

Kenny Karem Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Kenny Karem

Interviewer: Robert Klein

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Biographical Note

Kenny Karem served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Chile from 1966 to 1968 on community development and agricultural extension projects.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Kenny Karem

September 6, 2003
Louisville, Kentucky

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:05] Today is September 6, 2003. This is Bob Klein, and I'm interviewing Kenny Karem.

KAREM: [00:00:14] Karem.

KLEIN: [00:00:14] Karem, sorry, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Chile, 1966 to '68. The project was community development agricultural extension. So let's start by going back a year or so before you joined and what was going on at that point in your life?

KAREM: [00:00:33] Well, I was a student at the University of Notre Dame, which was a training center for the Peace Corps and one of the leading proponents of the Peace Corps was a nationally famous president. [phone rings]

KLEIN: [00:00:48] You mentioning you were at Notre Dame.

KAREM: [00:00:51] Right, and the president was Father Hesburgh, who was well known in Peace Corps circles and was one of their committees. And I actually talked to him once, he was kind of a campus god even then. So that was my inspiration. And then a couple of my classmates were interested. And so I went into training in Seattle, Washington.

KLEIN: [00:01:16] Wait, before that. What were you studying at Notre Dame?

KAREM: [00:01:20] History.

KLEIN: [00:01:22] And before you heard of Peace Corps, what sort of had been your plan?

KAREM: [00:01:28] Not really any plan, just to get through the University of Notre Dame because it was pretty academically challenging. So it emerged as a plan pretty early.

KLEIN: [00:01:41] The idea of joining Peace Corps?

KAREM: [00:01:42] The idea of joining, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:01:44] Where had you grown up?

KAREM: [00:01:45] In Louisville, Kentucky.

KLEIN: [00:01:48] And in through your high school years, did you do much volunteer work or any kind of travel?

KAREM: [00:01:59] No.

KLEIN: [00:01:59] Do you recall when you first heard of the Peace Corps?

KAREM: [00:02:04] Probably TV ads or recruitment or television programs, you know, back then it was kind of a hot property, you could have read about it in LIFE magazine. But one of my brother's friends was in Peace Corps

Venezuela, one of the early groups, and he finished his service and he lived down the street. And I distinctly remember going down to him and just talking about his Peace Corps experience and looking at all his objects that he brought back. You know, his souvenirs. And I was in college then. So that was the. It certainly didn't come from family and background experience, if that's what you're looking for.

KLEIN: [00:02:50] Well, just I mean, during college years, you didn't particularly do any volunteer work or?

KAREM: [00:02:58] A little bit. Really, I was just swamped with work as a student at Notre Dame. It was just very academically challenging. Just to stay alive up there in a competitive place really consumed my time. But as I said, Father Hesburgh was a well-known promoter of the Peace Corps. So that's really where it came from. They trained on campus.

KLEIN: [00:03:23] Oh, OK. And you responded to whatever you had heard from him about it, that as a very positive thing. Do you remember '61 when it was first announced and Kennedy presented the idea?

KAREM: [00:03:38] But that's kind of mixed in with historic films that I've seen since then. I mean, I don't actually remember the moment, and that certainly wasn't what inspired me at that time. I don't remember where I was in school, but I was certainly aware that it existed. You know, as I said, it had a lot of publicity.

KLEIN: [00:04:01] Yeah. So as you were finishing your fourth year, your degree, you applied?

KAREM: [00:04:07] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:04:11] Had you studied any language at?

KAREM: [00:04:14] French.

KLEIN: [00:04:15] All right. And do you recall filling out the application indicating any preferences?

KAREM: [00:04:20] Oh yes, because Father Hesburgh was a champion of Chile as a Peace Corps site and was quite fond of the country. So I requested Chile. Oh, so did a classmate of mine whom I knew in the campus, and we both were in the program, which is rather odd.

KLEIN: [00:04:42] Oh okay. So before graduation, did you get an invitation to training?

KAREM: [00:04:49] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:04:50] And what was the deal? How soon after graduation were you?

KAREM: [00:04:55] Immediately after graduation, right away. I was in training for four months, and then we were shipped out to Chile.

KLEIN: [00:05:03] But at the point you, you got a telegram or a letter saying you're invited to train for Chile. Did you share that with your family and friends?

KAREM: [00:05:14] Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:05:15] And generally, what were they supportive, indifferent, puzzled?

KAREM: [00:05:21] Well, most of my friends went on to graduate school or law school. All of them, all my close friends. But they were certainly supportive. My mom didn't particularly want me to go, but my dad understood why I was doing it, and he was rather proud of it. He had always let me make my own decision, so it wasn't an issue.

KLEIN: [00:05:41] Yeah. Do you have any siblings?

KAREM: [00:05:44] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:05:45] And were they part of the decision or indifferent?

KAREM: [00:05:51] Indifferent. They wouldn't do anything like that. I was sort of the black sheep of the family. They were typical middle class sons who got a

job, got married when they were 19 and had kids, and I didn't follow that route. And so it wasn't even on their radar.

KLEIN: [00:06:10] So you had just completed your degree. You must have felt pretty confident. I mean, having completed a degree program going into training. Were you at all nervous about whether you were going to make it or?

KAREM: [00:06:24] Well, we were in a pressure tank and in those days, you probably know, they had team psychiatrists and you had to talk to psychiatrists. I've actually written about this because it was a bit of a joke.

KLEIN: [00:06:41] Uh-huh.

KAREM: [00:06:42] And we had 77 trainees and I think only 44 went and numerous were selected out. Some self-selected themselves and some dropped out. There was a retired couple in their sixties, for health reasons they dropped out. But you were being observed by the psychiatrists all the time and you had to have interviews and everybody knew that there was a lot of pressure on you when you were whatever you were doing and then you would have periodic interviews with them. But one of the things that I wrote about that I thought was so funny, was the first time we met the psychiatrist. We knew that they would be watching us and they had the power to send us out of the program. And so we were introduced to three of them and we were in this large room and the chief psychiatrist stood up and they introduced him and he said, hello, my name is Dr. K-K-K-Katz. And I will b-b-b-be your chief psychiatrist. And so at that time, we were all quiet, kind of looking at one another thinking this guy has a stutter and he's a psychiatrist? And then we thought, no, this is a joke, they're testing us. They want to see if we have a sense of humor and we're cognizant enough to laugh at a chief psychiatrist. And then we thought, no, their testing is to see if we would be insensitive and laugh at somebody with a stutter. So nobody knew what to do. And I just remember pinching myself, just trying not to laugh. And fortunately, I did not have him for one-on-one interviews. He did have a stutter.

KLEIN: [00:08:29] Oh, OK. So you had there were individual psychiatric interviews?

KAREM: [00:08:34] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:08:34] One, two, three?

KAREM: [00:08:36] Three psychiatrists. And you had several interviews, but they divided you up. And then when they selected people out, that was always interesting. It was like you were deleted from the face of the planet. They would take you out of the program and put you on a plane so fast that you barely had the chance to say goodbye to anybody. And often you didn't even know why they just disappeared. But they had periodic evaluations, so you might be sent home after a month.

KAREM: [00:09:10] And then we had training in a national forest. We were training in forestry up there, too. And at the end, they sent us to Puerto Rico, where we lived for a month. And that was Spanish language training, community development, training, living with families. And we arrived in the San Juan airport and they gave us an envelope and some money and they said, go, go find a way to get there and then go find a place to live for a month and study the community and you're on your own. And I happened to be on the other side of the island, had no idea how to get there. That was part of what you had to learn, they had rural taxies in Puerto Rico.

KAREM: [00:10:00] And they had the name of the town where I was supposed to go. And I found out it was up in the mountains. And this cab driver took me there and it was called Marueno, and he'd never heard of it. And every time we drove around in the countryside asking people were as my blue angel, he would ask them and they'd say, *no hay Marueno*. There isn't anything. So I found out it was just campo. You know, it was just rural area. It was no town. And he didn't know what to do with me. And so finally, he stopped at this nightclub and this kind family actually took me in. They ran a nightclub and a rooster fighting nightclub. And they had an extra room above the rooster house. And that's where I stayed for a month.

KLEIN: [00:11:00] Did they speak some English?

KAREM: [00:11:04] Some.

KLEIN: [00:11:04] Ok. But at that point, you didn't know any Spanish?

KAREM: [00:11:07] No, I had language training for two and a half months, so I knew some.

KLEIN: [00:11:11] Let's go back to the first phase. That was in Seattle?

KAREM: [00:11:16] University of Washington campus.

KLEIN: [00:11:21] What was the structure of the training other than the selection process, which obviously was?

KAREM: [00:11:24] Lots of language training, about six hours a day. Classes and training and forestry, community development work.

KLEIN: [00:11:35] So at that point, it looked like your project was going to be forestry.

KAREM: [00:11:40] You didn't know. It would be one or the other, and we didn't know what our assignments were. We didn't know until we got to Chile. And when we got to Chile, that's where you find out where you were going.

KLEIN: [00:11:51] Of, well, as you looked at the group, what was the background of other trainees?

KAREM: [00:11:58] Most of them were in their twenties, college educated. Various backgrounds, a few in their thirties and forties, and then retired couple in their sixties. And they ranged from all types of personalities. Some that you just took one look at them, you wondered what in the world are you doing here? To some that you admired immediately, they were just very capable people.

KLEIN: [00:12:26] Did any have specific experiences either in forestry or community development?

KAREM: [00:12:31] There were some that had degrees in forestry. And they were the ones who were certainly going to be in the forestry program. The rest of us received forestry training, but still didn't know how we would be utilized. But the ones that specifically had forestry backgrounds, they knew they would be working purely in forestry.

KLEIN: [00:12:53] So typical day was consumed with a lot of language training.

KAREM: [00:12:57] A lot.

KLEIN: [00:12:58] Must have been some area studies.

KAREM: [00:13:01] Some cultural studies.

KLEIN: [00:13:03] Yeah, a lot of cultural studies.

KAREM: [00:13:06] Some Chileans came out and.

KLEIN: [00:13:07] I was going to ask you about who were the language instructors?

KAREM: [00:13:12] They were all sorts. They were university. Some were native Latin Americans.

KLEIN: [00:13:19] Some, but not all.

KAREM: [00:13:21] No, but they were all fluent. They were all good instructors.

KLEIN: [00:13:25] Were you told that your learning the language would affect whether you'd be selected or not?

KAREM: [00:13:35] It was a factor, but I think it was far down the list. Some people had a terrible time learning a foreign language, I remember that. They just didn't have the facility, but I don't think it was a factor.

KLEIN: [00:13:47] They didn't say, like, you know, in the FSR scale, you have to come up to at least two or three.

KAREM: [00:13:55] Not at all.

KLEIN: [00:13:55] But you were tested independently?

KAREM: [00:13:58] I know we were when we left. We got a Foreign Service rating. I do not recall being tested in training. Maybe we were. I don't remember it.

KLEIN: [00:14:07] Oh, OK. Generally, other than the selection process, how did you react to the training?

KAREM: [00:14:15] Well, I've already told you one reaction. I just laughed at the psychiatrist. And when you interviewed with them, I thought it was funny too. But it didn't make any difference how you regarded them because you knew they could exit you from the program. So it was very stressful situation, and I remember my guy. I thought he was a real dud. But he would ask me such things about like, they always ask you if you got along with your mother and your father, but they did try to be helpful. To see what you were worried about living in a foreign culture. What were your biggest concerns? And I don't know how we got on one topic, but I still remember we talked about. I told him I didn't like drunks. He wanted to know what would happen to me if I got into a situation where I was challenged by some bar drunk or somebody who wanted to get into a fight. And you know, I told him I wasn't really worried about it at all. And he kept pursuing that. So they were trying to find out how you would handle a stressful situation. Actually, one of my biggest concerns was the food, and I told him that. I knew I would have a rough time with the food because I was a picky eater.

KLEIN: [00:15:35] Do you know if any of the psychiatrists had lived and worked in the Third World?

KAREM: [00:15:42] No, I don't think they had. They were just textbook psychologists. And then some of the silliest things. We used to get together and just laugh at all this stuff because they'd walk around with their yellow legal pads. We had to.

KLEIN: [00:15:58] Did they come into class? I mean, and observe you?

KAREM: [00:16:00] No, in other situations like.

KLEIN: [00:16:04] Where were you living?

KAREM: [00:16:05] On the campus of University of Washington.

KLEIN: [00:16:07] In a dorm?

KAREM: [00:16:08] In a dorm, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:16:10] What was the male female split, you remember?

KAREM: [00:16:14] Pretty even.

KLEIN: [00:16:14] And were there any married couples other than the older couple?

KAREM: [00:16:21] Yeah, there were several.

KLEIN: [00:16:22] Oh, OK.

KAREM: [00:16:23] And like you heard before, they spanned the whole gamut where two of them really wanted to be in it. The Albers that I mentioned to you, you could just tell they both wanted to be in the Peace Corps. Then there's another couple where the guy wanted to be in it, but the girl didn't. There was several of those. And as is predicted, if they both don't want to be in it, they don't usually last. Because I remember several couples left or were sometimes, you didn't know if they selected themselves out or they were asked to leave. And then some went to Chile and lasted. I know two

that lasted for several months and came home. But I don't know. See, in our program they can select you out as a volunteer and it depends on your regional director. We had a tough regional director and he sent some volunteers home because he was dissatisfied with them. It's pretty tough.

KLEIN: [00:17:28] Was the draft an issue at this time?

KAREM: [00:17:30] Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [00:17:31] What was your status?

KAREM: [00:17:32] Draftable the whole time, before, after. I just kept writing appeal letters and trying to find ways to not be drafted. And even after my Peace Corps experience, it didn't make any difference that I had been a Peace Corps volunteer. They kept trying to draft me, and the only reason I wasn't was because I used different appeals and then I got a job deferment, things like that.

KLEIN: [00:17:56] But initially, they were willing to give you a deferment to go to Chile with the Peace Corps?

KAREM: [00:18:01] No, I never got a deferment. They could have drafted me any. If they could have, they could have drafted me. I mean, they could have, but they left me alone while I was in the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:18:18] This was the Louisville board?

KAREM: [00:18:19] Yeah, but it was quite clear that they could have drafted me.

KLEIN: [00:18:24] Do you know if Peace Corps ever wrote letters supporting a deferment?

KAREM: [00:18:31] No, I don't think they did that because throughout the Peace Corps history in that time period, volunteers were drafted all the time out of the Peace Corps. So maybe they wrote letters of support, but selective service boards on a local level had the power to draft you.

KLEIN: [00:18:49] Right, right.

KAREM: [00:18:51] I even met with them. I can't, well, not with a board, but they always had a secretary. And I thought it was unfair that after two years in the Peace Corps, they were trying to draft me. That's what they did all over the country. And I said, I've done my service, but it didn't make any difference.

KLEIN: [00:19:08] How old were you when you first joined the Peace Corps?

KAREM: [00:19:12] Twenty three.

KLEIN: [00:19:13] Ok, let's go back to Seattle training. Was there a mid-selection point and then a final selection for that phase?

KAREM: [00:19:25] Yes, several selection points.

KLEIN: [00:19:26] And how did you deal with them? I mean, was there, did you expect you were going to be dumped or were you confident you weren't?

KAREM: [00:19:36] Well you never knew the process because some people were just deselected along the way. At the end, the final step, that was in Puerto Rico and we were in a hotel. They told us to go to your room and wait. They were going to meet about it. And then we all thought that was just nerve wracking. So we all got together in one volunteer's room and started to just have a party. And then every once in a while, the phone would ring and they would say, it's for you. And then they would be muscling somebody out of there. I never thought I would be selected out because all along you met with these people and I had hope that if they had doubts about me, they would have said so in the interviews and they never did.

KLEIN: [00:20:26] You never had. Ok, go ahead.

KAREM: [00:20:30] In Puerto Rico, we had returned Peace Corps volunteers checking on us in our sites. You know, I told you I was in a rural site. I think she visited me twice, and I do remember asking her at the end, you

know, well, what do you think or what are you going to write about me? And she said she wasn't worried about me at all. I was a small paragraph. That's what she said. But some they did select out, I wasn't surprised. The ones that that you didn't really know why, didn't make sense to you. Those are the ones that scared you. If you thought they were a solid person and they should go, those were the ones that scared you. But some, you're just glad they left, they just didn't belong there.

KLEIN: [00:21:18] Did the group at any point try to protest the selection process?

KAREM: [00:21:25] I don't recall that. No, not at all.

KLEIN: [00:21:29] All right. So from the Seattle phase was four months?

KAREM: [00:21:38] Seattle and Puerto Rico.

KLEIN: [00:21:39] How long was Seattle?

KAREM: [00:21:42] About two and a half.

KLEIN: [00:21:43] And did you go directly from Seattle to Puerto Rico?

KAREM: [00:21:48] No, we went home.

KLEIN: [00:21:50] Ok. Was the expectation that you were going to leave from Puerto Rico to go overseas?

KAREM: [00:21:56] Well, then we went back home.

KLEIN: [00:21:57] So you knew that you'd have a chance to pack. OK. All right. So we left you in Puerto Rico, having finished the taxi ride and finally found this couple that took you in. And living over the rooster pit or whatever. What was your initial introduction like? What did you do the first couple of days there?

KAREM: [00:22:25] Just walk around, introduce myself and tell everybody I was a Peace Corps trainee. Of course, you know, in the early days, they had that

Outward Bound type training in Puerto Rico, some camp down there. And then I guess they had used it, some other groups have used it, in different communities, and I basically just got to know the community, met people from all walks of life. It was easier to talk to middle class Puerto Ricans. That's a snap. Hardest thing, of course, is talking to rural poor campesinos and Puerto Rican Spanish is awful. It still is. I still don't understand it very well, but I didn't know how bad it was and I was there and talking with poor, uneducated people. It's even harder. And I can remember talking to my supervising returned Peace Corps volunteer, and we talked about how hard it is to talk to poor people because what are you going to talk about?

KAREM: [00:23:22] And I remember I walked into a bar once and down there in the Campo, a lot of people are missing arms and hands, and I can remember asking somebody why. They get drunk and they get into machete fights. So, rum is a big product of Puerto Rico so they have a lot of alcoholism, but I'm never a bar person, but I tried. I went in those places and they all wanted me to drink rum straight and I tried it, just to get along with people. It was good language training, and it sure weeded out some people. Because you were in a foreign culture, you were on your own. And just like in the Peace Corps, a lot of people had an easy ride depending on where they wound up. They were in a middle class family. They had it easy. And for me, it was pretty difficult.

KLEIN: [00:24:19] We're talking about the Puerto Rico phase still. During the time in Seattle, did the group begin to develop any kind of group spirit?

KAREM: [00:24:27] Yeah, it was pretty cohesive.

KLEIN: [00:24:30] So make it even more painful as people were taken out and shot? I mean, in effect.

KAREM: [00:24:35] Yeah. But of course, they don't do that today.

KLEIN: [00:24:38] No. But when the group went to Puerto Rico, you immediately dispersed.

KAREM: [00:24:44] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:24:46] So you didn't have the group to lean on as you were settling in.

KAREM: [00:24:50] Not unless you were near someone. I wasn't near anybody. I never saw anybody in the group for the whole month, ever.

KLEIN: [00:24:57] So you were there for a month. Pretty much by yourself in the midst of a variety of Puerto Ricans?

KAREM: [00:25:04] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:25:04] And the only person who came out was the returned volunteer supervisor.

KAREM: [00:25:10] You never knew when they were coming. They didn't announce their arrival. They just tried to find you.

KLEIN: [00:25:14] Did you have any assigned work to do or it was just a matter of be there?

KAREM: [00:25:21] Learn about the community. What are the community's problems? How would you solve them? Because by that time I was, there was community development training. We had forest training already in Washington. So it was how to analyze the community. And you read a lot and met people. And then of course, you were working on your Spanish.

KLEIN: [00:25:41] Yeah. How was your Spanish going by then?

KAREM: [00:25:45] It was OK. I had never studied it before. So I was starting from scratch.

KLEIN: [00:25:49] So this was like three months into language training.

KAREM: [00:25:52] And yeah, it was good because you couldn't talk English.

KLEIN: [00:25:56] And the expectation also was that when you got to Chile, you were going to be functioning in Spanish.

KAREM: [00:26:04] Yeah, because we weren't going to be teaching English as a foreign language or anything like that. So you knew that you might be with another volunteer because at that time, Chile was a very popular place for the Peace Corps. And at one time, it's hard to imagine, they had over five hundred volunteers in that country.

KLEIN: [00:26:26] You know why?

KAREM: [00:26:27] I mean, it was a very popular place, and the government was very welcoming. You know, Chile is, at that time, was one of the most democratic countries in the world. And one of the friends of the Peace Corps and of President Kennedy was the president of Chile. Eduardo Frei, Christian Democratic Party. Very reformist minded, a Kennedy friend. So they were requesting all these, you know, the Peace Corps didn't go where it was not wanted.

KLEIN: [00:27:02] Right.

KAREM: [00:27:02] And the programs would be determined by the host country, how many they wanted, and I assume that's the reason. It was too many, though.

KLEIN: [00:27:15] We'll get to that. Just to go back to the forestry training. What was involved in the forestry training?

KAREM: [00:27:27] Basically how to plant seedlings and how to take care of them and how to teach poor farmers to plant them and why they should plant them. Planting trees is not like planting wheat or potatoes. You're planning for the future. It's also for soil erosion control. And they had terrible problems of erosion in certain parts of Chile. So that was the two points of the program.

KLEIN: [00:27:58] But the skills, the actual skills involved were not terribly sophisticated. So you felt you were able to felt comfortable that you could do it if you had to.

KAREM: [00:28:08] But the foresters, the degreed foresters, you know, they were on a different plane.

KLEIN: [00:28:14] But might they be assigned to the simple tasks even though they had more sophisticated?

KAREM: [00:28:21] They had separate training. They had more sophisticated training because they already knew all that stuff.

KLEIN: [00:28:25] Well, while you were in Seattle, then.

KAREM: [00:28:27] Yeah, when they got to Chile, they were specifically with the forestry department. I was not.

KLEIN: [00:28:34] But when you were in Puerto Rico, were they there, the forestry people?

KAREM: [00:28:39] They were there, basically, to learn Spanish.

KLEIN: [00:28:42] And same kind of experience that you had?

KAREM: [00:28:45] Well, some were sent to cities. I was in a rural area, no city. So those are two very different experiences.

KLEIN: [00:28:53] But it was an open ended, find a place to live with a family and learn about the community.

KAREM: [00:28:58] From the airport, they just gave you an envelope and said go.

KLEIN: [00:29:04] And you knew at the end of the four weeks you were to somehow work your way back, where?

KAREM: [00:29:12] Back to San Juan.

KLEIN: [00:29:14] To a specific hotel? Ok.

KAREM: [00:29:17] There was a hotel that everybody met at. So you got yourself back to the hotel on a certain date.

KLEIN: [00:29:24] But not earlier.

KAREM: [00:29:27] Not legally. You could sneak around anywhere you wanted to, if you had the money.

KLEIN: [00:29:35] Did you spend the four weeks in the village?

KAREM: [00:29:37] Yeah, I never left. I never went anywhere.

KLEIN: [00:29:40] How was your health?

KAREM: [00:29:42] Fine.

KLEIN: [00:29:42] The adjustment was fine. And the food?

KAREM: [00:29:46] And family fed me. You know, they were wonderful.

KLEIN: [00:29:49] You had mentioned that food was a bit of a concern initially. And so your first contact, it went OK?

KAREM: [00:29:57] It went OK.

KLEIN: [00:29:58] Good. So you gather at the hotel, you must have had a party. Who showed up, official Peace Corps officials?

KAREM: [00:30:14] The training officials, you know, they had designated heads of training. One was a university professor. I remember him from Florida State, which was very big in Latin American studies. He was one of our primary teachers.

KLEIN: [00:30:26] You remember his name?

KAREM: [00:30:27] No. But he was not typical of university academics. But he was in charge of the program. They had a team in charge of the program. And

the one that was the head of the whole program, he had done programs before. I forgot his name.

KLEIN: [00:30:46] There must have been a selection officer from out of Washington.

KAREM: [00:30:51] I don't recall one. Their staff, they figured out who was coming and who wasn't.

KLEIN: [00:30:56] Did you have any contact with people from Washington, either when you were in Seattle or in Puerto Rico?

KAREM: [00:31:01] Maybe they came, but I don't remember. They might have dropped in. Yeah, but see, the University of Washington had been training people. So these were all veteran trainers, the staff.

KLEIN: [00:31:17] And it was while you were at the hotel that the final selection process with the sitting in the room and being called out one at a time.

KAREM: [00:31:34] Well, the program started with 77 and 44 went, but I don't remember how many were in the hotel in Puerto Rico.

KLEIN: [00:31:42] Oh, OK. But by then it had pared down considerably. Now, what happened after you were informed that you were in?

KAREM: [00:31:55] Whoopee! That's what you were there for. You know, everybody was happy. The self-selection process was helpful because two of my best friends dropped out and they would have been great volunteers. And that was really discouraging because I saw them as perfect candidates for being in the Peace Corps, and they just decided they didn't want to do it.

KLEIN: [00:32:24] Do you think people leaned on them too hard?

KAREM: [00:32:27] No, because one was fluent in Spanish and everybody was crazy about her, just crazy. And one was my roommate at the University of

Washington, and he was just a great guy who just decided he didn't want to do it.

KLEIN: [00:32:39] Do you know if he ever joined the Peace Corps later?

KAREM: [00:32:43] I don't know. I lost touch with them. Both of them, eventually. They wrote for a while.

KLEIN: [00:32:50] But that, you know, it was a real self-selection. They simply said, I don't want to do this.

KAREM: [00:32:57] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:33:00] Where did you go from Puerto Rico then?

KAREM: [00:33:03] Went home and then went to the Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:33:05] How long the period home do you have?

KAREM: [00:33:09] It was very brief. A couple of days. They didn't want you to stay home that long.

KLEIN: [00:33:14] Did you have a shopping list, like buy 25 T-shirts?

KAREM: [00:33:19] A trunk. In those days, they had a big, bought a big metal trunk and put a ton of stuff in it, and they made arrangements to ship it down there. And I still have it. That trunk has been to a lot of places.

KLEIN: [00:33:35] Do you recall packing and putting in any kind of security blanket things? Were the books, a tape recorder?

KAREM: [00:33:47] Contact lens solution. Not many books, because, you know, they had Peace Corps locker books, and we knew that. You got two hundred books.

KLEIN: [00:34:09] How did you spend your few days at home?

KAREM: [00:34:12] It wasn't very long time. It was just packing to go.

KLEIN: [00:34:16] Nobody pulled you aside and said, don't go. Or are you sure you want to do this?

KAREM: [00:34:23] No, because by then, all my friends were gone. All my friends were in graduate school, law school, med school. And I didn't really have any local friends because, you know, that was from college. And you know, my parents knew I was going.

KLEIN: [00:34:40] So was there any local publicity at that time, like newspaper articles in the local paper? By then being in the Peace Corps wasn't publicly wasn't as big as?

KAREM: [00:34:52] Not in a big city like this.

KLEIN: [00:34:56] Where'd you report after your time at home?

KAREM: [00:35:01] We flew to see Santiago, Chile, the capital, which is the main office of the Peace Corps, and then we had.

KLEIN: [00:35:08] Where'd you leave from?

KAREM: [00:35:11] Louisville.

KLEIN: [00:35:12] You flew directly to Santiago?

KAREM: [00:35:14] Oh. It was either Miami or New York.

KLEIN: [00:35:22] But you don't, there's nothing about the flight, particularly. When you arrived, did you travel as a group?

KAREM: [00:35:32] We traveled as a group and arrived in Santiago and we were in a hotel and then we had meetings for a couple of days, orientation meetings. That's when you found out where you were going? Which was pretty big deal because you wanted to be near your friends. Of course they decided that, you didn't. And that's when you found out who you were

going to be near or if you were going to be with anybody. Who would you be working with?

KLEIN: [00:36:02] At any point in training, did they ask you one, what did you want to do, CD or forestry? And two, who would you like to be assigned with?

KAREM: [00:36:13] Well, the forestry was just general training for the non-forestry volunteers.

KLEIN: [00:36:20] So that wasn't a real option?

KAREM: [00:36:22] No. It was supposed to be something to help you if it was needed. If you were a rural volunteer and they certainly didn't ask you, who did you want to be near. Now in training, they'd ask you to rat on people all the time. Who do you think should not be in the Peace Corps? Name three people.

KLEIN: [00:36:44] They'd sit you in a room and give you a piece of paper?

KAREM: [00:36:46] The psychiatrist. They'd ask you, who do you think are the best qualified and who do you think are the worst? Who do you think would not fit in? And then they would report the results to. That's why when I was telling you, was I afraid that I was going to be selected out? Normally, I wasn't, unless somebody was sent home, and I was just shocked they were sent home. Because they had reported to me that within the group, I had lots of votes as someone who was well qualified or highly thought of or something, to go into the Peace Corps. But it was their way, of course, of finding out about some that people didn't think would do very well there. But in Chile itself, they somehow decided who was going to go where, and you never knew that. And then that's when I got the surprise that I would be working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and with Mapuche Indians from the southern part of Chile, and then one of my best friends was assigned to the same town.

KLEIN: [00:37:54] Oh. At that point when you arrived in Chile, you were about the fifth, sixth, seventh group in? Do you have any idea?

KAREM: [00:38:05] We had a number, but I've forgotten it.

KLEIN: [00:38:06] Yeah, but there were about five hundred volunteers in the country.

KAREM: [00:38:11] It was well known as an organization by the time I got there and a lot of towns had already had volunteers, not where I went.

KLEIN: [00:38:19] And what was the Peace Corps structure, the staff?

KAREM: [00:38:23] Santiago was the main office and then they had regional offices.

KLEIN: [00:38:28] How many do you recall?

KAREM: [00:38:30] It varied. When I was there, there was a lot. At least four.

KLEIN: [00:38:37] Did they also have technical support staff?

KAREM: [00:38:40] Well, they had, uh, training workshops and my group in the south was trained in foot and mouth disease vaccination and education program, and I was eventually slotted into that to work with poorer campesino farmers, so they brought in technicians for that. And every once in a while, they would bring in somebody to teach you something for a day like dealing with cattle diseases, something like that.

KLEIN: [00:39:12] For those, were you called back to Santiago?

KAREM: [00:39:16] No, to regional offices.

KLEIN: [00:39:17] What was the regional office for you, where you were?

KAREM: [00:39:21] Temuco was the big southern city.

KLEIN: [00:39:24] Is that, as I recall, that's what it must be, is it on the coast?

KAREM: [00:39:28] No, it's on the Pan-American Highway in the middle of the country.

KLEIN: [00:39:31] OK. So you had an initial assignment, which was with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Was any definition given to what you were being assigned to do?

KAREM: [00:39:49] No, they just said, go report to them. You're going to be working with them. They would be your co-host, your colleagues.

KLEIN: [00:39:58] And then so you arrived. Where were you stationed? What town?

KAREM: [00:40:03] Tiny little town of 200 people with no electricity, no running water. And then the where the offices were was about 30 minutes away, the provincial town. And then when I got there, you know, supposedly you had a job and they were all prepared. But I found out right away they really didn't do anything at all. It was just a couple of office bureaucrats who hated Indians, didn't want to go out to the reservations and basically did nothing.

KLEIN: [00:40:38] And they were in the regional capital.

KAREM: [00:40:40] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:40:41] Why were you living so far away from the regional capital?

KAREM: [00:40:44] It's where the Peace Corps sent me. It was a joke. They should have never sent us there.

KLEIN: [00:40:50] Who had arranged the job? I mean, had people actually come out?

KAREM: [00:40:55] Peace Corps office staff person who supposedly tried to find who wants volunteers? What do you want volunteers to do? Where's the place to live? And maybe, find an actual spot for you to live. Where we went, the town was such a nothing place, it was just one lady with the

pension and there's one empty schoolhouse and that's where we two volunteers who were assigned when. But there was no reception, no greeting party, nothing of the sort. And then my friend eventually moved out to an Indian reservation about an hour away. Town wasn't big enough for two volunteers.

KLEIN: [00:41:41] So what did you do for the first few weeks?

KAREM: [00:41:48] Get to know the community. Found out that the Bureau of Indian Affairs didn't do anything. Went out and visited reservations and introduced myself.

KLEIN: [00:41:58] Yeah, go ahead.

KAREM: [00:41:59] You're always explain what the Peace Corps is, what you're there to do. And of course, Chile is highly politicized, that's the middle of the Vietnam War and half the people think you're spies. I mean, you had that all the time. The Indians were a little more receptive because they didn't get along with the Chileans. They had stolen all their land. They were very prejudiced against them. And just by the fact that somebody actually came out and visited them and wanted to help, you could eventually win their confidence because they trusted you more than the white Chileans.

KLEIN: [00:42:35] Now in Chile, the native populations had been placed on reservations?

KAREM: [00:42:44] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:42:44] I assume more or less against their will?

KAREM: [00:42:47] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:42:50] But the town you were living in was not on the reservation. How far away was the reservation?

KAREM: [00:42:58] They surrounded the town. But mixed in with were white owners too. You know, it wasn't solid reservation.

KLEIN: [00:43:06] Was there any cohesiveness to the reservation or was any structure that you could begin to relate to?

KAREM: [00:43:14] Some. That was part of the job. You're supposed to help them get organized, cooperatives, or introduce farming ideas. That's where the forestry training came in. We also had training in rabbit raising. That was another thing that I did. Vegetable gardens. All these things are introduced, new ideas to them. Forestry is particularly hard because it's hard to convince somebody to plant little pine seedlings because there's no income from it. But that was to help. Their lands were badly eroded from over planting. It was a wheat growing area, primarily, and some animal raising. And they just didn't have good agricultural practices, so they were just ruining the hilly lands. So that's why they were trying to have forestry programs all over southern Chile.

KLEIN: [00:44:04] Your roommate initially, what was his or her assignment?

KAREM: [00:44:10] Same thing.

KLEIN: [00:44:12] Oh, OK, so you were both assigned to work on the reservation. Had any volunteers worked in that area or with those Indians before?

KAREM: [00:44:21] No, we were the first. So we always had to explain who we were, what we were doing. Which, you know, can be an advantage or a disadvantage. If you follow a tremendous volunteer and they had been all over Chile, if it was, then you had a reputation to live up to and they would say, oh, so-and-so did it like this and did it like that. If there had never been anyone there, you'd think that could be advantage, but it could be a disadvantage too. It just depended. If you were first, then you always had to explain your role and win people's confidence.

KLEIN: [00:45:00] And all the time now you're working in Spanish. But the Indians must have had their own language.

KAREM: [00:45:12] You know, they spoke Mapuche. But they spoke Spanish.

KLEIN: [00:45:16] They did?

KAREM: [00:45:17] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:45:17] And you were not the least tempted to start learning Mapuche?

KAREM: [00:45:21] It's too hard. I learned words. They loved that. If you learned anything, they loved it. Just thought that was the sign of respect. A Chilean wouldn't do that.

KLEIN: [00:45:31] Yeah. But you were able to function in Spanish.

KAREM: [00:45:36] Eventually. Not right away. It was awful the first couple of months, just awful.

KLEIN: [00:45:41] During the first couple of months, you were living in the small town. Did you have to check in at the regional office on any basis?

KAREM: [00:45:48] Well, we'd have once in a while a regional meeting.

KLEIN: [00:45:52] How would you know a meeting was being held? I mean, regional, these were Chileans.

KAREM: [00:45:57] No. The Peace Corps would have a regional meeting at the regional office.

KLEIN: [00:46:03] But I thought your, the BIA, had its office that was nearby.

KAREM: [00:46:09] That's not where the Peace Corps office was. That was the town that was near me. I'd gotten that right away, they weren't going to do anything. They were useless.

KLEIN: [00:46:18] So whether you showed up at the office or not didn't matter to them.

KAREM: [00:46:23] They didn't care.

KLEIN: [00:46:23] And they weren't concerned that you were going to go out and do things and would embarrass them.

KAREM: [00:46:27] Well, I just gave up. I just didn't work with them because they didn't have any dealings or they were just office bureaucrats, and I tried to get them interested in projects and come out. And I don't ever remember them coming out to the reservations. I don't ever remember them coming. And then I basically defined my own job, is what I did. I did not have a job like a lot of volunteers. I had to figure out, what am I going to do here? So that was the community development training came in. I went to the school and they had me teaching English, which I didn't want to do, and P.E. classes, which I didn't want to do. But that was a way for me to teach rabbit raising. Raising grasses was another thing, pastures.

KLEIN: [00:47:13] This is on the reservation.

KAREM: [00:47:15] No, it was with both. Because they're mixed, you start working with white Chileans and Indians. You kind of had your foot in two worlds because they were all poor with rich landowners scattered in between, you know, who were very prosperous.

KLEIN: [00:47:32] During your first couple of months, what would be a typical day for you?

KAREM: [00:47:40] Well, I tried to set up a lot of meetings and meet people and to talk about ideas, what does the community need? But so I spent a lot of time traveling around meeting people.

KLEIN: [00:47:55] What made them come together to meet with you?

KAREM: [00:47:58] I mean, that's the hardest part is getting anybody to come together for a meeting. You know, I went to mothers' club meetings. And at one time I got somebody who could teach how to make jams come to a meeting. Or I would try that somebody, if it was informational, I'd try to get Peace Corps Chile to send me information on this. I was kind of like a

conduit. And then the Indian reservation was hard because I had no way to get around. The only way I could get around it was a walk. So I was pretty isolated. At one time I got a horse and that did not work out well. It's just, it was just too slow. Now there were there were campesino busses that would go into these rural areas. And sometimes in a day, I could take one out and then take one back, to go meet people. But as it turned out, the Peace Corps kept training us on other things, and eventually we've gotten the foot and mouth disease program that they started when I was there. I switched to that and switched communities, and then I really did have a specific job.

KLEIN: [00:49:15] How far into your Peace Corps service did that happen?

KAREM: [00:49:20] About nine months.

KLEIN: [00:49:21] Ok, so for the first nine months, you were working on the reservation, kind of open ended.

KAREM: [00:49:29] Rural community development. I didn't really have a lot of success with it, working with the Indians, because they were just too isolated and I had no way to get there. It's just too far.

KLEIN: [00:49:38] Did you have any resources you could draw on? I mean, seed or tools or stuff like that?

KAREM: [00:49:47] You're always looking for stuff like that and there was an agricultural institute in another town and I would go visit them and ask them for advice, seeds, things like that, but always trying to do the Peace Corps philosophy where you don't give things to people from nothing. So the rabbit raising, I would give them rabbits for a small fee. I'd sell them rabbits for a small fee, and I would show them how to build rabbit hutches and how to feed them. And with grasses, I can't remember where I got the grass seed.

KLEIN: [00:50:23] Where did you get the rabbits from?

KAREM: [00:50:25] From a breeder.

KLEIN: [00:50:29] Where did you get the money to buy the rabbits from the breeder?

KAREM: [00:50:33] Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:50:33] Did you have to submit say, I want to buy 50 rabbits?

KAREM: [00:50:37] And oh, I didn't start off with that many.

KLEIN: [00:50:40] Well, whatever.

KAREM: [00:50:41] Raising them myself, I don't remember. I don't even remember how I built the hutches just because I'm not a carpenter. I think I got somebody to help me with the Peace Corps plan. It wasn't that complicated. So I raised the rabbits, and when they multiplied, I would sell them to people who would be interested in trying to raise them. I would never kill them, though I couldn't do it.

KLEIN: [00:51:08] Were rabbits in any way indigenous to the Native American people?

KAREM: [00:51:18] They had some wild ones.

KLEIN: [00:51:18] Were they accustomed to killing them and eating them?

KAREM: [00:51:22] Some people have done it because angora rabbits were popular for their fur. So they all knew about them and some had raised them. So it wasn't something totally foreign to them.

KLEIN: [00:51:36] What would be their incentive to start raising rabbits?

KAREM: [00:51:40] They multiply. They eat almost any grass, and it puts meat in your diet. That's why the Peace Corps started it, to introduce more protein into poor people's diet.

KLEIN: [00:51:55] But under the ideal community development circumstances, you would have, the community would have defined what it is that their need was.

KAREM: [00:52:06] Yeah, and that wasn't the case.

KLEIN: [00:52:08] So OK, which I think occurs in a lot of instances.

KAREM: [00:52:12] It was a Peace Corps idea, not a community idea.

KLEIN: [00:52:15] So in the first nine months, your major achievement or your biggest step was the rabbit project.

KAREM: [00:52:23] It wasn't a big deal. It was just the beginning project. I mean, all the rabbits found homes. But I wasn't there long enough to follow up the project.

KLEIN: [00:52:37] Now your roommate had moved out after what, wow many months?

KAREM: [00:52:43] Right away, right after a few weeks, she was on the Indian reservation. She lived with in a schoolhouse with a teacher, invited her there. She did the same type of work, but she was on the reservation and sometimes we worked together. I would go out there and we would work on projects together, and I got along very well with the director of the school, who was a dynamic lady. She had two kids and a husband, and she was white. She wasn't Indian and wanted to help people, but she was the director of the school. So she invited her out so she would have a base in which she could operate among the people because the little town I lived in was just too far away and no transportation. So she was out there in in the reservation and I wasn't.

KLEIN: [00:53:39] Initially you were sharing the same house with the other PCV?

KAREM: [00:53:44] I was living in an old school. She was living in a pension. So it wasn't the same house.

KLEIN: [00:53:50] So there wasn't the concern about apparent impropriety?

KAREM: [00:53:54] Oh, that's always a concern. You really had to be careful about that. I mean, that wouldn't have worked, us being in the same building.

KLEIN: [00:54:03] OK. You mentioned early on that there was a continuing suspicion about that you were spies and so forth. How did you become aware of that?

KAREM: [00:54:16] They'd ask you, are you a spy for the CIA?

KLEIN: [00:54:20] They being everybody or mostly the white? The Chileans, not the Indians?

KAREM: [00:54:27] Not the Indians.

KLEIN: [00:54:29] And that you know of, where had they picked up on it?

KAREM: [00:54:33] Picked up on being a spy?

KLEIN: [00:54:35] The idea that you were.

KAREM: [00:54:37] Well, that was in the at the height of the Vietnam War and the CIA was well publicized as a meddling agency in tool of the United States. Chile had about 13 political parties and they had one of the leading Marxist communist parties in the world. And of course, they did elect a Marxist president, the only one ever elected. I still think so, the only one freely elected. And of course, he didn't last long. That was Salvador Allende. I wrote about him and meeting a volunteer once. It was very interesting conversation he had.

KLEIN: [00:55:16] And so you were there when the Allende elections?

KAREM: [00:55:23] Just before. He came in after I left.

KLEIN: [00:55:25] Oh, OK. But you were there during the campaign or?

KAREM: [00:55:28] Before, just before. They start campaigning early, like here, a couple of years in advance. It's a very politicized country. And of course, the CIA helped overthrow him. That's well known now.

KLEIN: [00:55:43] To you, out of your own personal knowledge, were you ever aware of CIA involvement in?

KAREM: [00:55:52] Well, I was a rural volunteer, so I had nothing to do with the cities. But I'm sure they were involved in spying in Chile.

KLEIN: [00:56:02] But not using the Peace Corps to do it.

KAREM: [00:56:04] Don't know. I suspect that they had some contact with Peace Corps and maybe shared some information. I wouldn't be surprised because that was the temper of the times. And Chile was a focused country in the world. Because Eduardo Frei was doing agrarian reform, which I eventually wound up studying as part of my master's degree because I was working with farmers and got interested in it. And he was tackling a problem that was prominent around the world. When you have a third world country where a small percentage of landowners own a lot of the land. How are you going to get the land away from them? So they were trying democratic reform and voluntarily buying land. Owners would sell their land, and everybody knew that eventually, if this didn't work, then you have social revolution because that's what the Marxists and the Communists and the Socialists. Chile had all three of those. That's what they wanted, to take over the land and that happened in some other countries. So the Social Democratic Party was being closely watched all over the world to see if it could see succeed in agrarian land reform. But at the same time, even though President Frei was a close friend of Kennedy and succeeding U.S. presidents and got lots of aid, the Communists, Socialists and Marxists were always complaining about U.S. meddling, the CIA, etc.

KLEIN: [00:57:43] But people would, even though they might associate or accuse Peace Corps of possibly being part of that whole structure, that didn't impact personally on what you were doing there?

KAREM: [00:57:59] I mean, it always did, because they would always accuse you of being a spy. So if you're trying to work with somebody and they think you're a spy, they might not work with you.

KLEIN: [00:58:08] That specifically happened to you then. You had a feeling that there were, well, there were doors closed.

KAREM: [00:58:14] Yeah, but they're very polite people.

KLEIN: [00:58:17] But that there were certain limits sort of imposed.

KAREM: [00:58:20] You would find out who was in what party. And if somebody was a socialist or a Marxist, you would find out. I went to some, some meetings just to see what they were like. It was good entertainment.

KLEIN: [00:58:38] Now let's go. We're coming near the end of the first nine months. How was your Spanish?

KAREM: [00:58:45] By that time, it was good, and it was because I had no one to talk to in English. See, the Chileans didn't speak any English. I don't recall speaking English to anybody other than when I was with other volunteers. There weren't any around except the rural volunteer that was in my area. So that's when your Spanish really improved. People would say a few phrases to you, but nobody would practice English.

KLEIN: [00:59:14] Did you get out of the community periodically, weekends or holidays?

KAREM: [00:59:20] Well, you know, you had vacation as a volunteer. So I took my vacation and traveled around, but mainly I went to the regional Peace Corps city, which was Temuco.

KLEIN: [00:59:35] How far away was that?

KAREM: [00:59:37] I think it was about an hour and a half bus ride. Two hours, maybe. I think it was about two hours. And the joy of that was just getting into a hotel and getting a hot bath or shower, which I didn't get. And going

to a restaurant and hopefully eating some. But I wasn't a party volunteer at all. I stayed in my community. I really did. And my best friends turned out to be Chilean friends. And they still are today because I went back and I became close to lots of Chilean families. And so my social circle wasn't the volunteers.

KLEIN: [01:00:22] Again during that first nine months, did friends began to emerge from that community?

KAREM: [01:00:32] Oh yeah.

KLEIN: [01:00:32] Now at the nine month point, you said there was a change in your job. Talk about how that came about and what the change was.

KAREM: [01:00:39] I just didn't think I was accomplishing much and I told the regional director, you know, that just didn't feel like I was accomplishing that much. And then this program came up and he asked me if I was interested in it. And I said yes. And so I left my community and trained in the foot and mouth disease vaccination program and then was assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture. And this time it was a job, and I for a while went out with somebody in the Ministry of Agriculture and did educational programs and wound up vaccinating cattle all the time at the same time. And we had a generator and we would show a film and we had literature, and I developed posters and basically working with poor farmers. Because your prosperous farmers, they already know what to do and they're well equipped. So we would make forays in a truck that belonged to the Ministry of Agriculture and oddly enough, I was at two officers and neither one of their office people could drive. So I wound up driving this old Ford pickup truck, which I guess looked like it was about a 1950 pickup truck.

KLEIN: [01:02:06] Was AID involved in?

KAREM: [01:02:11] No.

KLEIN: [01:02:11] So it was the government of Chile that was buying the vaccine.

KAREM: [01:02:17] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:02:17] And everything needed to.

KAREM: [01:02:19] I don't know, maybe AID was involved. You know, that'd be on the Santiago level.

KLEIN: [01:02:24] But I mean, you weren't aware of it at all. Ok. When you shifted jobs, then where were you living?

KAREM: [01:02:35] South of there, in two small towns. I was shifted twice. And there were just two small towns, but it had electricity and water, which was.

KLEIN: [01:02:55] So now you were in the hoof and mouth disease program, living in, as you said, in two towns or working in two towns?

KAREM: [01:03:02] I lived in two different towns. I was switched.

KLEIN: [01:03:05] Oh, so it was one after the other.

KAREM: [01:03:07] Yeah, because they closed one office and opened another, so I had to go with it.

KLEIN: [01:03:13] The they in this case being the Ministry of Agriculture?

KAREM: [01:03:16] The Chilean Ministry of Agriculture.

KLEIN: [01:03:17] Did you have an immediate counterpart?

KAREM: [01:03:20] Yes, I worked with a Chilean.

KLEIN: [01:03:23] Who was that? I mean, what was his background?

KAREM: [01:03:26] Veterinarian and then office people.

KLEIN: [01:03:30] Were they, did they become friends, particularly?

KAREM: [01:03:34] We got along okay. I didn't get to be close to them as I did when I was in the other community. It's like an office personnel. But I did get close to a family, so. Not particularly to these two, but they were nice guys.

KLEIN: [01:03:57] When you were now working in this program and take the first town you lived in. Can you describe a typical couple of days? I mean, what did you do?

KAREM: [01:04:11] Well, almost every day went out in the Campo and to some small farmer's place every day.

KLEIN: [01:04:19] Who chose that?

KAREM: [01:04:21] They would call in to the Ministry of Agriculture and request the vaccination. And then I would go along. And specifically, I was there to help educate the farmers, but I wound up vaccinating cattle too. I was trained in that, but that wasn't the original thing that I was supposed to do. It was just sort of go ahead and do it.

KLEIN: [01:04:54] Who was supposed to do it?

KAREM: [01:04:57] Well, they had a vet, but sometimes he needed help because you have so many cattle, so that's how I'll start vaccinating.

KLEIN: [01:05:07] How were the campesinos who had cattle aware that this service was available?

KAREM: [01:05:14] It was the Minister of Agriculture. They were pretty professional and they work with small farmers and they would get the word out into the villages.

KLEIN: [01:05:25] Did they try to do anything on a regular basis like, you know, we're going to be in your town on Monday?

KAREM: [01:05:31] No, I don't know how they did it. I really don't. It just, probably they came to the town, like all rural farmers do, to buy supplies and make

a request that they come out. And if they had a specific date, I can't recall that because, yeah, you know, in these places, when you go out, you usually find people, but often it was a specific appointment. I didn't do that. The office staff did that. I never knew where we were going, but I would often wind up driving.

KLEIN: [01:06:09] You said you had to set-up to show a film and do some education of, about more than just the vaccination you were trying to do.

KAREM: [01:06:19] Hygiene around the place.

KLEIN: [01:06:21] Related to cattle?

KAREM: [01:06:24] Foot and mouth disease, how to recognize the symptoms of the disease, why you should vaccinate them. See, in the United States, this is all unusual. We don't have it because we don't have foot and mouth disease or they eliminated it in the twenties and the way it was eliminated was they shot them all. I don't know if you knew that.

KLEIN: [01:06:42] I didn't.

KAREM: [01:06:42] They killed them all. Do you ever see the movie Hud with Paul Newman?

KLEIN: [01:06:46] No.

KAREM: [01:06:46] Well, there's a famous scene where they come out to a farm and the government comes out there and they round up all the cattle and they shoot them. That's how we got rid of the disease. You can't do that in Third World countries. They just can't afford it. And so most of the animals recover. Once they're real sick, some of them are going to die. But the big problem is, is the spread of the disease. So what the government wanted is prevention, vaccination, go around and vaccinate the animals. So it was a big government campaign and it was pretty successful too. I don't think they had much problem with that disease anymore.

KLEIN: [01:07:35] Did the farmers raise the cattle for their own use or for sale?

KAREM: [01:07:41] Oh, these were small farmers, so it would be both. These are small, poor farmers. And sometimes a cut above that. Like we'd go to a more prosperous farmer, but they were usually large landowners.

KLEIN: [01:07:58] But you would never work as a vet? I mean, and you had no problem with giving cattle shots.

KAREM: [01:08:07] There was a lot of problems with it because the poor farmers don't have chutes. Every American farmer has a cattle chute, so they didn't have a chute. You'd have to go up there and hold, one of them would hold on to it. You know, they'd lasso it, and try not to get stomped. The worst thing were bulls. That was just awful. Awful. So if they had a chute, it was easier. You could do that. But I never enjoyed vaccinating. Never.

KLEIN: [01:08:41] And in the several months you were doing this, was more time spent going out vaccinating or more compared to doing the film and discussing?

KAREM: [01:08:57] More vaccinating. And often it was a discussion with a farmer talking about hygiene, prevention, spread of the disease.

KLEIN: [01:09:03] More like one on one.

KAREM: [01:09:05] Yeah, it was more often just one farmer that you would be meeting with. Not a group, not a cooperative.

KLEIN: [01:09:13] Did you ever have a sense that the ministry felt it was important that you be part of the process, that you somehow being a foreigner?

KAREM: [01:09:21] Well, of course, they requested this. That was their program. They wanted Peace Corps involved.

KLEIN: [01:09:27] And do you have a feeling that it was supposed to make the program more effective because you were there?

KAREM: [01:09:36] Yeah, the Chilean farmers responded very positively to a gringo being there, I think they thought that was a big deal. And they liked the fact that you were there helping them. That's like personal attention. Here's this farmer, kind of this poor campesino's place. And, you know, they were poor. And the fact that you came to them and came along with the regular Chilean. That was the big event in their life. They maybe had never talked to a foreigner before.

KLEIN: [01:10:11] Did you invariably introduce yourself as a Peace Corps?

KAREM: [01:10:14] Always. Of course they knew I was a foreigner.

KLEIN: [01:10:19] Right. That that part, yes. But you also said, I'm with the Peace Corps, I'm part of the Peace Corps.

KAREM: [01:10:27] Yeah, but it wasn't a discussion unless they asked me.

KLEIN: [01:10:31] And did people say, what's that?

KAREM: [01:10:35] Sometimes.

KLEIN: [01:10:35] And what did you say?

KAREM: [01:10:37] Well, the best word I always use, as I said, we're kind of like missionaries, except we don't do the religious stuff and they understood that, but they would always ask you, you would inevitably get into religion because Chile is a very Catholic country, but with a lot of evangelical inroads. And so you just naturally got into religious talk and we were trained about that. Like, I just happened to be raised Catholic so I could talk about anything that was Catholic and they would love that. So I didn't have a problem with it.

KLEIN: [01:11:16] Now, what did you do when you weren't working? You couldn't have been, you know, wasn't 24 hours work, 7 days a week.

KAREM: [01:11:25] There wasn't much to do at all. Just I read a lot and that in the first place I was, I had like a Chilean family. There wasn't anything to do. It

wasn't any light or electricity. We would drink mate every night, the universal Latin American tea, and sit around the, well, it's called a bracero, coal, that we would put charcoal on to warm yourself. I don't know what we'd call them the States. That was one of those cool, it was very communal to put the mate in a cup with a straw, pour in hot water, and pass it around the circle. And I read a lot, the most I've ever read in my life. And then when I got electricity, I read more. But as far as. And there were some town fiestas that I went to and often being invited out to dinner. But I think I probably traveled the path of a lot of Americans did, particularly if you were by yourself, a lot of times you just got tired of going to people's houses. You didn't want to, got tired of speaking Spanish and that they're just glad not to.

KLEIN: [01:12:51] So just sitting in your room and reading was comforting sometimes.

KAREM: [01:12:57] There was nothing else to do. These were tiny towns.

KLEIN: [01:13:00] Did you have a radio?

KAREM: [01:13:01] Oh yeah. I listened to the radio all the time, the BBC and other stuff. I didn't have any record player. The radio was the godsend.

KLEIN: [01:13:13] What about newspaper? How did you keep up?

KAREM: [01:13:16] I read the Chilean newspaper.

KLEIN: [01:13:17] Oh, you did.

KAREM: [01:13:17] Yeah. And Time magazine.

KLEIN: [01:13:21] Was there a government paper or were there different party papers?

KAREM: [01:13:26] There are all sorts of newspapers. Chile's a pretty literate country. So they have pretty good newspapers, but there was one that was a dominant newspaper, and I read the local one too. But I usually

liked reading the major newspaper of the country. That's how I learned to read Spanish. I didn't learn in Peace Corps training because we were trained by the audio-lingual method. We were not. They did not give us books. I really was self-taught for reading and writing Spanish. They never taught us to read or write Spanish.

KLEIN: [01:14:00] But you were learning that while you were there?

KAREM: [01:14:04] While I was there, on my own.

KLEIN: [01:14:08] Coming toward the end of the first year in the country, had you been moved to the second village by then? Did you have any reflection about having joined Peace Corps and there you were? And was it worth doing or?

KAREM: [01:14:24] Well, it was always hard because I was a rural volunteer. And there were plenty of times and I wanted to go home. I was just fed up, particularly with the situation since there never was a job. I wasn't happy about that. But if you talk to volunteers in other countries, that's not an atypical story where a job dries up. And I learned later that a lot of times agencies would just take volunteers with no plan at all, or they would take them because they thought that's what the U.S. wanted, or that's what capital city wanted, and they didn't really want them. So it was a political thing. And so that was pretty common that a lot of the volunteers had assigned their own job. So when the other job came along, that made it easier, it was much easier because they had a specific job to do. You don't have to politick all the time.

KLEIN: [01:15:29] Even though you were simply becoming part of an ongoing process, not instituting, developing or changing anything.

KAREM: [01:15:45] I think I like the educational part.

KLEIN: [01:15:52] In relation to the hoof and mouth disease?

KAREM: [01:15:53] Yeah. And I guess the vaccination part helped because I was helping the vet do his job. But that's not being too much of an agent of change. You're just helping.

KLEIN: [01:16:04] Well, that's why I raised the issue. I mean, because sometimes the rhetoric that you get in going into the country as a community development is, you know, there's some kind of change or goal, you know, that you're going to try to reach, although within a two year span, it's extremely difficult.

KAREM: [01:16:25] Of course, you're always dealing with what the host government wants and what the Peace Corps wants. So that was a case of what this program was. But in the long run, beyond our program, all the programs in Chile must have been pretty good because eventually Peace Corps declared Chile a success and ended all its programs.

KLEIN: [01:16:52] Was there a mid-tour conference where you were all called into Santiago?

KAREM: [01:16:59] They had so many volunteers there you usually went to your regional area. There are about five hundred volunteers. So you'd be called into your region, not the capital city.

KLEIN: [01:17:10] And it was usually for some kind of specialized training?

KAREM: [01:17:14] It could be.

KLEIN: [01:17:14] What else would go on?

KAREM: [01:17:16] Well, you know, they had different. They had so many people there. They were in there for different programs. There was a university program. So if there was something on community development, they didn't bring them in.

KLEIN: [01:17:27] Yeah, I got it. Yeah.

KAREM: [01:17:29] And as far as trying to think, that was the reason we were brought together. There was no such thing as a mid-term conference. The regional director would come out and visit you.

KLEIN: [01:17:44] How often did he?

KAREM: [01:17:45] He came to my community once, and it was more of an assessment, and this guy was pretty tough. He's the one that sent people home, including one of my friends. And it just happened fast. I was just surprised they sent him home because he was a good guy. He wasn't doing a lot because he was in the same situation a lot of them landed in. They were supposed to have a specific job and then people didn't do anything. And he was sent home and I just got a letter from him saying, I'm being terminated. That's what the word they use, which I thought was really unfair.

KLEIN: [01:18:21] It's like deselection, you know.

KAREM: [01:18:24] They called it termination. And I just thought it was wrong.

KLEIN: [01:18:29] Well, when the regional director came out, you had a sense he was assessing you?

KAREM: [01:18:37] Oh yes. He had his little pad and he wanted to know everything was going on, everything that you were doing. And then at the end of it, he would announce his decision, whether you were going to stay or not go. So he decided I could stay. He was very arrogant and very inexperienced, and he left before my term was up. And then another guy replaced him, who turned out to be a very interesting Peace Corps career person because he was country director in several places and I actually had caught up with him several times. He was a Peace Corps director in Ecuador, and I visited him there. He was in Peace Corps Washington and I visited him there. We became friends. And he was much more of a tolerant person. But the one before him was just awful.

KLEIN: [01:19:34] And he was assessing you really not knowing much about your particular situation?

KAREM: [01:19:41] Well, he would interview you, basically.

KLEIN: [01:19:43] So it was your testimony.

KAREM: [01:19:45] Yeah. And then he would determine on the spot if you were going to stay, just by a one spot interview. So I was shocked when he sent my friend home.

KLEIN: [01:19:56] Were you called in for medical shots and stuff?

KAREM: [01:20:00] We had a doctor.

KLEIN: [01:20:03] The doctor didn't come out and check your sites, generally speaking?

KAREM: [01:20:07] No, you had to go see the doctor.

KLEIN: [01:20:09] Health problems?

KAREM: [01:20:11] I remember having something like food poisoning once, one horrible weekend, but other than that, I didn't have any problems.

KAREM: [01:20:22] Did you treat it yourself?

KAREM: [01:20:24] The food poisoning?

KLEIN: [01:20:25] Yeah.

KAREM: [01:20:26] I don't know what it was. It just, you know, you had your medical kit and half of it was worthless. In fact, the lady who became like my Chilean surrogate mother, my nickname for her was La Bruja, the witch, because she had all these herbs in her kitchen and then I would get diarrhea or something and I was afraid to take anything she gave me, or wanted to give me. So eventually I learned that she was a lot better than the medical kit. So I stopped taking the stuff in the medical kit and she would take give me brews and that.

KLEIN: [01:21:08] Now this was in the second village?

KAREM: [01:21:11] The first town.

KLEIN: [01:21:11] The first town. Were you living with the family?

KAREM: [01:21:18] No, I was in an abandoned school. I took food with them, pension. I didn't cook. I never cooked the whole time.

KLEIN: [01:21:28] So you became sort of became friends with that family.

KAREM: [01:21:31] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:21:32] Just the mother or others?

KAREM: [01:21:36] And her daughter. And her husband.

KLEIN: [01:21:40] You had mentioned that you grew up Catholic. Were you able to go to services?

KAREM: [01:21:50] Some. It was more of a political thing because some people liked that, they just thought it was wonderful. I didn't care, but it was politics.

KLEIN: [01:22:05] In other words, to establish yourself in the community.

KAREM: [01:22:08] Yes, be a good religious person.

KLEIN: [01:22:12] If you walked into the church, did all heads immediately turn or?

KAREM: [01:22:18] Well, there wasn't a church in my little town, it was too tiny. The regional city where I went to, where I got to know people, everybody, you know, everybody knows who you are after a while, the heads don't turn. They see you. One of them used to tell me that he could tell a gringo from six blocks, just by the way they walk down the street. I always thought that was funny. And of course, in this town, there had never been a Peace

Corps volunteer. I'm not talking about my little town. The little town just had a hundred people. But the town where I went to buy chocolate and Cokes and things like that was a little bus ride away. That's where I went for any social thing, and there were people there who'd just stare at me constantly. In fact, I remember one conversation. I wrote about this too. My volunteer friend and I were walking down the street, and it was pretty common that people would stop and stare at you and just look at you. And by that time, I think she was in the stage like a volunteer's get just sick of everything and somebody was just stopped and listening to us speak English. And she started saying to him, why don't you quit staring at us? Why are you staring at us, just go away. And then I kept telling her, well, you're speaking English. He doesn't understand English. He's only going to stare more. She says, I don't care. I'm just tired of these people looking at us all the time. So sick of all this stuff. So it went on and on like that. And it was really quite comical because the more she turned and looked at the guy, the more he just stared at her.

KLEIN: [01:24:00] Yeah, it can be difficult. Did you take, you must have had vacation coming.

KAREM: [01:24:11] Yeah, I took in-country vacation twice. I went to the south to the lake volcano district. I went to the north to the desert. In the second year, you could leave the country and I went to Peru and Bolivia and just loved all that traveling.

KLEIN: [01:24:27] If you wanted, could you have come back to the U.S.?

KAREM: [01:24:30] No, I was not allowed.

KLEIN: [01:24:31] Ok. You would stay on the continent.

KAREM: [01:24:34] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:24:35] Ok. Did some people find just a resort-y kind of place to go to?

KAREM: [01:24:40] And I really don't know. See, I was pretty isolated.

KLEIN: [01:24:45] You weren't part of a big social circuit.

KAREM: [01:24:50] No, see, there's certainly specific different Peace Corps type experiences. If you were a volunteer in a big city with a lot of volunteers, you know, you hung out with them. And you might live with them in the same building. See, I didn't have that experience because my friends were Chilean. I had a couple of Peace Corps volunteer friends, but for the most part, I never saw any of them unless we were called together or they happened to go be in the regional office when I was there. I might see them, and once in a while somebody would have a gathering. I'd go visit somebody.

KLEIN: [01:25:28] How about holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas? Do you tend to try to seek out?

KAREM: [01:25:34] Well, Christmas was hard because being away from home for the first time and I went and stayed with a volunteer on the coast who lived in an Indian reservation. And he lived on an island, and the only way to get to the island was paddle a rowboat across the open sea. And I can remember when I got there, I knew where it was and there were these nuns that stayed with him a lot and I was just dying for the nuns. I was being as friendly as I could because I wanted them to invite me to spend the night there with water and electricity and comforts, and I didn't really want to go across the channel at night. And so they didn't invite us. He said, maybe they will, but they didn't. So it was just dark. And then we were rowing across the ocean, and he had one of his Indian buddies with him and the wind was picking up and the boat was tossing all over the place. And all he did was just laugh at me. But I was scared to death going across. The dark, you know, in that little boat flipping all over the place, and the Indian didn't say much, but he just kept laughing and laughing. And I actually got mad at it because he kept laughing at me when I was scared.

KAREM: [01:26:57] That's, he lived on a little island. It was pure Indian reservation, and so I spent Christmas with him. And we decided in our first Christmas away to do something traditional and have a Christmas dinner for his Indian friends, and we were going to make it. And he had a wooden stove

and we decided to fix a turkey dinner. So neither one of us had ever killed a turkey before. So we're chasing turkeys around and we'd never plucked one before, we had to learn that. And they raised potatoes, so we made mashed potatoes. And I think they had lima beans and we had those. And we set the table, invited all them to Christmas dinner and they just sat down rather politely and sort of stared at the food politely because it was, mashed potatoes wasn't something they would have. They were very polite, but it took us the whole day to cook that stuff. And I can remember the Peace Corps gave us a Fannie Farmer cookbook. And we were using the cookbook to figure out how do you fix a turkey? And the first thing we know is what it said preheat oven to 350 degrees. Of course, we had a wood stove. We're trying to figure out, what in the world do you do? How do you figure out, you know, the thermometer? So we were guessing. It probably worked. It took the whole day and it was a wonderful dinner and we just loved it and they seem rather blasé about it.

KLEIN: [01:28:41] It was the two of you and how many Indians?

KAREM: [01:28:46] There were about eight. All his friends.

KLEIN: [01:28:47] Yeah. And all the conversation was in Spanish?

KAREM: [01:28:52] Oh yeah, yeah. Now they often spoke their language, Mapuche, among each other. Some of the older ones weren't very good at Spanish. But the kids, when they went to school, they all learned Spanish in school.

KLEIN: [01:29:05] Did that friend learn Mapuche, the one who was on the island?

KAREM: [01:29:09] [inaudible]

KLEIN: [01:29:11] So that was your first Christmas. How long was your tour supposed to be in country?

KAREM: [01:29:19] Two years.

KLEIN: [01:29:20] So you had four months of training and plus two years.

KAREM: [01:29:26] Roughly. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:29:31] So let's go into the second year now. As the second year began, where were you at that point?

KAREM: [01:29:43] I was in a small regional town and working with the Ministry of Agriculture. I did that for the rest of my service. That was the specific job, just in different towns.

KLEIN: [01:29:56] And at any point did you try to shift the job or to make more of it or to build some little monument?

KAREM: [01:30:09] I just wasn't involved in the community like before because I wasn't doing community development. I wasn't involved in the school because I was out in the Campo every day, so I didn't have the integration in the community. I was gone all the time. And the few people that I got to know other than work just happened by accident. And actually, it turned out to be pretty beneficial. One family that I met, I was riding back on a bus to the town and this guy to start talking to me. It turned out he had done his graduate work or university work in South Dakota, and he spoke English. So he spoke English to me, and then he invited me over to dinner to his family's house. And they were of Swiss descent. We had a lot of immigration in Chile from Germany, Switzerland, and so they were educated, middle class people. And his sister was there and I just loved being with them. They were just fun people.

KAREM: [01:31:21] And then about a week after that, I was staying in a pension and the pension caught fire and burned down. And that night, it burned down at night and I had dragged out some of my things. I told you I had a trunk. I had dragged my trunk out and then everything else went up in flames and that was the only thing I had. When I was out on the street and the place was in flames, then this family who I just met invited me in. So for the last months of my service, I think that's when I was the happiest because I was living with this family. And they were wonderful. They were just fun and they taught me a lot. They taught me music and dancing, and the mother was very educated and I was very comfortable, so. And they were my friends.

KLEIN: [01:32:19] You didn't have to be on in talking with them, as different than going out.

KAREM: [01:32:25] I was like an adopted son. So I had something to do every night. It was very social because they, we listened to music. We talked. He worked. He was an engineer and he worked for the Chilean government as an engineer. And she, his sister, who has, is one of my, they're both still my lifelong friends and the mother is still alive. She's in her nineties.

KLEIN: [01:32:53] Wow.

KAREM: [01:32:54] And of course, I went, I told you before I went back to Chile, so I stayed with them and I went to the other town and stayed with that family. And I've never been out of communication with these people, which is pretty rare, I think, for a Peace Corps volunteer. I'm still in touch with them after all these years. I have been back. I'm on email with them. They call me on the cellular phone. And then one family that I got to know, actually, the daughter, who was a baby when I was there, came here to study in advanced med school at the University of Minnesota. And she came to visit me on her way up to Minnesota, which is pretty fascinating. And she was just a baby when I knew her.

KLEIN: [01:33:44] As you're coming to the end of the second year, your tour is about to be over. Any temptation to extend?

KAREM: [01:33:54] No, I wanted to go home. If I was doing something really important that I had to see it through, I would have extended. But I also was battling the Vietnam War and the possibility of being drafted and. I was a protester adamantly opposed to it, and my plan was to get in graduate school. To at least have a temporary deferment. In those days, if you were in graduate school, you were entitled to finish the semester you were registered for, then they could draft you. And then they came up with a lottery number.

KLEIN: [01:34:44] That's right.

KAREM: [01:34:45] And then I had a low lottery number and I already told you my selective service board didn't care that I spent two years in the Peace Corps. They were ready to draft me and I had a physical and I was in the drafting pool, but I kept using tricks of the law to stay deferred. It's a complicated story.

KLEIN: [01:35:08] Yeah, well, let's go back to why you were in Chile. While you were there, some of the volunteers chose to express their feeling about opposition to the war. Being as isolated as you were, how did you become aware of this?

KAREM: [01:35:27] Well, the girl who was near me eventually left the Indian reservation, and she went to become a regional secretary in the Peace Corps office. And I had a lot of correspondence with her. I wrote a lot of letters. I wrote more letters, then, because that was my only contact with the outside world. And then I tried to read the Chilean newspapers as much as I could. So as I was telling you before, it was a very politicized country and the socialists, the communists, the Marxist parties were well-organized, very anti-Peace Corps, and always accusing the CIA of being part of the Peace Corps. But everybody knew this because you had to face it wherever you went. So one of the big incidents was when this volunteer was sent home by the Peace Corps, Bruce Murray. He was in Concepcion, where my friend was. And he was at the University of Concepcion, which is a high-profile university, he was teaching there. And he signed his name to a protest letter, which was. Excuse me. He wrote a protest letter opposing U.S. policy in Vietnam, and it was published in a Chilean newspaper with Peace Corps volunteer under it. The Peace Corps was very upset about that, and eventually they sent him home. They cleared him out pretty fast. They yanked him out so fast, he didn't even have time to say goodbye to all the Chileans, which really politicized it even more because that was leaped upon by the Chilean newspapers as unfair handling by the Peace Corps, silencing, censoring their volunteers.

KLEIN: [01:37:16] So you were able to read in the Chilean papers about the event.

KAREM: [01:37:22] I don't remember if I specifically read about him.

KLEIN: [01:37:26] But you were getting information from your friend who is in the.

KAREM: [01:37:29] Because she was the secretary of the, she was in his region. It was his regional director.

KLEIN: [01:37:36] Yeah. How did, what did you decide to do or not do about it?

KAREM: [01:37:41] Well, I did. There was a meeting of volunteers and we talked about that. And then some volunteers tried to get a Peace Corps volunteer letter in support of this volunteer. And what he did, that he should not be dismissed, but I did not sign it because I thought what he did was stupid and naive. The one thing you learn in Chile was it was a highly politicized country, and people of the Communist Marxist Socialist Party were watching everything you did. And that to send a letter to a newspaper with Peace Corps volunteer on it was just wrong. I mean, any, lots of volunteers wrote letters expressing their opinion, but they just signed their name. And you knew you weren't supposed to do as a Peace Corps volunteer. And whenever I gave my opinion of the Vietnam War, opposing it, because it was practically a daily conversation, I always said I was opposed to the war and I thought it was stupid and I was opposed to the government's policy and I wasn't part of the government's policy.

KLEIN: [01:38:48] All right.

KAREM: [01:38:49] But this guy chose a different route. And then eventually, as I told you, he was sent back and terminated by the Peace Corps. He sued the Peace Corps and eventually he won because they it was decided he was, his First Amendment rights were violated.

KLEIN: [01:39:10] And you followed the whole thing. You were aware of it as it unfolded, but you didn't choose to participate in the letter that the people?

KAREM: [01:39:24] No. But I was very concerned about the whole issue of the Vietnam War and the Peace Corps. The most important thing was that the Peace Corps be seen as a totally separate institution from anything else.

KLEIN: [01:39:41] Oh, I know what I wanted to ask you. Before the Murray thing, when you had various regional Peace Corps meetings on the various topics, had Peace Corps officials ever discussed what your stance, proper political stance should be, not in relation to the war, but in being a volunteer?

KAREM: [01:40:05] They always said, you're going to be asked. You can express your opinion on anything because it's your opinion, but if it's associated with the Peace Corps, that's different. But we got that in training.

KLEIN: [01:40:14] So it went back that far.

KAREM: [01:40:16] Because it was a highly politicized country. It was really a no-brainer from the day you got there, you knew with the situation you were in. You could not get through meeting anybody who wasn't going to ask you about what you thought about in Vietnam. They wanted to know what your opinion was. And the other thing was civil rights. You often got that because Chile had a democratic tradition of over a hundred years. And they always liked to say they were concerned about the plight of the African-Americans. So whenever we got into that conversation and they thought we were all racist, I would immediately turn the tables on them and say how they were treating the Indians in their own backyard. And of course, a lot of them didn't like that. But since I worked with the Indians, they couldn't beat me on that.

KLEIN: [01:41:06] Yeah. Do you remember during training, were there any role-playing exercises where in relation to that?

KAREM: [01:41:15] I remember my psychiatrist asking me about what would I do if the drunks came after me. They wanted to know if I would get into a physical fight. And I told him, no, I am not a person who's going to get into a physical fight.

KLEIN: [01:41:30] But nobody tried to say, OK, what would you say if someone accused you of being a CIA? Why don't you play it out?

KAREM: [01:41:37] Might have asked you that, but we didn't do role playing.

KLEIN: [01:41:40] Okay, okay. But you were just aware from the get-go that you were going to work in a high, a very political country.

KAREM: [01:41:50] But you didn't understand until you got down there.

KLEIN: [01:41:52] True.

KAREM: [01:41:52] Then, you know, as I was down there, that was when the worst of the Vietnam War was happening. So and there were volunteers protesting all over the place. '68 was the worst year for the U.S. And in that war, and then you also had the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, so you had to deal with that too. They all wanted to know what you thought of that, and they used to say all the time, you're a nation of violence. Of course then, I was young and naive. And now I realize they were right. We're a violent society, militaristic society. Because they would say, our president walks through the streets. Nobody would ever bother him. You all shoot them. And I think I was defensive for a while.

KLEIN: [01:42:52] Let's say you finished up your tour. Was there a termination conference?

KAREM: [01:43:01] I missed that because I had to leave early to get into graduate school.

KLEIN: [01:43:08] You had applied?

KAREM: [01:43:10] I applied and had been accepted.

KLEIN: [01:43:12] What school?

KAREM: [01:43:13] Georgetown University.

KLEIN: [01:43:15] And what program?

KAREM: [01:43:17] Latin American cultures. And the other plan I had was is to somehow avoid being drafted in the Vietnam War. So I knew by that time that if I got into Georgetown immediately, I would have one semester of protection. And after that, I had just figure out the next step because I was determined not to be part of the government's war machine and I was prepared to go to Canada. I didn't have to make that decision. So it was critical that I got into graduate school because if I hadn't, they could have drafted me.

KLEIN: [01:44:01] Now, as you come to the end of your Peace Corps service, what do you think? Do you recall at the time feeling what the influence was of the two years on you? Or you just left and you were immediately caught up in.

KAREM: [01:44:21] I think the effect that it had on you, or the effect that you had on your environment, comes in bits and pieces. And certainly the effect on me in the assessment and realization of it has been never ending. And I do realize that it changed my life forever. The way I do things certainly self-confidence, my career, my interests, my hobbies.

KLEIN: [01:44:55] But at the point of leaving, it wasn't as if you left saying my life has been transformed. It's in the living of that life that the changes have become apparent.

KAREM: [01:45:07] No, there was no great assessment. I was ready to go home.

KLEIN: [01:45:12] Yeah, OK, yeah.

KAREM: [01:45:14] And I missed the termination conference, which now I realize is unfortunate, because that's like closure. And you see all your friends and you do that sort of thing. See, I didn't. All I did was go by myself to the capital, signed the papers, and leave. So I missed what, unfortunately what most volunteers get, and I missed seeing a lot of people in my program.

KLEIN: [01:45:39] Did you do any self-assessment, though? I mean, do you recall thinking that?

KAREM: [01:45:44] Oh sure, I kept a journal.

KLEIN: [01:45:44] And what was your judgment of yourself as a volunteer?

KAREM: [01:45:49] Well, I made a valiant effort. I don't think I accomplished a lot, which is pretty typical of Peace Corps volunteers.

KLEIN: [01:45:58] Was that your sense at the time also?

KAREM: [01:46:00] Oh yes. I didn't accomplish much. But the one thing I did realize and learned about myself is that I had a facility for getting along with people on all levels, which a lot of people don't have. I learned that I could relate to rich people, middle class people and the hardest of all poor people, that I just had a facility for that. And that's something that has served me well for the rest of my career. And it also gave me confidence to go back to Third World countries and know how to relate to people and how to understand a foreign culture. I've been to many Third World countries. I've been in many groups with people for grants and studies and within a group. I noticed that usually within a group, I'm one of the ones that feels very comfortable getting to know a foreign culture and that I will go up and talk to people and others will not. And I know some of the tricks of crossing the cultural barriers. It can be music. I know what to talk about, to get somebody to talk. And every group I've been in it, it's just an extra ability that I've developed and has served me well.

KLEIN: [01:47:21] And you've traveled not just in Spanish speaking Third World?

KAREM: [01:47:25] I've been all over. Just got back from Japan, learning about Japan for a grant and that that was a very foreign experience. I've even been to out of the way places. Also on a grant to study the culture, Saudi Arabia, in fact, that was popping into my head as we were talking because I can remember a lot of the people in the group. Whenever you are in a room with people, particularly Saudis, who are always dressed so different, you and their personalities are so different, that a lot of people just find it difficult to get across that culture barrier. But I just don't, even though I don't speak Arabic. You know, they spoke English. It's just the

easy for me. And also the other thing I learned after that, I forgot this, is sometimes you don't even realize it's happening or that you can do it. I was lucky that I could translate my sense of humor in the Spanish, and I could get people to laugh wherever I went. Always. And at first, I didn't understand the value of that. But now I do. To be able to make people laugh. There are certain universal truths, and some cut across barriers and humor is certainly one of them. And the other one is music and dance and poetry and sometimes gardens. These are things that break down barriers because they're universals among people. Religion, you have to be careful with, but you always show that you're interested in another person's religion, that's something else.

KLEIN: [01:49:08] Yeah, yeah. So through the years, you've stayed in touch with various friends from Chile. Some have come up here.

KAREM: [01:49:19] They still want me to come back. Also I send money to them too.

KLEIN: [01:49:23] Uh-huh. And your career, for the most part, has been in the field of education.

KAREM: [01:49:32] The most part, in some ways, whether it's a school or a museum or writing.

KLEIN: [01:49:37] OK. Anything else you want to talk about your Peace Corps experience?

KAREM: [01:49:45] And well, the aftermath is so interesting, you know? I told you a couple of things about going back. And writing about my experiences and having a couple of scenes published. I have an article here that I'm going to give you about my going back to Chile. I never thought I would go back. I can remember when I left, my Chilean mother said, you are going to come back, aren't you? And I said, oh yeah, but in my brain I said, I'll never come back. Because they see you in a certain way and then the experience is over. And I didn't think I could come back and start all over again because it was so hard to become part of a community, to learn Spanish. I didn't think you could pick it up again. You'd change and you

wouldn't want to come back, and that's pretty much the way it went. Then all of a sudden, I don't know where it came from. It's like a thunderbolt in my brain. I said, I need to go back.

KLEIN: [01:50:52] How many years later was this?

KAREM: [01:50:54] That was 20 years later. I just need to go back. And it was just sudden because I was determined I would never go back, simply because I thought it would be a disappointment. Because it was such a difficult existence in the poorer parts that I figured it would just be hard to relate to. So it was a split decision, and actually my school was very helpful. They let me off work to go back. And then I still remember, and this is in the article, when I came back and saw the family for the first time and what I call my Chilean mother. And the minute I saw her and the look on her face and heard what she said, I knew it was the right thing to do. Because she said, oh, this just seems like a dream. I just can't believe this is happening. I just always wanted you to come back. And that I knew I had done the right thing. And as far as worrying about, could I make the connection again? There was no problem at all.

KLEIN: [01:51:57] That's great.

KAREM: [01:51:58] The next generation was there. They had all heard about me for years and then the next generation. And it was just wonderful.

KLEIN: [01:52:07] Peace Corps was out of Chile by the time you went back?

KAREM: [01:52:09] No, it was still there. No, wait a minute, hold on. So they had an interruption during the Pinochet years.

KLEIN: [01:52:16] That's right.

KAREM: [01:52:19] I can't remember. When I went back, they were in transition. They were trying to get back into democracy and they were headed in that direction. And the military rule was ended. And that produced some interesting conversation because they told me about all the years of Allende and Pinochet. And all the sad part was the people that I had

known, it split the country kind of like the Vietnam War was for ours. Then there were people who were for the government, others against, and they claimed others were sympathizers and people were rounded up and put in prison camps in the woods. And they told me about prison camp where some people were and who people who pointed out, you know, they were informers and some of them were people that I had known. And of course, it was right wing stuff, you know, it was a right-wing dictatorship. So if anybody had leftist leanings, those are the ones they singled out. So in any community, you're going to have all those. And in Santiago, they pointed out torture houses to me. So it was like a dream world when I went back there. None of that was like that when I was there, it was a functioning democracy.

KLEIN: [01:53:38] Yeah.

KAREM: [01:53:39] And then the amazing thing also was how I made friends with the next generation, the grandkids. Because I didn't know how they would react to me. Just immediately, we just became friends.

KLEIN: [01:53:55] Were you tempted at all to try to get a Peace Corps job or another job that would be working in Chile?

KAREM: [01:54:01] I thought about it. I really did, but I didn't want to interrupt my career for two years. I didn't to make the break. It was just too hard. I know the other thing I was going to tell you, about the spin-offs of being a Peace Corps volunteer besides my return visit and writing about it. One of the other unusual things that happened was I was Olympic torch bearer in the 1996 Olympics and I ran a leg here in Louisville. And then one of the things I decided to do, because the Olympics is internationalism, was dedicate my run to the Peace Corps. So I wrote Peace Corps in Washington and told them what I wanted to do and in Chile, and they sent me a pin which had the Chilean flag on it and the American flag joined together. And then I wore a Mapuche Indian sash that I had down there around my waist, and I wore this pin and then my Mapuche pin and a Chile pin. And when I went to run the torch, everybody has the same outfit. And then when I got on the bus, they saw what I had on and they said, you can't wear that stuff, because everybody has to wear the same

thing. And then I explained to them why I was wearing it, what it was dedicated to. And they let me wear it. And then this somehow this was picked up in Chile as a story, and a guy wrote an article about me and had a picture of me wearing all this stuff. It appeared in the Chilean newspapers that I was dedicating the run to Peace Corps Chile in particular and all the people in Chile. So that was just a sweet thing.

KLEIN: [01:56:08] Oh, yeah. Yeah, wonderful.

KAREM: [01:56:10] And I think I'm pretty sure I'm the only one that did that from the 1996 Olympics. I made the connection.

KLEIN: [01:56:17] Yeah. Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]