLEIN: [00:00:42] Right. And how close were you to your degree in?

BENNETT: [00:00:45] Well, I graduated in 1962. In June of '62.

KLEIN: [00:00:49] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:00:50] So in my senior year, I began to think about what I would be doing next, and I really wanted to go to graduate school. I applied to a graduate school in English literature.

KLEIN: [00:01:05] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:01:05] And was rejected. That was a very crushing experience.

KLEIN: [00:01:11] Yeah. Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:01:12] And I also applied to Wheaton's theology program.

KLEIN: [00:01:17] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:01:18] But didn't really want to continue there. It's a fairly narrow point of view and I didn't really want to continue there, so I didn't. Even though I could have gone on for a master's, the Peace Corps idea came to my attention. Kennedy was in the presidency. He'd only started in 1961.

KLEIN: [00:01:42] Right.

BENNETT: [00:01:43] We'd gone through the Cuban Missile Crisis, which I didn't really pay that much attention to. I wasn't that aware of what was going on in the outside world, but was certainly aware of the Peace Corps. It got a tremendous amount of attention in the press.

KLEIN: [00:02:00] In the years, had you known anyone who joined the Peace Corps?

BENNETT: [00:02:04] Well, it was brand new.

KLEIN: [00:02:05] Yeah, yeah.

BENNETT: [00:02:06] It was brand new. I don't, let's see, um, in March 1st, 1961, Kennedy signed the executive order that created it.

KLEIN: [00:02:15] Right.

BENNETT: [00:02:16] And they worked real hard to get a couple of projects in the field before the end of that year.

KLEIN: [00:02:20] Right.

BENNETT: [00:02:20] And even in 1962, there weren't that many projects going out. Now, the Malawi project started training in October of 1962.

KLEIN: [00:02:31] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:02:32] So it was 4 or 5 months after my graduation.

KLEIN: [00:02:35] Let's go back a little bit. Where did you grow up, what part?

BENNETT: [00:02:39] I'm from Rochester, New York, originally.

KLEIN: [00:02:42] Did you go to high school there?

BENNETT: [00:02:44] I was born there and graduated from John Marshall High School in Rochester.

KLEIN: [00:02:48] During your high school years, did you do any travel? Did you do any special summer projects? Any volunteer work?

BENNETT: [00:02:59] Uh, not in particular. My family would take us out to Ohio and Illinois. My parents were farm children who left the farm and went to college. So I had a taste for seeing, getting around. You know, I'd been across the country and back in a family trip, but not overseas. In fact, my parents never went overseas in their entire lives.

KLEIN: [00:03:25] Yeah. How about during your college years? And what did you do with the summers?

BENNETT: [00:03:30] You have to remember, Bob, the jet plane was the new phenomenon back in this time. And the, the only transcontinental jet plane was the Comet that the British had put in the air. And along about that same time, Boeing came up with the 707, which was the first intercontinental public air transport.

KLEIN: [00:03:54] But what about, what did you do during your summers in college?

BENNETT: [00:03:57] Oh, different things. Um. I think that perhaps the thing that gave me a taste for adventure was going to Alberta, Canada, in 1960. One of my classmates just asked me off the spur of the moment in June, actually, after exams. He said, how'd you like to come to Alberta for the summer and be a cook for my building crew I'm going to be on? So I was up in northern Alberta, got up into an area that was within 100 miles of the Arctic Circle.

KLEIN: [00:04:33] So you had done some international travel.

BENNETT: [00:04:35] Oh yeah, you know, I wasn't afraid of, yeah, I guess you could call Canada international.

KLEIN: [00:04:42] So now as you're getting close to graduation, you, you know about the Peace Corps?

BENNETT: [00:04:47] I got ahold of an application and filled it out and sent it in.

KLEIN: [00:04:51] Do you remember the application process?

BENNETT: [00:04:53] It was basically a form. Maybe six or 7 or 8 sheets.

KLEIN: [00:04:57] Do you remember having to take an exam as well?

BENNETT: [00:05:00] No.

KLEIN: [00:05:01] They may have given it up by then.

BENNETT: [00:05:01] I don't remember an exam.

KLEIN: [00:05:04] When you, when you fill out the application, somewhere you indicate an area of preference of assignment. And they also ask you about your skill in the second language. Do you remember?

BENNETT: [00:05:17] I have no skills in any second language. I always did miserably in any language course I ever took. And I think I've taken five different languages in my life. But fortunately Malawi was in the British Empire system.

KLEIN: [00:05:33] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:05:35] It was Nyasaland when the British were there. And then when it became independent.

KLEIN: [00:05:39] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:05:40] It changed its name, took a new name. Malawi.

KLEIN: [00:05:43] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:05:43] And English is the official language. There are 17 or 18 tribal languages there. So I did my work in English.

KLEIN: [00:05:52] So June comes, you get your degree from Wheaton.

BENNETT: [00:05:56] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:05:57] And had you heard from the Peace Corps at that point or were you still in the application?

BENNETT: [00:06:00] I don't think I filled my application in till May. I would guess it was May.

KLEIN: [00:06:05] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:06:05] And I went off for the summer as a door-to-door salesman selling pots and pans, I believe it was. And, um, I was at my brother's house in Rochester when I got the letter from the Peace Corps offering me a place in Nyasaland with training to begin in October. I was so excited. I could, I could tell you exactly where I was when I opened that letter and just bursting with excitement. And it took, it took quite a few days for me to calm down.

KLEIN: [00:06:43] No second thoughts at all at that point?

BENNETT: [00:06:46] I think my parents, my mother probably had second thoughts.

KLEIN: [00:06:49] I was going to ask.

BENNETT: [00:06:50] But this was it. I mean, once I got that letter, I accepted it immediately.

KLEIN: [00:06:54] And at that point, you didn't know anyone who had been in the Peace Corps or who knew any?

BENNETT: [00:06:59] No.

KLEIN: [00:06:59] And do you have siblings?

BENNETT: [00:07:01] My older, my brother is six years older. My sister is six years younger.

KLEIN: [00:07:05] What was their reaction to what you were doing?

BENNETT: [00:07:08] I don't really actually remember.

KLEIN: [00:07:10] Oh, okay. Okay.

BENNETT: [00:07:12] I really don't.

KLEIN: [00:07:13] But you knew your folks were a little apprehensive.

BENNETT: [00:07:15] Well, my mother, you know, was worried, but my mother was not going to stop me. But if you want to get a little glimpse of my mom and father and their, uh, their interaction with this. When I arranged for that Canada trip, my classmate Paul Belisky and I worked out that we would take the train out of Chicago, uh, up to Winnipeg, and from there we would hitchhike. Now that's about a thousand mile hitchhike, I mean, more than that, because Grande Prairie country is 500 miles north of Edmonton and Edmonton is pretty far north of Calgary.

KLEIN: [00:07:57] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:07:58] So, um, at that time, my parents were in the process of moving from Rochester to Evanston, and my father was in Evanston at the new job and my mother was closing up the house. So he called mom and said, Roland has a chance to go to Alberta. Well, how is he getting there? And father said very shrewdly, well, they're going by train and from Winnipeg they're going by car. And my mother didn't catch the subtlety and gave her approval and off I went. So there was the same sort of trepidation. I remember she sent me a clipping when I was in Malawi.

KLEIN: [00:08:41] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:08:42] From the local paper that said there was some unexplained disease that was breaking out in, uh, in Kenya. People would go, they would laugh and laugh. Continuous laughter. That was, that was the main symptom. And she was worried about this. And I wrote back and said, Mother, I don't think you have to worry. That's a thousand miles away from where I am.

KLEIN: [00:09:05] Yeah. So where did you report for training?

BENNETT: [00:09:10] We went to Syracuse, New York. Syracuse University had a contract to train us starting in October.

KLEIN: [00:09:18] Do you remember the?

BENNETT: [00:09:19] It was over by, um, before Christmas.

KLEIN: [00:09:23] Do you remember the group's first gathering? You're reporting in. Approximately how many were there?

BENNETT: [00:09:28] There were about 46, 47. We lost several in the process of what they used to call deselection.

KLEIN: [00:09:36] We'll get there. About equal men and women?

BENNETT: [00:09:41] I think so.

KLEIN: [00:09:42] Any married couples, do you recall?

BENNETT: [00:09:44] A few. And a few marriages came out of it.

KLEIN: [00:09:47] Yeah. What, do you recall your impression? You know, now you're meeting 30 some other people who also said they're going to join the Peace Corps. And then there's you. Do you recall?

BENNETT: [00:10:00] I think I had a little bit of insecurity. I was a skinny, gawky kid. I went to a college which was relatively unknown, although now I realize what a terrific education I got there. And there were kids there with, um, there were a couple of lawyers. There were Harvard grads. And quite an impressive array of young people.

KLEIN: [00:10:24] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:10:25] So it took me a while to, um, feel comfortable with them. And also from my background, I was a non-drinker. And after training, just about every day, the, uh, maybe two thirds or three quarters of them would go across the street and spend the rest of the evening in the bar.

KLEIN: [00:10:47] Right.

BENNETT: [00:10:48] I didn't participate in that, you see.

KLEIN: [00:10:51] Great American tradition.

BENNETT: [00:10:51] But it was a growth experience for me in that coming from this religious background that was pretty sure they were right, I had to reconcile the fact that here were a bunch of people who were going to go overseas and give of themselves for two years and get nothing back materially for this, um, whose personal habits weren't as tight, tightly wound as mine. And yet I could see they were good people. And that was a very good experience for me and helped me to unwind from this position that I'd found myself in.

KLEIN: [00:11:31] It was the beginning of cross-cultural understanding.

BENNETT: [00:11:34] Well, yes. Even understanding other Americans.

KLEIN: [00:11:37] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Talk about the structure of training, how you spent your time and what's?

BENNETT: [00:11:42] Well, it was, training was new. It was just the early days. And I don't think Peace Corps really knew how to do it very well. This was even before they set up the Puerto Rico experience. And we didn't do any things like the Outward Bound type physical testing. We did pull ups and calisthenics and things, but it was mostly the way an academic institution would do training. So there was a class in American history and foreign relations and a class in Chinyanja, the language class. And health, how to take care of your health overseas.

KLEIN: [00:12:19] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:12:20] It was more structured that way and lasted through, um, November. It was about, let me think. Let me do this count. About eight weeks long altogether.

KLEIN: [00:12:29] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:12:30] Eight or nine.

KLEIN: [00:12:30] And it was a comfortable setting. I mean, you just coming out of school, so you're back in a classroom.

BENNETT: [00:12:35] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:12:35] And what about the language? Was that emphasized at all?

BENNETT: [00:12:42] I thought they, under the circumstances, they did a good job. There really weren't published language material for Chinyanja or Chichewa. It's almost the same thing. But there were some students, grad students from Malawi, that were hired by Syracuse University and a linguist headed that up. He didn't actually know the language, but the African men did a good job and some of the students did very well at it.

KLEIN: [00:13:18] Did they concentrate on speaking rather than trying to teach you the grammar and everything?

BENNETT: [00:13:24] Yes, they did both.

KLEIN: [00:13:25] How did you do in the language?

BENNETT: [00:13:27] Not well. I just don't have the brain for it, I guess. I learned a lot about languages, though, which has been a nice store of knowledge.

KLEIN: [00:13:37] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:13:38] For, for my work. But I didn't really learn much more than 30 or 40 vocabulary words and phrases. But I would like to add that when I got over there in Malawi, I was placed at a secondary school to teach English, and I felt really guilty about not really getting, uh, my language skills built up. But that would have required getting out into the village, because in the school setting English was the appropriate language. And I finally decided I would be doing a better job for my students to just work with them in English conversation and not have them work with me in learning Chichewa.

KLEIN: [00:14:22] Yeah. We'll talk about that when you're in the field because that was an issue in the Peace Corps. Uh, there's also a component of training usually called area studies.

BENNETT: [00:14:32] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:14:33] And do you recall who ran it or?

BENNETT: [00:14:37] Uh, I recall who ran the American history and foreign policy because the guy came into our class and on the first day and he knew everybody's name from memory, that made quite an impression.

KLEIN: [00:14:53] Wow.

BENNETT: [00:14:54] The area studies I don't remember the personality but, um, it was the beginning of a lifelong interest in Africa. I have continued to read about Africa, African history, foreign affairs. I follow African events.

KLEIN: [00:15:09] So it was kind of African studies and then some concentration on the colonial history of Nyasaland.

BENNETT: [00:15:14] Colonial history and the current political goings on. There was a liberation movement and there were some key figures there. We did have a man named Malan. I may not get this right, but Eduardo Malan [Mondlane]. And he was actually from Mozambique.

KLEIN: [00:15:33] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:15:34] Which is a neighboring contiguous country. And he was a faculty member at Syracuse. But he was also on the liberation front over there. And in due course, he became a member of their new government or, or at some point he was assassinated because of his political commitment.

KLEIN: [00:15:53] But Nyasaland must have been under a provisional transitional government that the British had decided to grant it independence.

BENNETT: [00:16:03] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:16:04] So that in effect, that's what permitted the Peace Corps to come in.

BENNETT: [00:16:09] Yeah. Peace Corps knew that the British were leaving.

KLEIN: [00:16:11] Right.

BENNETT: [00:16:12] And it could, uh. So we talked to the people who would be. I didn't talk to them.

KLEIN: [00:16:18] Yeah, well, right.

BENNETT: [00:16:19] The administrators talked to the Africans who would be leading the government, and they said, well, what we need most right now is more secondary school teachers because we don't have enough educated people.

KLEIN: [00:16:33] How about, uh, whether, was there an area of training on technical studies?

BENNETT: [00:16:39] Yes, there was some education training from the people at the graduate school of education.

KLEIN: [00:16:46] You had never taught before?

BENNETT: [00:16:47] No.

KLEIN: [00:16:48] And did?

BENNETT: [00:16:49] Well, I had never taught in a classroom.

KLEIN: [00:16:51] Right.

BENNETT: [00:16:52] I had done Sunday school teaching.

KLEIN: [00:16:54] Right. And how did you feel about the prospect of, you know, walking into a class and becoming a teacher?

BENNETT: [00:17:01] Perhaps I was a little bit concerned, but I might have been an education major, but I was more interested in learning real content in college. And I never took a single education course. I avoided them in order to take content courses. But it was no, there was no issue once I got in the classroom.

KLEIN: [00:17:23] The other big event or big thing that happens during training is the selection process and generally it includes some kind of psychological testing. You may even have been interviewed by psychiatrists.

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

KLEIN: [00:17:37] Do you recall that?

BENNETT: [00:17:37] Yeah, sure.

KLEIN: [00:17:39] Was it extremely stressful? I mean, how did the group handle it and how did you handle it individually?

BENNETT: [00:17:46] Everybody had an interview. I don't know. I don't know if I'd ever seen a psychiatrist before.

KLEIN: [00:17:52] Most people don't.

BENNETT: [00:17:53] You know, I mean.

KLEIN: [00:17:53] Right.

BENNETT: [00:17:54] And I don't know. I assumed he was Freudian. But whatever I said didn't hurt me. I know that. But a few, I think three of us were deselected.

KLEIN: [00:18:09] So during training, would people disappear, I mean, how?

BENNETT: [00:18:13] There were as I recall three. Now, one, one fellow was an extremely verbal young man who had gone to the University of Texas, and he'd been either the editor or high in their newspaper.

KLEIN: [00:18:27] Right.

BENNETT: [00:18:27] And he had an approach to things where he would engage in a sort of debate.

KLEIN: [00:18:35] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:18:35] And, and you could see he was just contrary, you know, he loved to be contrary. And he didn't, he wasn't shy about it. And I thought that might have been the reason why he was deselected.

KLEIN: [00:18:48] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:18:49] He was, uh, difficult.

KLEIN: [00:18:53] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:18:53] And we felt he was difficult too. The second fellow had told the psychiatrist that he'd been in a bar room fight.

KLEIN: [00:19:02] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:19:03] And he mentioned this afterwards in the brief period between his interview and the time he was packed away and sent home. And that's all we could figure out on him. But the bigger picture was that the Peace Corps didn't want to embarrass itself overseas.

KLEIN: [00:19:23] Right, right, oh yeah.

BENNETT: [00:19:23] So they tried to spot problems or potential problems. And it was very hard on us emotionally to see these kids disappear and they wouldn't tell us why.

KLEIN: [00:19:35] Right. Right.

BENNETT: [00:19:36] Someone was deselected. We only could guess about that. And of course, you wondered, would you be next?

KLEIN: [00:19:43] Yes. Did that tend to? Did the group coalesce? I mean, was there some kind of group spirit evolving, even if it was on negative grounds that, you know, if there's all this stress about selection, you kind of want to hang close to your buddies or the friends in the group?

BENNETT: [00:20:03] Uh, I think there was in the group. I was more of an outlier, more of a, of an individualist. I had a smaller circle of friends, and these were usually the kids that didn't want to be over in the bar.

KLEIN: [00:20:14] Right. Right.

BENNETT: [00:20:15] But it was stressful for us because nobody knew what you did to get deselected.

KLEIN: [00:20:22] Yeah. Were part of the world, uh, the American studies, did it include world communism?

BENNETT: [00:20:29] Oh, sure. The Peace Corps was an anti-communist movement, if you ask me.

KLEIN: [00:20:34] Sure. Okay.

BENNETT: [00:20:35] It clearly was an attempt to win goodwill in third world countries.

KLEIN: [00:20:41] Well, did you have a sense that you were then being sent as an agent of anti-communism? Don't let me put words in your mouth.

BENNETT: [00:20:47] Well, to some extent, yeah. Sure.

KLEIN: [00:20:49] Okay. But you don't recall any specifics of that kind of training?

BENNETT: [00:20:54] You know, back in those days, it would have just been part of the wallpaper.

KLEIN: [00:20:58] Okay. Okay. Final selection comes and the group is now pared down to about how many?

BENNETT: [00:21:08] About 43, 44. Well, they flew us home for Christmas. We could go to our own homes.

KLEIN: [00:21:14] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:21:15] I'd like to add, because it was very exciting to me at the time, first time I ever flew in an airplane was courtesy of the United States government.

KLEIN: [00:21:24] Right. Right.

BENNETT: [00:21:25] And they flew me from Syracuse to Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:21:31] Right.

BENNETT: [00:21:31] And then back to, uh, we left from JFK. But then it was called Idlewild International Airport.

KLEIN: [00:21:41] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:21:42] So I think they took us from Syracuse down there by bus, if I recall.

KLEIN: [00:21:46] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:21:47] And it was a great day. It was early January, first day or two of January.

KLEIN: [00:21:53] Well, let's say you've couple of days left.

BENNETT: [00:21:55] Yeah, a couple of days home and then.

KLEIN: [00:21:58] No second thoughts? You know, mother didn't say?

BENNETT: [00:22:01] No.

KLEIN: [00:22:01] You know, don't go.

BENNETT: [00:22:03] No, I was very keen to go.

KLEIN: [00:22:04] And were you shopping then? Did you have to buy enough handkerchiefs for two years?

BENNETT: [00:22:09] Oh yes, got a big trunk and put things in there that later we found out you could easily buy in Malawi.

KLEIN: [00:22:15] Right. Right. So then you finally end up at Idlewild. And was it a charter flight or a regular flight?

BENNETT: [00:22:23] It was a Pan Am.

KLEIN: [00:22:24] Yeah. Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:22:26] Regular flight. And we, let's see.

KLEIN: [00:22:31] Couldn't have gone direct.

BENNETT: [00:22:32] No, it didn't go direct. But I remember that, um, well, we certainly changed planes in Europe, but I remember they brought us into Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

KLEIN: [00:22:44] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:22:45] And we had an overnight there.

KLEIN: [00:22:47] Right.

BENNETT: [00:22:48] And then, um, after that. And that was on a Comet.

KLEIN: [00:22:54] Oh.

BENNETT: [00:22:55] British Airways. And then on to Blantyre.

KLEIN: [00:22:59] Right. In this, the whole process from Idlewild on. Well, at what point in the whole process did you meet or become aware of Peace Corps staff?

BENNETT: [00:23:10] Oh, well, we met Peace Corps staff in training.

KLEIN: [00:23:13] People from Washington?

BENNETT: [00:23:14] No, our country director, Bob Poole.

KLEIN: [00:23:18] Ah, okay.

BENNETT: [00:23:19] And his assistant. I don't remember the assistant's name, but he was a colorful fellow who had been a, what's called a great white hunter in East Africa.

KLEIN: [00:23:28] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:23:29] He was not as highly educated, but he was an adventurer who knew East Africa.

KLEIN: [00:23:35] Right.

BENNETT: [00:23:36] And that, no, those staff people were a presence.

KLEIN: [00:23:40] Because there was no project in the country at the time. I mean, you were the first.

BENNETT: [00:23:44] We were the first.

KLEIN: [00:23:45] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:23:46] I don't think they were in Syracuse all the time, but they certainly came in. Maybe they flew on back to Malawi to work on things.

KLEIN: [00:23:55] Did any staff members escort you there? Must have been some.

BENNETT: [00:23:57] There must have been, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:23:58] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:23:59] Don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:24:00] Arrived in Blantyre.

BENNETT: [00:24:01] Blantyre was the largest city at the time, still is. It was a commercial center. And it was about one hour's drive from the capital, which was Zomba.

KLEIN: [00:24:14] Was there a reception when you arrived?

BENNETT: [00:24:16] Oh. Some of this is faded, a little foggy in my memory, you know.

KLEIN: [00:24:21] Well, that's alright.

BENNETT: [00:24:22] It's been over 40 years.

KLEIN: [00:24:23] Yeah. Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:24:23] But we were housed at a very nice teachers college.

KLEIN: [00:24:31] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:24:32] By African standards. Right away you realize things are different in Africa.

KLEIN: [00:24:36] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:24:37] I mean, even a paved road was something to notice. There were lots of paved roads in Blantyre, but you could get out of town and in very short order be on a dirt road.

KLEIN: [00:24:49] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:24:51] But Soche Hill College was this teacher's training school where they housed us and fed us and gave us classes and they would take us out by bus to see this and that in Blantyre.

KLEIN: [00:25:03] How long was it?

BENNETT: [00:25:05] I would say two weeks, three weeks maybe. Three and a half weeks. Most of January 1963.

KLEIN: [00:25:14] Were you, uh, were they trying to get you to match up to the school year or a school term anyway?

BENNETT: [00:25:21] Yeah, school term began late January. So they were giving us a time to acclimate to the country, to the food.

KLEIN: [00:25:30] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:25:31] Get us comfortable walking around. And because it was unusual to be a white in Africa at the time.

KLEIN: [00:25:40] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:25:41] Maybe not so much in Blantyre, but in the countryside you could certainly be an object of great curiosity, especially with the little children.

KLEIN: [00:25:50] Yeah. And that was the entire group secondary teachers?

BENNETT: [00:25:56] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:25:57] Okay. And at what point during the three weeks did you begin to, did you, did you meet people you'd be working with like headmasters of schools or Malawians who were teachers?

BENNETT: [00:26:11] Well, we had Malawians around who were helping us with the training and more language instruction. Lots of contact with Malawians. And I must say the Malawians are lovely people and they were very courteous, respectful, friendly, interested, and grateful in what we were bringing to their country.

KLEIN: [00:26:36] Early on, did you have any?

BENNETT: [00:26:37] But we did not meet the people from our various secondary schools, no.

KLEIN: [00:26:41] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:26:41] No. The Peace Corps office was doing the placement. They told us we're working on the placement. We're taking these things into consideration. We're not taking certain other things into consideration.

KLEIN: [00:26:55] Right.

BENNETT: [00:26:56] And there was one, there were a lot of government schools, and there were a number, quite a number of Catholic schools, boys schools and girls schools.

KLEIN: [00:27:07] Were they mostly boarding schools?

BENNETT: [00:27:09] They were all boarding schools.

KLEIN: [00:27:11] Okay. Okay.

BENNETT: [00:27:11] And then there was this one Protestant boarding school for boys.

KLEIN: [00:27:16] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:27:16] Called Robert Blake School at Kongwe. And they were telling us that the people there were so conservative that it might be a difficult placement, but they also told us they were not taking our religions into any consideration for this placement. Well, that would have been in keeping with the First Amendment, I imagine, and American policy. So I sort of thought, gee, that would be a nice place, that Protestant place for me. But I guess I won't, I won't go there because they're not taking religion into account. And in the end, and I only figured this out much later, I think they realized I would be comfortable there and a lot of the others would not be comfortable and would chafe.

KLEIN: [00:28:07] Because religious studies are built into the school.

BENNETT: [00:28:10] Well, religious studies was in the British curriculum.

KLEIN: [00:28:13] Right.

BENNETT: [00:28:14] So every school had a certain amount of Bible knowledge that was taught. But, um, it's just that more of the people, the missionaries there would have been what most people would consider to be straight laced. And I was straight laced myself. So in the end, it worked out great because I really had a wonderful relationship with those.

KLEIN: [00:28:39] So that's where you were assigned?

BENNETT: [00:28:40] I was assigned to Robert Blake School.

KLEIN: [00:28:43] During your first three weeks, did you have much interaction with British officials or British people who were still in Nyasaland?

BENNETT: [00:28:54] The boma, or the government center, was about two and a half miles away, and the, uh, the district commissioner was named Mr. Ashton, if I remember correctly.

KLEIN: [00:29:08] Right.

BENNETT: [00:29:09] And he invited us three, there were three of us placed at Robert Blake School at Kongwe, invited us for dinner. Well, that was quite an experience because he had this huge, by Malawi standards, huge white, uh, white, um. The white stuff they put on?

KLEIN: [00:29:30] Whitewash?

BENNETT: [00:29:31] Whitewashed house and veranda and lawns and gardens and servants and uniformed policemen around giving all this grand service. And, um, that was a real insight into the British colonial picture. So we were invited there and also meeting a lot of African.

KLEIN: [00:29:55] But do you recall your interaction with him? I mean, what did he, what did he make of you, you as Peace Corps?

BENNETT: [00:30:02] Well, he was the perfect gentleman. The British, though, in general, were resentful of us Americans. They knew they were leaving.

KLEIN: [00:30:12] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:30:13] They, um, thought that America had let them down in the Suez Canal crisis in 1956.

KLEIN: [00:30:22] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:30:22] And that was, that really pulled the keystone out of the British Empire. I didn't even know what they were talking about. Now I've read up on it. Now I understand why they were resentful.

KLEIN: [00:30:33] The death knell.

BENNETT: [00:30:35] But they were leaving and they knew they were dropping from a first rate power to a second rate power. And here were these young American kids who thought they knew so much.

KLEIN: [00:30:50] So you went, you were taken from Blantyre. Did the school come and pick you up and?

BENNETT: [00:30:56] No, Peace Corps delivered us in Land Rovers.

KLEIN: [00:30:59] During the three weeks, did the Peace Corps staff try to establish any policies about where you could travel, what they expected of you? Was there any kind of trying to shape what it is you would be doing? Do you recall any of that?

BENNETT: [00:31:17] Yes, there certainly was. I don't recall too many specifics. But the one, one specific I remember was. [tape break] Back of my mind, I'd like to be a writer. And as soon as I heard that, it was like, oh well, I'm off the hook for that. Now, a year later, Malawi III showed up and Paul Theroux was a member of Malawi III and I remember specifically meeting him down at the rest house that the Peace Corps kept for us in Blantyre when we needed to, you know, get back to town and we had a place to sleep. And I remember talking to him and he said to me, I'm going to be a writer. And I thought, yeah, sure. Behind my smirk, you know, I thought, yeah, yeah, right. I'm going to be a writer, too, Paul Theroux. So that was quite amusing.

KLEIN: [00:32:09] And I think he stayed only a year as a volunteer.

BENNETT: [00:32:11] He did write for publication.

KLEIN: [00:32:13] Oh, yeah.

BENNETT: [00:32:13] He broke the regulations and he wrote critical material about the Banda government and he published, it was published in material that was not in country. It was for public, to be read by Americans, but it got back to Banda. And Banda said, get him out of here. They kicked him out.

KLEIN: [00:32:33] Well, let's go back to your beginning. You arrive at the school. There are three of you.

BENNETT: [00:32:39] Three of us. Right. A couple and me.

KLEIN: [00:32:41] And are you all to be English teachers?

BENNETT: [00:32:44] Yes. Well, no, he was a, he was a chemist, industrial chemist, and he taught science.

KLEIN: [00:32:51] And it was a fully established school, so it had?

BENNETT: [00:32:55] The school had been running since 1950.

KLEIN: [00:32:58] Did it have O-levels as well as A-levels?

BENNETT: [00:33:02] It was O-level.

KLEIN: [00:33:02] O-levels.

BENNETT: [00:33:03] Not A-level.

KLEIN: [00:33:03] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:33:04] Four years.

KLEIN: [00:33:05] Four years.

BENNETT: [00:33:06] Four years.

KLEIN: [00:33:06] Okay. Because in Ghana it was five. We had five forms. But, uh. Well, let's, let's talk about living conditions, then we'll talk about the teachers.

BENNETT: [00:33:15] Well, you know, we expected to live in grass huts from the publicity and the Peace Corps. And subsequently I have met volunteers who have lived in grass huts.

KLEIN: [00:33:26] That's a rarity.

BENNETT: [00:33:26] But we were at a mission station and the missionaries were South African. It was built and paid for by the reformed, Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. So there were about five Afrikaner families there.

KLEIN: [00:33:41] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:33:42] With children often. And there were, uh, 2 or 3 Africans on the teaching staff.

KLEIN: [00:33:51] Malawians?

BENNETT: [00:33:52] Malawians. And then also the three Americans who showed up. And that was the staff. It was an international staff, you might say. And they had built for their staff, really it was missionary housing, but lovely brick bungalows. You had running water, you had a wood stove for cooking. A little kitchen, it was very smoky, but cooking was done in the wood stove area or on the wood stove, like a cast iron stove.

KLEIN: [00:34:31] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:34:32] The hot water for your bath, or should I say bath, had to be heated by building a fire outdoors in this gadget that looked like a barbecue. Except instead of where you'd cook meat, there was a 55 gallon petroleum drum which they filled with water. And you could scald yourself to death on the first day. And on the end of the second day, it was lukewarm. So every two days the houseboy would build a fire.

KLEIN: [00:35:03] Did you have electricity just at night?

BENNETT: [00:35:05] The electricity was either from a generator or from a hydroelectric dam that the missionary had built.

KLEIN: [00:35:14] 24 hours then?

BENNETT: [00:35:15] In the rainy season.

KLEIN: [00:35:16] Yeah. Okay.

BENNETT: [00:35:18] I don't think they usually gave us 24 hour electricity. And an anecdote I like to tell is this couple who were there who had been married

ten years and were childless. And I guess said, well, I guess we're not going to have a family, so we might as well do something interesting.

KLEIN: [00:35:35] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:35:37] She became pregnant pretty soon. Now you have to picture that at 10 of 10:00, the lights would flash a couple of times to warn you. And then a minute later, the lights would dim down to nothing. So this couple, I guess, had some time to relax. And pretty soon she became pregnant with twins and they were not happy there. They didn't particularly like the missionaries and they went home after one year.

KLEIN: [00:36:03] Okay. Well, let's go back to, to you and your. So you're given the house.

BENNETT: [00:36:09] Well, I shared the house actually at the beginning. There was kind of a rolling personnel changes there between the missionaries and the Africans. So at some times I lived with an African teacher and at some times I lived as a guest in the home of a missionary family and sometimes there was the three Peace Corps guys. And the second year we were together.

KLEIN: [00:36:35] Okay. Were there any British teachers on staff?

BENNETT: [00:36:40] Yes, we had a British volunteer named Jonathan Fox.

KLEIN: [00:36:45] A VSO?

BENNETT: [00:36:46] VSO.

KLEIN: [00:36:46] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:36:46] Volunteer service overseas.

KLEIN: [00:36:48] Right. Right. Sort of the equivalent of Peace Corps. But they would make fun of Peace Corps because they just came. They didn't have to be trained or anything.

BENNETT: [00:36:57] Well.

KLEIN: [00:36:59] Do you recall that?

BENNETT: [00:36:59] British snobbery, but Jonathan Fox was a terrific character. I wish I knew where he was today.

KLEIN: [00:37:04] Oh, okay. So you walk into a very well established system.

BENNETT: [00:37:11] It was well run.

KLEIN: [00:37:12] And what was, and what was the headmaster's expectation of the role that you would play?

BENNETT: [00:37:19] Well, they said to me, you're the junior and senior English master. And I was a little caught off guard because I was surprised that they gave me so much responsibility right from the start.

KLEIN: [00:37:31] And your seniors would be facing the, uh.

BENNETT: [00:37:36] The exam.

KLEIN: [00:37:36] The West African, well, not the West African.

BENNETT: [00:37:38] The British O-level exam. Anyway, I said, well, gee, why, why me? And Dr. Lowe. Dr. Lowe, I'd like to say something about him in a minute. But he said, well, it's your language. I couldn't argue against that because the Afrikaners were using English as a second language and so were the Africans.

KLEIN: [00:38:02] Right.

BENNETT: [00:38:03] Now, Dr. Lowe actually in the '30s came over to the States and completed a PhD at Yale in 1940 in the field of race relations, which is no longer a field, but he was a very sophisticated man and a lovely man who did a good job running the school. I was, he was a real good friend to me.

KLEIN: [00:38:32] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:38:33] And it was great working for Dr. Lowe. And he ran a wonderful school. And I would like to also add that even though our school did not get the top students generally.

KLEIN: [00:38:45] Right.

BENNETT: [00:38:46] Because they went to the government schools, our work with them meant that, uh, showed up in the final exams. Generally, we had the highest pass rate for the secondary school, ordinary levels.

KLEIN: [00:39:01] I'm wondering. There was a great sensitivity about what was going on in South Africa on the part of.

BENNETT: [00:39:10] Oh, yes.

KLEIN: [00:39:11] Peace Corps officials and other Americans. And yet you're placed in a situation where a significant number of the staff and the school itself is being run by Afrikaners.

BENNETT: [00:39:24] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:39:25] Was that a problem? Were you ever alerted to being careful not to say anything or avoid any kind of political discussion? How did that play out?

BENNETT: [00:39:35] Well, I was already aware of apartheid. I'd read Cry the Beloved Country. I knew that, uh, I knew what apartheid meant, at least on paper. So I was a little uncomfortable with these people. And it took me a while to realize that they were probably the cream of the crop.

KLEIN: [00:39:51] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:39:53] I got a chance to travel to South Africa.

KLEIN: [00:39:56] There was no restriction on that?

BENNETT: [00:39:57] Not at that time. Later they said you shouldn't go to South Africa. But at the beginning it was okay. And through my contacts at the mission station, I had people to visit and stay with and saw a lot of interesting things in the three week tour in South Africa. But I certainly didn't like apartheid when I saw it in South Africa.

KLEIN: [00:40:20] Right.

BENNETT: [00:40:20] And, um, and I'll never forget this. One of the teachers drove me down to Jo'burg [Johannesburg], and from there I hitchhiked. But when we got to Jo'burg, he pulled in his, his car needed some work. He pulled into a repair shop and on the back of a, like in Europe, there is an oval that lists the country and ML was on the back of his car. And the mechanic said, what are you doing live up there living with those monkeys? So I had a sense of the derision that these missionaries had to put up with by their career choice.

KLEIN: [00:41:01] So one would assume that the missionaries were not racist or would not particularly supporters of apartheid.

BENNETT: [00:41:08] They weren't. They were insofar, well, maybe they supported apartheid.

KLEIN: [00:41:13] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:41:15] As a political thing. And we used to have great discussions. Some, some were more supportive than others.

KLEIN: [00:41:22] Yeah. I was wondering whether even sending you out initially the Peace Corps had given you any cautions or if they were even aware of.

BENNETT: [00:41:30] Oh, sure, we were aware of it. We were all a little tense about it because the United States had a strong position, anti-apartheid position.

KLEIN: [00:41:38] But no official letters, policy statements from Peace Corps to you?

BENNETT: [00:41:45] No, no.

KLEIN: [00:41:45] Or pulling you aside and saying you're going into a?

BENNETT: [00:41:48] Oh, no, I knew I was going into that.

KLEIN: [00:41:50] So it was not said that from by Poole and others?

BENNETT: [00:41:55] No.

KLEIN: [00:41:55] Okay. I just, uh. How about, let's talk about your adjustment into the teaching schedule. You were a little disconcerted with the fact that you were teaching the two top classes.

BENNETT: [00:42:06] Oh, they put a lot of confidence in me right off the bat.

KLEIN: [00:42:10] I know what they did, what about you?

BENNETT: [00:42:12] I adjusted to it right away. You know, I loved the classroom experience and I was very devoted to it. I cared a lot about my students.

KLEIN: [00:42:22] Was it English literature mainly?

BENNETT: [00:42:23] Well, you had the set books.

KLEIN: [00:42:26] Right, right. You remember the set books you were working from?

BENNETT: [00:42:28] Well, I remember My Family and Other Animals by Durrell. That was a very funny book. The boys loved it.

KLEIN: [00:42:34] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:42:37] And I wish I could name the other ones, but you really had Shakespeare. We always did a Shakespeare play. Macbeth. You had to work through line by line virtually to make sure the kids understood what was going on. And you develop vocabulary, and then they would write about what was going on. And there was a lot of correction of writing and blackboard work, examples and things like that.

KLEIN: [00:43:03] One of the classic problems that teachers in Peace Corps going into your situation have is you come in with your American English and, for the most part, your students are attuned to British English, British accent, as well as their own language has a different lilt to it.

BENNETT: [00:43:24] Definitely.

KLEIN: [00:43:24] Do you recall your adjustment to that? I mean, how you finally figured out that they didn't understand you at all?

BENNETT: [00:43:33] Well, I slowed down my speech and became more articulate, and I think that has stayed with me to some extent. I do try to, to speak very clearly, and I'm aware of vowel differences. It used to annoy me with the kids in my project who weren't able to make the shift to the longer vowels. So someone would say Kongwe, that's K-O-N-G-W-E. But it was Kongwe, you know.

KLEIN: [00:44:02] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:44:03] And Banda. President Banda instead of President Banda, things like that. But I had an ear for that. And I did get a lot out of the linguistics training from Syracuse.

KLEIN: [00:44:16] So there weren't major misunderstandings.

BENNETT: [00:44:18] Well, I had a lot to learn.

KLEIN: [00:44:19] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:44:19] You know, I had to make these adjustments, but it was very clear that I had to adjust to British rather than trying to get the boys to talk like me. But they did love to imitate us and say things like gonna, wanna, shoulda, you know. And I'd hear these things and they didn't quite sound right, you know. And I'd sort of cringe and think, oh my goodness, look what I've done to their fine basic English instruction.

KLEIN: [00:44:48] Describe your classroom setting.

BENNETT: [00:44:50] Well, the classroom blocks were brick with corrugated, I think it was asbestos roofing.

KLEIN: [00:44:58] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:44:59] There were no drop ceilings.

KLEIN: [00:45:01] Right.

BENNETT: [00:45:01] Each class had eight hanging light bulbs. And at night, the boys would come back and study from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in artificial lighting.

KLEIN: [00:45:14] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:45:15] And then they'd leave for bedtime.

KLEIN: [00:45:18] How many students in the class?

BENNETT: [00:45:20] Thirty. 30 seats. And every seat was full. Very, very little absenteeism. Everybody there was there to learn. They were respectful. They were earnest.

KLEIN: [00:45:31] And they were living on.

BENNETT: [00:45:32] Living. And they had dining hall and dormitories. One dorm was two stories. Now, that's very unusual in up country Malawi to have a two story building. And that building was named Mulanje, which is the name of

the high peak in, in Malawi. So it was a great novelty to have this two story dormitory and a point of pride if you lived in Mulanje.

KLEIN: [00:45:58] Yeah. How did you address the students, do you recall?

BENNETT: [00:46:04] We were pretty informal. The British tradition was your teacher is aloof and sir and all that. When we entered the classroom, they all stood up. Well, right away we said, hey, fellas, you know, relax. It's okay. But that was a mistake. I see that as a mistake. We should have fitted in a little more closely to the established tradition because it confused them. They didn't know when to stand and when not to stand.

KLEIN: [00:46:35] During your first six months, did you have any discipline problems?

BENNETT: [00:46:41] I had no discipline problems.

KLEIN: [00:46:43] And were you able to sort of work with the married couple to process your experience? You know, your, to work through your adjustment to teaching there. Was there anyone you could turn to to talk it over to just to get some sense of whether you were doing it well or poorly?

BENNETT: [00:47:02] Uh, the married couple and I were comfortable with each other, but I don't really feel that I ever became good friends of theirs. They were not happy, as I said. They made some mistakes at the beginning with their houseboy. They had their houseboy sit and eat with them and he fell apart. He became no good for doing his work in about ten days or two weeks. And I had better luck with my houseboy.

KLEIN: [00:47:33] Well, how did you know what was the roles between houseboy and, uh, teacher, you know, master?

BENNETT: [00:47:42] Well, you know, we Americans have this egalitarian inclination that we're all equal and we're all, nobody's better than anybody else. But you carry that over into a, uh, master servant situation and it doesn't work in Africa because not everybody there shares this assumption. The hierarchy is very clear.

KLEIN: [00:48:07] Yeah. Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:48:08] So it was a mistake to try to break this down.

KLEIN: [00:48:13] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:48:15] We didn't know what we were doing when we did try to break it down.

KLEIN: [00:48:19] Right.

BENNETT: [00:48:19] And it usually didn't work out well. Now, on the other hand, I think the schoolboys appreciated the opportunity to get to know us Americans as people and see us more as people rather than somebody on a pedestal. So you have to differentiate, and this is where it gets thick.

KLEIN: [00:48:42] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:48:43] You have white privilege. You have teacher privilege. You have the employer privilege, uh, the foreigner, the guest privilege. All these things can be jumbled up together and you have to be there quite a while to begin to sort out the social implications of your role and their roles.

KLEIN: [00:49:04] Had anyone in training or had Peace Corps staff kind of, had there been any group sessions talking about roles?

BENNETT: [00:49:12] Yeah, some discussion of it.

KLEIN: [00:49:13] So you were at least aware of the possibility that, you know, it wasn't exactly as it might be back in the United States?

BENNETT: [00:49:21] Oh, certainly. Yeah, certainly aware of that. But theory is one thing. Practice is something else. Now, you asked me, where did we process these things? Mostly we processed them back when we'd get down to the rest house in Blantyre and talked to other volunteers. Or go visit our colleagues at other schools.

KLEIN: [00:49:41] So you had, you know, the circle of friends you had gotten through training that you could meet in Blantyre and more readily talk over your teaching.

BENNETT: [00:49:49] Well, anybody. Once you came back into Blantyre from being upcountry, you were ready to be an American and chat and discuss things. And that was a great decompression. You probably experienced the same kind of thing because there's a tension in being immersed in another culture and it's hard on the nerves. And, you know, you go through the three month, six month cycle. And after six months, you're very likely to be depressed. And but then you sort of build back up out of that. And by the second year, you're really in tune, I thought.

KLEIN: [00:50:27] Right.

BENNETT: [00:50:27] And comfortable.

KLEIN: [00:50:28] Let's stay within the first six months. Do you recall what you were writing home to your family?

BENNETT: [00:50:32] You know, I have never really examined those letters.

KLEIN: [00:50:36] Oh, okay. But you have them?

BENNETT: [00:50:38] It's a lot of detail. I have them, yes.

KLEIN: [00:50:41] Do you recall your own sense that after 5 or 6 months that you'd, you were, you made it, you were a Peace Corps volunteer. You were in Africa. You were teaching. You were teaching, as far as you could tell, reasonably well. Was there any sense of that evolving or?

BENNETT: [00:51:02] Um. Yes, I think I, those things I, not exactly what you said, not that I was all that conscious of it. But one consciousness you didn't mention was pretty soon I didn't think of myself so much as a volunteer as a teacher at Kongwe School. Peace Corps in due course became an

agency, you know, a couple of hundred miles away who you really didn't see very much. You didn't really need very much.

KLEIN: [00:51:31] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:51:33] I was much more a part of Kongwe and Dowa boma district and this American visitor who was teaching. And that was much more real to me than the external structure.

KLEIN: [00:51:49] And you, and the world you were in at the school was relatively comfortable.

BENNETT: [00:51:53] Very comfortable.

KLEIN: [00:51:54] And you had, you were friends with the headmaster and others.

BENNETT: [00:52:00] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:52:00] How were you being paid?

BENNETT: [00:52:02] Well, we got this living allowance.

KLEIN: [00:52:05] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:52:05] And it was deposited into a standard bank. We had a check book.

KLEIN: [00:52:10] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:52:11] Once a month, we got X dollars. I think I recall \$105, which by today's standard, might be 4 or 500.

KLEIN: [00:52:19] Right, right.

BENNETT: [00:52:20] Our housing was taken care of by the school. So we had transport, food. Health was taken care of by the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:52:30] Did you still would do the food shopping?

BENNETT: [00:52:32] Well, the school ran a farm and they would deliver fresh vegetables, which took a lot of work to clean up. They didn't exactly come in Birdseye frozen packages.

KLEIN: [00:52:45] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:52:46] But that's how we got the vegetables. Fruits we would buy in the market and also beef we would buy in the market. And every perhaps three weeks on average, I would get into Lilongwe, which was about 30 miles away. It's now the capital, but then it was not the capital.

KLEIN: [00:53:04] Right.

BENNETT: [00:53:05] And it was a great treat to buy some Cadbury chocolate bars and some cheese and a pound of butter. I mean, bacon, sliced bacon.

KLEIN: [00:53:14] Yeah. But you could get bread and eggs locally and stuff?

BENNETT: [00:53:18] My cook baked bread.

KLEIN: [00:53:20] Oh, okay.

BENNETT: [00:53:20] Eggs came from local chickens.

KLEIN: [00:53:22] Did you physically go into the market to buy the meat?

BENNETT: [00:53:26] Sometimes.

KLEIN: [00:53:27] And was that frowned on or was that acceptable?

BENNETT: [00:53:29] It was fine. But more often the houseboy went in.

KLEIN: [00:53:33] Okay. Okay. Let's talk about the other, the school itself.

BENNETT: [00:53:40] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:53:40] Generally at boarding schools, most of the masters have additional duties.

BENNETT: [00:53:46] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:53:47] Housemaster or you supervise evening studies.

BENNETT: [00:53:50] Exactly.

KLEIN: [00:53:50] Sports or what have you. What were you assigned?

BENNETT: [00:53:54] Well, I did night duty. One, one teacher would watch 300. I mean, can you imagine this in the United States? Three hundred schoolboys quietly studying under the supervision of one teacher for two hours, uninterrupted. Couldn't happen here.

KLEIN: [00:54:15] Right.

BENNETT: [00:54:16] I did the choir.

KLEIN: [00:54:18] Oh.

BENNETT: [00:54:18] I took my choir down to the national competition, and they were very good. But we, we were disqualified because, uh, we, we. Every choir sang three songs. And one of the songs had to be in praise of President Kamuzu Banda. Well, nobody told me that. So we didn't have a song in praise of President Banda, so we couldn't have won. I didn't know this. But we were very good singers.

KLEIN: [00:54:51] Yeah. Had you had choir training?

BENNETT: [00:54:54] Yeah, well, church, church background.

KLEIN: [00:54:56] But enough that you?

BENNETT: [00:54:57] I'm a baritone. I can read music.

KLEIN: [00:54:59] Yeah. Okay. And who had done it at the school before you?

BENNETT: [00:55:04] I don't know.

KLEIN: [00:55:05] And the students? Was it, did they volunteer to join the choir?

BENNETT: [00:55:12] Mm hmm. Football was the, "futball" was the big sport. Remember, every year we'd have a teachers versus the students game.

KLEIN: [00:55:21] And you dared to play?

BENNETT: [00:55:22] I play. Yeah. I played soccer and I went out for soccer at college. I wasn't much good, but at least I knew what direction to kick the ball and how to dribble and things like that. But that was great fun because the schoolboys were much better than we were. Oh, basketball. I introduced basketball.

KLEIN: [00:55:42] Okay.

BENNETT: [00:55:43] To this school. I found a few miles away there was a recruiting station for mine labor in South Africa. And these people had through the years had some trucks that when they were done with, they just discarded the parts. And I got two truck chassis, which were essentially C beams bolted together, maybe 16, 18 feet long. We cut through in order to fold down one end and attach the blackboard, the backboard to that and buried the other end in concrete. And I actually made a regulation basketball court on a dirt surface.

KLEIN: [00:56:31] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:56:33] Built the backboard out of masonite on a frame and Peace Corps supplied me the hoops. They were regulation hoops. We started teaching basketball.

KLEIN: [00:56:44] And the students took to it?

BENNETT: [00:56:46] Yeah, they took to it. They didn't like to jump very high. I couldn't get them to, uh, touch the rim.

KLEIN: [00:56:54] Oh, okay.

BENNETT: [00:56:55] And so then I said, look, anybody who can touch the rim, I'll give you two shillings, 6 pence, and boy, several of them were immediately able to touch the rim.

KLEIN: [00:57:06] Yeah. So, so during school term you had, you were pretty much, pretty busy.

BENNETT: [00:57:13] Oh, we were always busy.

KLEIN: [00:57:14] What about weekends? What did you do?

BENNETT: [00:57:17] Either go into Lilongwe.

KLEIN: [00:57:19] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:57:20] If we stayed in town, there was church services that I would go to. Not every week, excuse me, but, and they were all in Chinyanja.

KLEIN: [00:57:32] Right.

BENNETT: [00:57:32] So I didn't really understand too much of what was going on, but I would go. Uh. And hiking, visiting, socializing with the other teachers.

KLEIN: [00:57:45] On the staff?

BENNETT: [00:57:46] On the staff.

KLEIN: [00:57:47] Both African and Afrikaner and?

BENNETT: [00:57:50] Afrikaner. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:57:52] Sometimes.

BENNETT: [00:57:53] And reading. A lot of really nice quiet time to read.

KLEIN: [00:57:58] Sometimes people in a, going into another cultural situation find one particular friend who sort of becomes the, a mentor or, you know, the informant about the culture and, you know, you can communicate about your mis- or your puzzlement. And he or she would be able to say, well, the tradition that's going on is. Was there anyone like that? Or do you recall trying to become familiar with the traditional culture of your students?

BENNETT: [00:58:31] Dr. Lowe had been in the country since 1950.

KLEIN: [00:58:35] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:58:36] He was good at that. I used to spend a lot of time with the mechanic, the missionary mechanic, the one who built the hydroelectric dam.

KLEIN: [00:58:46] Yeah.

BENNETT: [00:58:46] And generally took care of electrical issues and car problems and things like that. Not an educated man, but a very informed man. We used to play chess late into the night.

KLEIN: [00:58:56] Malawian or?

BENNETT: [00:58:58] No, he was South African, Afrikaner guy. Called him Uncle Chris, Oom Stoffel. He'd been a missionary for a long time and he and his wife were very insightful and we'd ponder issues, differences, and why things are this way.

KLEIN: [00:59:20] Conversations all in English, I assume?

BENNETT: [00:59:22] Those would be in English. Yes. All my conversations were in English. Now, I roomed for a while with a guy named Gus Mutambala, an

African man who had gotten a master's in economics at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

KLEIN: [00:59:38] Ah.

BENNETT: [00:59:39] And he was a very sophisticated man, bachelor at the time, later married. We were housemates for a while.

KLEIN: [00:59:46] And was his village nearby?

BENNETT: [00:59:50] I have no idea.

KLEIN: [00:59:51] Okay. Okay.

BENNETT: [00:59:54] He didn't go home very often.

KLEIN: [00:59:55] Right.

BENNETT: [00:59:56] But that was a nice friendship. I was living with him for 6 or 7 months.

KLEIN: [01:00:03] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:00:04] Later on, he became active in politics. But he was, um, got on the outs with President Banda and was able to get a job at the American embassy, which protected him from any political retribution because Banda was very tough on people that he didn't think were supporting him. And there was a lot of jailing brutality. Now, now we realize there was a lot of political assassination going on all around us.

KLEIN: [01:00:40] Well, let's stay in the political area. Um. Nyasaland became independent while you were there. At what point in your service did it come, after you were up at the school for a few months?

BENNETT: [01:00:56] It came essentially three quarters of the way through. So the first year it was British or British protectorate. Then we had six months of transition, quote unquote, at which time it was sort of a partnership. The

civil service were, the British civil servants were still there, but they had colleagues, partners in the Africans who were going to become the African civil servants. And then on July 6th, 1964, it was formally given over to the Africans with President Hastings Banda. And I went down to Blantyre, to the National Stadium.

KLEIN: [01:01:42] I was going to ask, yeah.

BENNETT: [01:01:44] In I think perhaps Zomba, I'm not sure, but it was Rangeley Stadium. They changed the name later, but it was a soccer stadium. And Prince Philip came, came in.

KLEIN: [01:01:56] Did you need special tickets to get in?

BENNETT: [01:01:57] I don't know how I got in, but I was certainly there.

KLEIN: [01:02:01] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:02:01] Prince Philip with a Rolls-Royce convertible.

KLEIN: [01:02:06] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:02:06] And Banda in a red, I believe it was a Sunbeam convertible, which is much more of a low-end car, but a bright red Sunbeam. Drove around the track, you know, and then took their seats in the honor, place of honor. And at midnight, the Union Jack came down and the Malawi Kwacha flag went up and the fireworks were terrific, right over our heads. So it was a great thing to be there.

KLEIN: [01:02:37] Were there a lot of the other volunteers there?

BENNETT: [01:02:39] Oh, some, but mostly Africans.

KLEIN: [01:02:42] And Peace Corps hadn't said one way or the other stay. [tape break]

BENNETT: [01:02:46] Office. But I can't imagine that they would have in any way inhibited us from, from being there. I mean, we, the whole stance or posture of Peace Corps office was supportive of independence.

KLEIN: [01:03:01] Yeah. Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:03:02] And they didn't tell us certain things that were happening which were embarrassing to, uh, or would have been embarrassing to the new government, such as political assassinations, for example.

KLEIN: [01:03:14] Oh, okay. Okay.

BENNETT: [01:03:15] So there was a political assassination while we were still in training that rubbed out three of the intellectual leaders of the movement to, to take over and Africanize the country.

KLEIN: [01:03:30] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:03:30] And these guys had brought Dr. Banda back from West Africa. Banda had been, had gotten out as a very young man.

KLEIN: [01:03:40] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:03:41] When it was unheard of to do so. Educated in America, became a physician, practiced medicine in England, married an English woman. And then when the African Freedom movement began, he was already in that circle of people in London who had been discussing independence with the.

KLEIN: [01:04:05] Like Kwame Nkrumah.

BENNETT: [01:04:07] Nkrumah and Mr. [George] Padmore was the, like the intellectual leader of this.

KLEIN: [01:04:13] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:04:13] So he lived in Ghana and the young Turks in Malawi that were interested in liberation brought Banda as a figurehead, to their minds, an older man, you know, that the British would respect, but they never intended him to be, to take charge. But he, he did take charge through strong arm methods.

KLEIN: [01:04:40] So in the.

BENNETT: [01:04:41] I wanted to just finish that.

KLEIN: [01:04:43] Okay.

BENNETT: [01:04:44] So three of these guys were run off the road and shot up while we were still in training.

KLEIN: [01:04:50] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:04:51] And we were told that they had died in a car accident. Well, they did die in a car accident, but it was a planned accident. I didn't know about that, the truth about that, till after I was out.

KLEIN: [01:05:05] So then in the time you were there in the run up to final independence, that you knew, Banda and the group that was being prepared to take over the government, there were no wrinkles in that. I mean, there weren't. Was there opposition? Were you advised not to talk?

BENNETT: [01:05:27] Well, we were advised not to talk politics. Don't get involved in politics.

KLEIN: [01:05:32] But were there any regional dangers that if you were in this area that was likely to be anti-government or anti-Banda? And do you recall any of that?

BENNETT: [01:05:43] Yes, I was quite aware of that.

KLEIN: [01:05:45] But directly impacting on you?

BENNETT: [01:05:48] We were told keep your nose out of politics.

KLEIN: [01:05:50] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:05:51] So we listened, but we didn't participate. Now, if you did participate, uh, some of the volunteers went to parliament and applauded the certain people, and they were, they shouldn't have been applauding anybody. So they were either reprimanded or sent home, as I recall.

KLEIN: [01:06:17] While you were a volunteer?

BENNETT: [01:06:19] Uh huh.

KLEIN: [01:06:19] Okay. Okay.

BENNETT: [01:06:20] Yeah. So we, we listened. We kept our ears open. Now, I remember one day that Orton Chirwa came and had lunch with Agus and Tambala. And since we were housemates, I was at the table. Orton Chirwa was one of the few lawyers in all, Black lawyers in all of Malawi. He was trained in London, um, or in Britain and he was part of that in-group. But in due course he became unhappy with Banda's ways and was put in prison and died in prison. But I remember chatting with Orton Chirwa, who was, had to be in the top 5 or 6 people of the inner circle at one time. So we'd listen.

KLEIN: [01:07:06] Yeah. Let's go back to school. The, uh. After two terms, did you have a long break?

BENNETT: [01:07:15] Yeah, there were, um.

KLEIN: [01:07:17] The long break.

BENNETT: [01:07:17] The year started in late January, early February.

KLEIN: [01:07:21] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:07:21] And ended about Thanksgiving time.

KLEIN: [01:07:25] Okay.

BENNETT: [01:07:26] Now seasons are flip flopped over there.

KLEIN: [01:07:29] Right.

BENNETT: [01:07:29] So their, their summer is in December, January, February.

KLEIN: [01:07:34] Right.

BENNETT: [01:07:34] And that's also the rainy season when everything turns green.

KLEIN: [01:07:37] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:07:38] And their cold season is June, July, August. By then things have gotten all brown. So generally you'd have a term and then a three week break, a term, a three week break, a term and, and then the 6 or 7 week break. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:07:54] What did you do during the short breaks and then the long break?

BENNETT: [01:08:01] Uh, we either made, stayed around and did something, a project. You had to report down to headquarters this what I'm going to do. You had a certain amount of eligible times for, to be off.

KLEIN: [01:08:16] Right.

BENNETT: [01:08:17] And I usually traveled. I traveled to Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa during, during my off times. Or I traveled around Malawi and went to see volunteers at other school situations. In the long break, as I explained, I went to South Africa.

KLEIN: [01:08:34] Were there any restrictions on your travel? Like you couldn't go to Europe, you couldn't return to the U.S.?

BENNETT: [01:08:38] We were told not to, not to return to the U.S. And not to, no, travel in Africa was approved.

KLEIN: [01:08:45] Right.

BENNETT: [01:08:46] Period.

KLEIN: [01:08:48] During your whole first year, did you have any visitors from the Peace Corps out at your site?

BENNETT: [01:08:55] Well, there were two inspectors. I think they were State Department people. For all I know, they might have been CIA.

KLEIN: [01:09:01] We like to think not.

BENNETT: [01:09:03] And these guys showed up one day unannounced and, um, they told me, they showed me their IDs, told me they were, you know, inspecting the program. On that particular day, I was ill, as we learned to say in British English. And I was not teaching. I was in my bathrobe at home.

KLEIN: [01:09:24] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:09:24] And these guys showed up and they sat around and chatted for half an hour or something like that. But I was embarrassed that it appeared to be I was bluffing, you know, and not on the job, but apparently it didn't really bother them. And actually, from my point of view, it seemed to me they were lucky because they got this, you know, government tourist trip with plenty of leisure time driving from place to place.

KLEIN: [01:09:51] Do you recall if they spoke to your headmaster?

BENNETT: [01:09:54] I'm sure they did, but I don't.

KLEIN: [01:09:57] Other than?

BENNETT: [01:09:57] I don't know. I didn't worry about it.

KLEIN: [01:09:59] And you don't recall names at all?

BENNETT: [01:10:01] No, I don't.

KLEIN: [01:10:02] Okay. They could have been Peace Corps evaluators.

BENNETT: [01:10:05] Yeah. Yeah, well, I'm sure it was some sort of evaluation. They said they were evaluating the program.

KLEIN: [01:10:10] Any, any official Peace Corps staff come up and visit you?

BENNETT: [01:10:14] Yes, there were.

KLEIN: [01:10:16] Often or?

BENNETT: [01:10:17] No, not too often. You know, you'd usually be warned. You know, they'd let you know.

KLEIN: [01:10:23] How?

BENNETT: [01:10:24] A phone call. There was only one phone on the, on the entire mission station. It rang in the headmaster's office. And also it was attached to his front wall of his, on his house, on the wall, as we say, on the porch.

KLEIN: [01:10:39] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:10:39] And it was a, uh, wind up phone. You had to crank it to, to get into the operator in Dowa and so on.

KLEIN: [01:10:47] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:10:48] You didn't really worry about phone calls too much.

KLEIN: [01:10:51] Did Poole come out?

BENNETT: [01:10:52] Yeah, I think Pool came out. I don't specifically remember that, but I do remember being visited.

KLEIN: [01:10:59] But you said that really through the first year, you developed a sense that Peace Corps was almost incidental, that you, you were there and you were doing a job.

BENNETT: [01:11:09] For all practical purposes. I'm very consciously became aware that it was not really day to day so much that I was a Peace Corps volunteer as that I was a teacher at Kongwe School.

KLEIN: [01:11:24] Now, initially that grew up certainly through the period at that time with almost every Peace Corps project, particularly with education, was that the policy was it's not enough to just teach. You need to become involved somehow in other projects or involved somehow otherwise with the culture. And I had evaluators come and say, the first question was, well, how many Ghanaians do you know? And what they were implying was that it wasn't enough to work on the school compound I should possibly be doing. Do you recall that at all?

BENNETT: [01:12:05] Um, I had a certain amount of guilt about that because I was not getting out in the villages as much as I thought I would be.

KLEIN: [01:12:14] Right.

BENNETT: [01:12:15] Um. So in that sense, I didn't feel like I was a terrific Peace Corps volunteer.

KLEIN: [01:12:19] So you had a sense that?

BENNETT: [01:12:21] Yeah, I wasn't really.

KLEIN: [01:12:22] Ideal image?

BENNETT: [01:12:23] Yeah. Yeah, there was an ideal there.

KLEIN: [01:12:25] Right.

BENNETT: [01:12:25] That I wasn't fulfilling. Now, um, but as I explained back near the beginning, I soon decided that my job was to help these young people function in English.

KLEIN: [01:12:43] Right.

BENNETT: [01:12:44] And be more conversational and so on. And that that was where I should be and not worry about getting out in the village. And even as it was, I was often behind in returning my papers, you know, the corrections and things like that. So I didn't really think I had a lot of time to get out in the village. Now, on the other side of the coin, the missionaries sometimes would go out to see outlying churches, and that might involve a long hike on a Sunday, being there for a church service. We had a wonderful adventure driving up country and around to get to the certain place, which was really only about ten miles away. We had to drive this big C-shaped journey on dirt roads. But on another occasion we walked that, over hill and dale.

KLEIN: [01:13:39] Uh huh.

BENNETT: [01:13:39] And I really got in to see what the backcountry was like when we got off the roads and away from the colonial influence, you really saw Africa as it had always been. Another thing I did was to walk over to an American missionary's house. He was a family man. He had three boys. Named Irwin. They were Assemblies of God. And their mission house was about four miles away. And I often would walk as the crow flies on these little footpaths that I discovered are all through the grasslands of, of Africa, which you don't see when you drive by.

KLEIN: [01:14:19] Right.

BENNETT: [01:14:20] But I'd cut across country up and down and go see the Irwins and they'd, they'd feed me hamburgers.

KLEIN: [01:14:27] Worth the walk.

BENNETT: [01:14:28] Worth the walk.

KLEIN: [01:14:30] And as you're coming to the end of the second year, did you have any idea that possibly you might want to extend your service?

BENNETT: [01:14:40] No. I was in love with a college sweetheart and we'd been writing the whole time. I think her letters helped me a lot to keep, you know, emotionally stable and gave me a future to look forward to. So I was eager to get back and see her. I left service a little bit before they wrapped, before the project wound up, what they now call close of service, COS. Every Peace Corps volunteer knows COS. But the term COS was unknown to me.

KLEIN: [01:15:16] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:15:16] When I had my checkout interview a little bit before Thanksgiving time. Now, of course, they don't have Thanksgiving over there, but the Americans were aware of Thanksgiving and they gave me my ticket in, that is the right to buy passage home. And I arranged with the travel agency there to fly to Lusaka, then to Nairobi, then to Entebbe, then to Khartoum in the Sudan. Oh, sorry. I left out Addis Ababa. Then Khartoum, then Cairo. So I stayed in each of those cities at least one night, sometimes four nights.

KLEIN: [01:16:04] You could do it in those days.

BENNETT: [01:16:05] You could do it in those days. And that was a great experience. Spent almost no time in Europe. I think three, a night in Paris and three nights in London, and then got on home for Christmas.

KLEIN: [01:16:18] And was Poole up in Kenya by the time you finished?

BENNETT: [01:16:21] No. But Poole died in an auto accident in Kenya. He was the country director.

KLEIN: [01:16:29] Right. So at the end of the two years, you know, how did you, how at the time do you recall what, how you evaluated your experience?

BENNETT: [01:16:40] Oh, my. It was a great experience and it deeply changed me in many ways. When I got back to the States, I was much less materialistic. And I walked places. I would say to Margaret, when we were living on the edge of Cleveland, we didn't have a car. Newlyweds without a car, but on the bus line. And I would say we were, if we were say going shopping downtown, I'd say, Margaret, shall we take the bus or walk? Now, she thought I was nuts, but to me, to walk three or 4 or 5 miles would not, you know, would not be an unusual thought. And a lot of those things I really had to gradually change when I came home because you realized how out of step you were.

KLEIN: [01:17:40] Did you go right into graduate studies?

BENNETT: [01:17:44] Uh, no. I came home and she was in graduate school and I by then had been accepted at Princeton Theological Seminary.

KLEIN: [01:17:53] Ah, okay.

BENNETT: [01:17:54] And we got married in September. And the plan was for me to start seminary, but we weren't able to find a job for her that first year. So instead, we stayed in Cleveland, where I went to library school, and I got my library degree a year later. By then she had a job and we came to Princeton, and in due course I became a librarian rather than a clergyman. And I think, you know, the Peace Corps kind of helped me pull away from the evangelical conservatism.

KLEIN: [01:18:30] Sure.

BENNETT: [01:18:30] That I'd had at Wheaton. And I really wanted to be let out of that box. I, I realize that now. So all that worked out.

KLEIN: [01:18:44] Were you able to maintain any kind of continuing contact or contact through the years with people in Malawi?

BENNETT: [01:18:51] Well, I've been back to Malawi twice, in 1968 with Margaret after we'd been married for five years to show her, show her what, where I'd been, and also to see friends in Addis Ababa and in Kaduna, Nigeria.

KLEIN: [01:19:07] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:19:09] And I went again to go to a wedding of one of those missionary families' children in 1996. Uh, so I am in loose touch with a couple of the missionary people. Occasionally I communicate with the school and more likely, through secondhand information, I learn what's going on at the school.

KLEIN: [01:19:34] Right.

BENNETT: [01:19:36] And the most interesting contact is just a few miles from here in South Orange is a couple where they're both from Malawi. He came over here for college education in the early days and his wife came later to study nutrition and they met and married, had four children. Their children went to high school with my children.

KLEIN: [01:20:02] Oh, okay.

BENNETT: [01:20:03] And I'm good friends of theirs. Often I'm over there to have, a couple of times a year and they're always teasing me, you don't come enough.

KLEIN: [01:20:14] Right.

BENNETT: [01:20:15] For *nsima* and *ndiwal*. But you can go over there and have good African cooking anytime.

KLEIN: [01:20:22] And you've been involved in returned volunteer affairs, I gather, through the?

BENNETT: [01:20:27] I'm very active. I'm, I went to that first meeting when they considered forming a national group that was at Howard University.

KLEIN: [01:20:36] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:20:37] On the 15th, I believe that was, 15 years after founding.

KLEIN: [01:20:41] Could be.

BENNETT: [01:20:41] And I was at the 25th.

KLEIN: [01:20:44] Right.

BENNETT: [01:20:44] And I was at the 40th, which was actually the 41st. I just was in Chicago in August. I've been a member for many years of what's now called the National Peace Corps Association. I've been a member of the New Jersey Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. I've been a president of that for the last 3 or 4 years.

KLEIN: [01:21:04] And the Friends of Malawi as well.

BENNETT: [01:21:06] Oh, yes, Friends of Malawi.

KLEIN: [01:21:07] And your group still, there's still some communication among the group and you have reunions?

BENNETT: [01:21:14] We had one reunion in the Smokies.

KLEIN: [01:21:17] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:21:17] That was set up by Phil Durand, since deceased. That was not just Malawi I, but it was like 5 or 6 of the first Malawi groups.

KLEIN: [01:21:27] Right.

BENNETT: [01:21:28] And but a lot of Malawi I went to that.

KLEIN: [01:21:31] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:21:32] And it looks like we're going to get together this summer, Malawi I. Maybe only 6 or 7 people.

KLEIN: [01:21:38] Now that you're retired, you know, look back over a busy life and what have you. What do you think was the impact of Peace Corps service?

BENNETT: [01:21:45] Well, I think Peace Corps, without a doubt, was for me the most important single commitment that I made in my life. It was fundamental to adjusting my values, to being open to others and the way of life of others. I consider myself to be a tolerant person who also is in touch with the stresses and strains that you might feel when you're in a difficult situation or a situation where you're around people who are, quote, different.

KLEIN: [01:22:24] Yeah, yeah.

BENNETT: [01:22:25] But my heart is open to caring about all kinds of people and trying to understand who they are and what they are. Now let's bring and show them that I appreciate who they are and what they are. Let's bring this to my work. I'm a librarian. I've been a public librarian. But about 15 years ago, I got a part time job at Rutgers-Newark Library.

KLEIN: [01:22:53] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:22:55] Filling in their schedule, nights and weekends basically when the regular staff are not there. And I love this work. But the thing about Rutgers-Newark is, uh, it is the most diverse campus in the United States.

KLEIN: [01:23:11] Yeah. Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:23:14] It's more than half white. So I'm not talking about the traditional Negro college type thing, but where you have a basically a white campus with other diversity.

KLEIN: [01:23:26] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:23:27] It's up there in the 40 percent. So I see kids from all over the world. They may be doing foreign study, graduate study. They may be immigrants' children.

KLEIN: [01:23:39] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:23:41] And I feel that my Peace Corps experience has enabled me to be very effective with that type of library clientele.

KLEIN: [01:23:54] So it sort of stuck with you, I mean, it was back in the '60s and it just becomes part of your, your life.

BENNETT: [01:24:00] It's become part of me, yeah. I would say and I like to say to people that are thinking about joining the Peace Corps, it's equivalent to another college education in terms of what you learn and how you, one's self can be enlarged by that experience.

KLEIN: [01:24:17] Good.

BENNETT: [01:24:18] Do a lot of reading. I like to read about the British Empire.

KLEIN: [01:24:22] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:24:23] I like to read about third world countries, particularly Peace Corps experiences, and there's been some wonderful Peace Corps writers.

KLEIN: [01:24:31] Yes. Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:24:33] And maybe if you can't go, reading some of those experiential books is about as close as you can get.

KLEIN: [01:24:40] Yeah. Anything else for the archives, I mean?

BENNETT: [01:24:43] For the archives.

KLEIN: [01:24:44] We can, we can. We can stop.

BENNETT: [01:24:47] Uh, I want to say something about the impact of the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [01:24:51] Sure.

BENNETT: [01:24:53] The Peace Corps has done a tremendous amount of goodwill for the United States. The other day I read in the paper that it's costing us approximately \$300,000 per individual that's in Iraq right now. We're talking about military and nonmilitary.

KLEIN: [01:25:14] Right.

BENNETT: [01:25:14] And that's not even accounting for all costs.

KLEIN: [01:25:17] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:25:19] A Peace Corps person in the field is under \$20,000 a year. There's 7,000 some 100 Peace Corps volunteers abroad right now.

KLEIN: [01:25:28] Right.

BENNETT: [01:25:29] And I think that small group and that small expenditure of under \$300 million currently Peace Corps budget is doing far more good for the United States worldwide than our military adventures of late.

KLEIN: [01:25:45] Yeah.

BENNETT: [01:25:47] And it has been for the United States a wonderful PR benefit, to say nothing about whatever new ideas and enlargement of view and vision of people that we've come to know in the countries where we served.

KLEIN: [01:26:03] Yeah. Good.

BENNETT: [01:26:05] So it's deeply meaningful to me.

KLEIN: [01:26:07] Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]