

Roland H. Johnson Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Roland H. Johnson
Interviewer: Robert Klein
Date of Interview: April 26, 2002
Location of Interview: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Length: 59 pages

Biographical Note

Roland H. Johnson served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya from 1964 to 1996 as a land settlement officer (Kenya I).

Access

Open.

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Suggested Citation

Roland H. Johnson, recorded interview by Robert Klein, April 26, 2002, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Oral History Interview

with

Roland H. Johnson

April 26, 2002
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:00] This is Bob Klein. Today is April 26, 2002. I'm interviewing Roland Johnson, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, 1964 to '66. Okay, we can start. You want to go back to the time before you came in and we'll set it from there?

JOHNSON: [00:00:27] Okay. Well, I guess, Bob, that I'm one of those volunteers that did it ass backwards.

KLEIN: [00:00:34] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:00:35] That my first job out of college was assistant director of a Peace Corps training program at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, the oldest historically Black university in the United States. And it's also the school that Kwame Nkrumah went to.

KLEIN: [00:00:58] Yes, you would, you went there as an undergrad?

JOHNSON: [00:01:01] I went there as an undergraduate and that, although I had a hiatus before I graduated, but I went back and that's where I finished. I started out there in '55. My class was '59, but I graduated. And that I was asked to serve as assistant director of Peace Corps training program, which was for Liberia II, primary school teachers, and that my job primarily was dealing with a lot of the trainees and the psychological aspects and different things like that, doing some of the administrivia as well as doing all the tests and stuff like that, because my background was in psychology.

KLEIN: [00:01:44] Was that your degree?

JOHNSON: [00:01:46] My undergraduate degree was in psychology.

KLEIN: [00:01:49] Okay. Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:01:51] As a major.

KLEIN: [00:01:52] Where had you grown up?

JOHNSON: [00:01:54] In Cleveland, Ohio.

KLEIN: [00:01:55] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:01:56] And that is my home.

KLEIN: [00:01:57] When, completed high school there?

JOHNSON: [00:02:00] I completed high school in Cleveland. And when you say growing up, I really grew up between New York City and I was born in Cleveland. Went to like about the third grade, to New York. Came back to Cleveland in the 10th grade.

KLEIN: [00:02:22] Yeah. In high school, was there any kind of family travel or any travel outside the Cleveland - New York circuit?

JOHNSON: [00:02:33] No. Other than, you know, to the towns where relatives were and things like that. And most of our family was between Cleveland, in Ohio, or in Pennsylvania. Had no Southern roots basically.

KLEIN: [00:02:48] Okay. During college, did you do any international travel? Any, any national travel or?

JOHNSON: [00:02:57] No.

KLEIN: [00:02:58] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:02:58] No. Never. Never did.

KLEIN: [00:03:01] And as of the time that Peace Corps invited you to work with the Liberia group, you didn't have any special knowledge of Liberia, or did you?

JOHNSON: [00:03:11] Well, not quite. Not quite true. And it wasn't, it wasn't Peace Corps who asked me. It was university.

KLEIN: [00:03:16] Ah, okay.

JOHNSON: [00:03:17] They were the contracting agency for the training program. And so the director of the training program was one of my former professors. And that, uh, and asked me to serve in that capacity.

KLEIN: [00:03:34] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:03:34] Lincoln University at that time had a substantial population of students, particularly from Africa, but from other countries also.

KLEIN: [00:03:49] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:03:50] And that, I mean, it's, so that there was a real international flavor. It has always, it had always been there.

KLEIN: [00:03:58] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:03:59] And in fact, at the time that I attended Lincoln University, it had the highest percentage of foreign students than any university in the United States. And so that there was, you know, so there, there was that, that issue there.

KLEIN: [00:04:18] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:04:18] And, and when I was on campus as a student, we did a number of things. And there was an institute that was set up, uh, that was supported by the U.S. State Department in part for students from countries, particularly in Africa. And there was an Institute of African Affairs that was created. And a professor, I can't recall his name, at that time, he had come out of Berkeley. I know his name. I just, it may come to me later on, but, um. Markham.

KLEIN: [00:05:05] Ah, okay.

JOHNSON: [00:05:07] Dr. Markham. John Markham. And that, uh, and we had this institute there and that, uh, I also sort of got involved in that. And I guess what heightened part of my sensitivity to some of these things, and I'd always been whether or not I had read about it or knew about it, is that I had always been interested in international affairs. But when I got involved with the institute and some other things that I, you know, pursued it even further and that I was also involved in activities on campus.

KLEIN: [00:05:51] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:05:52] And it was interesting, one of them was the, uh, the YMCA. And the YMCA, they had things on college campuses around the country. And the fraternity I belonged to, and I have to give them their due, you know, we, you know, ran a number of different things. And one of them was the Y, and I became program chair this one year. And I said, well, what are we going to do? And I wanted to do something that was different.

KLEIN: [00:06:26] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:06:29] And not your usual thing. And so what we did was to develop a conference that was going to be held on campus.

KLEIN: [00:06:44] Do you remember what year is this now?

JOHNSON: [00:06:46] We're talking about 1961.

KLEIN: [00:06:49] Okay, good.

JOHNSON: [00:06:51] 1961. And that what we were going to do on campus was to have this conference on Africa because of our long history. I mean, Azikiwe, Nkrumah, and a whole bunch of others. If you go to West Africa and if someone is over 50, they know, they know Lincoln University.

KLEIN: [00:07:16] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:07:16] But anyway. Um. But and other colleges, other places, were having all these conferences. We wanted to do something different. And so what I suggested that we do is that, this was to have the colonial powers in Africa and the liberation groups that were in Africa.

KLEIN: [00:07:40] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:07:41] And the countries that we were dealing with were Mozambique. Well, the Portuguese colonial power, which meant Mozambique and Angola. Then there are still countries under the, uh, under the British, which was still, uh, which was still Zambia.

KLEIN: [00:08:03] Kenya.

JOHNSON: [00:08:04] No, no. Kenya, Kenya was free at that time.

KLEIN: [00:08:07] Okay. Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:08:10] And that they had just gotten and then they had the next steps to go through so it was an issue. But it was, it was Zambia and, um, and Zimbabwe now, I can't even remember what the name was at.

KLEIN: [00:08:26] Northern Rhodesia.

JOHNSON: [00:08:26] That's right. Northern Rhodesia. Well, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia.

KLEIN: [00:08:30] Yeah, I mix them up.

JOHNSON: [00:08:31] But anyway, the, uh. And we asked that, and South Africa.

KLEIN: [00:08:36] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:08:38] And we asked them to come to the table.

KLEIN: [00:08:42] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:08:43] The two sides and talk about issues and things like that. Oh, we got into all kinds of trouble. The university got harassed. Their funding was threatened because. And the main culprits were, were the South Africans.

KLEIN: [00:09:02] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:09:03] And that, you know, who tried to put pressure on the State Department not to have this conference. The British were very amenable and they sent representatives and everything else. The Portuguese, they raised some issues, but they decided to participate, as did finally the South Africans, not to the extent we wanted them to. Um. And we brought all these people in and we invited people from other colleges to come down for the conference. It wasn't just that Lincoln in the Northeast corridor. And we got a large, large percentage. The biggest problem that happened out of it was that while there was some civility that went on and, but in the background there a lot of non-civility, if that's a word.

KLEIN: [00:10:01] Hostility is what we call it.

JOHNSON: [00:10:03] Is that we had students that essentially were kidnapped who, they were from Mozambique. Because Lincoln had a number of students from those countries that were there under sponsorship.

KLEIN: [00:10:22] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:10:23] And what the Portuguese did was to have, and they had this big lobbying firm that did a lot of stuff for them and, and is to. They took some of them into town, talked with them, plied them with liquor, and, um, and. And as I understand threatened, you know, their families because they found out, because this one or these one or two, you know, squealed and told and they gave real names and things like that. And so that the families of those others may have been threatened, you know, back home. And so they disappeared, you know, from campus. And the last that we had heard that they were in Lisbon shortly thereafter.

KLEIN: [00:11:15] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:11:17] And so that, you know, that was one of my, you know, entrees into the real world of international affairs.

KLEIN: [00:11:28] Yeah. Now, the Liberia training group was going to be primary school teachers?

JOHNSON: [00:11:33] That's correct.

KLEIN: [00:11:34] And did they live on campus?

JOHNSON: [00:11:37] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:11:39] And was there a conscious, I assume it was a racially mixed group?

JOHNSON: [00:11:44] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:11:45] And for the most part, Lincoln at that time was still an all Black institution or?

JOHNSON: [00:11:51] Yes, it was all Black for all practical purposes. I mean, there were, I mean, white students had gone to Lincoln almost since the beginning.

KLEIN: [00:12:00] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:12:01] But I mean, but the majority of students there were Black. And it was all male.

KLEIN: [00:12:05] Ah, yeah. Okay. And how did the trainee program go, I mean?

JOHNSON: [00:12:14] Oh, the training program went very well. I mean, we had, um, I think it was the same kinds of problems that Peace Corps might have had with its other training programs. But, I mean, there were no problems on campus.

KLEIN: [00:12:25] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:12:26] That, you know, everyone, you know, mixed freely, I mean. Although the training group was somewhat isolated because they had all the classes during blocks of time and the meals and different things like that. But they were certainly free to move around campus and they were certainly welcome. And we utilized the, um, the resources that were on campus, the human resources on campus for our.

KLEIN: [00:12:53] Do you remember who ran the program, who was the director of the training faculty?

JOHNSON: [00:13:00] From Peace Corps?

KLEIN: [00:13:01] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:13:01] Bob Binswanger.

KLEIN: [00:13:03] Okay. Okay. And your role was kind of a?

JOHNSON: [00:13:10] Well, the head of the training program on Lincoln's side was, um, I forget. History, history professor Shakey Jones. That's what we called him. Professor Jones.

KLEIN: [00:13:28] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:13:29] I can't recall his first name right now. We had nicknames for all the professors, but the training director from Peace Corps Washington was Bob Binswanger.

KLEIN: [00:13:38] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:13:40] And at that time, interesting enough, Tom Quimby was the director in Liberia.

KLEIN: [00:13:50] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:13:50] And so he visited the campus and everything else.

KLEIN: [00:13:54] And you met him?

JOHNSON: [00:13:55] And that's where I met him.

KLEIN: [00:13:56] Yeah. Training program was over. You had finished your degree.

JOHNSON: [00:14:02] No, I finished my degree before the training program.

KLEIN: [00:14:05] Okay. What were your future plans at that point?

JOHNSON: [00:14:07] I went down to Peace Corps. I was asked to come down to the Peace Corps Washington to work.

KLEIN: [00:14:13] Oh, okay. Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:14:16] Because, uh, and one of the, one of the reasons is that, uh. I have to go back just a little bit. At the commencement of '62, I believe it was, of, at Lincoln University.

KLEIN: [00:14:34] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:14:36] That, um. They have the alumni reunions and one night in the dorm met some people. And we started sitting down, played some poker, drank some liquor, and all that. And one of those people happened to be Franklin Williams.

KLEIN: [00:15:02] I was going to say that, you know.

JOHNSON: [00:15:04] And it was like his 40th reunion or something. 30th reunion, 20th reunion, I don't know.

KLEIN: [00:15:10] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:15:10] And actually, he and I got into this big argument about Peace Corps. And because I raised the question as was, because I had been involved with a lot of civil rights stuff and everything else. You know, why should I be going overseas as a Black person?

KLEIN: [00:15:36] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:15:37] Or at that time we were Negroes or whatever.

KLEIN: [00:15:39] Right, right.

JOHNSON: [00:15:39] And that to, you know, to do these kinds of things when there's so much work that needs to be done here.

KLEIN: [00:15:46] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:15:47] And so all during this poker game and, uh, several glasses of scotch and everything else, you know, we, you know, we had some interesting back and forth.

KLEIN: [00:16:02] Do you recall what his stance was about, on that issue?

JOHNSON: [00:16:06] Not exactly. Other than that he felt that it was also a way in which, while he agreed and because, you know, and he came from that background, he was head of the NAACP out in California and everything else, is that he, he saw this. And these are not his words, but this is the essence of what I think that he said, is that you can look at. There's a lot that needs to be done here, but going overseas and seeing other things and doing what you're doing can give you a different perspective of what it is in the United States. And he was absolutely right.

KLEIN: [00:16:51] Yeah. Was there any sense, I mean, did he talk in terms of the kind of the Kennedy image of Peace Corps, that it was important for, quote, Americans to be making this gesture to countries, or was it more closer to?

JOHNSON: [00:17:08] He was, he was more, Frank was more pragmatic with that.

KLEIN: [00:17:12] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:17:12] He, I mean, he didn't, you know, at least during this session, I mean, that it wasn't, he wasn't the, you know, rah rah rah Kennedy this, that, and the other and got to. No, no, no. He didn't, that was, that was not, that is not what he did.

KLEIN: [00:17:27] During this time, was there a conscious attempt to do Peace Corps recruitment on the Lincoln campus? Do you recall that particularly?

JOHNSON: [00:17:37] When, when he was there? No, he was just there for his reunion and to interact with, you know, with, with the folk.

KLEIN: [00:17:43] And nobody invited?

JOHNSON: [00:17:44] Now he may have talked to administrators, which I didn't know, about the possibility. I'm sure that he was instrumental in a training program coming to Lincoln's campus.

KLEIN: [00:17:56] Yeah. You don't recall being involved with recruitment on the Lincoln campus at this time?

JOHNSON: [00:18:03] No. No.

KLEIN: [00:18:05] So. The meeting with Williams, the Liberia program's done, you're asked to come on up to Washington, and I gather you did so?

JOHNSON: [00:18:16] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:18:17] And what was your position or what did you do?

JOHNSON: [00:18:22] I was a classification officer.

KLEIN: [00:18:25] Oh, okay.

JOHNSON: [00:18:26] And what I did, and I was in the division of selection.

KLEIN: [00:18:29] Yes.

JOHNSON: [00:18:30] And what I did was essentially selected people for various programs, so that if you applied, um. And I primarily dealt with Africa, but also, you know, to some extent, sometimes Latin America. And that I would review the applications and everything else and select them for the various programs that we had available.

KLEIN: [00:18:54] And based on your decision an invitation would go out?

JOHNSON: [00:18:57] That is correct.

KLEIN: [00:18:59] Do you recall the, I'm just interested in this. So what was the dossier or the file that you would have on any individual? It would be

their application. References. Was there still a Peace Corps exam then that they had to take?

JOHNSON: [00:19:16] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:19:18] And FBI background.

JOHNSON: [00:19:22] Uh.

KLEIN: [00:19:22] Or would that come later?

JOHNSON: [00:19:23] The background sometimes came later, after they were invited.

KLEIN: [00:19:27] Right. Okay. And were there like 100 possibilities for each slot or was it sort of shifting whoever was available into the slots that were around?

JOHNSON: [00:19:46] Uh.

KLEIN: [00:19:46] There are different stories about this.

JOHNSON: [00:19:48] Well, you know, it's funny, it is that it depended upon the country. Some countries you had a lot of flexibility. Other countries you didn't. I mean, like, for example, in Ghana, there was not a hell of a lot of flexibility. I mean, they wanted science teachers, geography teachers, and stuff like that. And so you sort of had to be on target with that. Nigeria was like that and everything else. In Ethiopia, anything.

KLEIN: [00:20:18] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:20:19] The Philippines, anything.

KLEIN: [00:20:21] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:20:21] I mean, that's, we'd fill, we fill these programs, I mean, you know, with all these AB generalists and things like that. Then of course,

if there are programs that, you know, that required secretaries or lawyers or different things, veterinarians or what have you, then of course you had to, uh. Those are harder things to fill.

KLEIN: [00:20:39] Who was your boss in selection, or who was the head of selection? Do you remember?

JOHNSON: [00:20:44] Oh, I should have thought about that.

KLEIN: [00:20:47] Not important.

JOHNSON: [00:20:47] But the first one, basically, he used to work for Exxon. He had been head of, I guess now what would be human resources for Exxon. That may come to me.

KLEIN: [00:21:03] Yeah. Yeah. How long did you stay in the selection division or?

JOHNSON: [00:21:12] From, for about a year and a half.

KLEIN: [00:21:15] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:21:17] And I then left and went into training for, uh, for the first group that went to Kenya. Originally, I selected, I selected my own program.

KLEIN: [00:21:27] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:21:29] And that I knew was coming, what was coming down the pike. And originally I was going to go to Uganda and there was a refugee program that was going to be going on, and that sort of fell through. And at the same time that the Kenya program came online. And so then I decided to go into, into that one. And all of my stuff was handled internally and in the director's office. In fact, no one knew other than a few people that I had applied. And my, and in fact when I, in fact when I went to training, you know, no one knew that I had worked in Washington for Peace Corps. And we wanted it like that. And we had to

do this little bio thing that it said, I just said I was a minor bureaucrat in Washington.

KLEIN: [00:22:21] You fudged. Yeah, okay. What, what motivated you to decide to go to the, for the Ghana, for the Kenya project?

JOHNSON: [00:22:34] One, it seemed interesting. And in the sense that, um, I really liked the Uganda program because it's still refugees and trying people to get resettled, you know, seeing people displaced and everything else. And then the Kenya program, to some extent, which was a land resettlement program, was in some ways the same, the same kind of thing in different ways, except that people had more of an opportunity for self-sufficiency, which in Uganda, they really, they really didn't. It was just trying to make them more comfortable and in a, in a place that, you know, that was foreign to them.

KLEIN: [00:23:22] You had no particular interest in teaching?

JOHNSON: [00:23:26] No.

KLEIN: [00:23:26] Okay. Because the initial Kenya group was a group of teachers and the land settlement group.

JOHNSON: [00:23:33] Let me make the record straight.

KLEIN: [00:23:35] Okay. Go ahead.

JOHNSON: [00:23:38] Kenya I was the land resettlement group.

KLEIN: [00:23:42] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:23:42] Kenya II, the teachers.

KLEIN: [00:23:45] Good. Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:23:45] And when we arrived in Kenya, the teachers stood in the back, while Kenya I.

KLEIN: [00:23:54] Stood up and sang.

JOHNSON: [00:23:57] Sang.

KLEIN: [00:24:00] Up to, up to the time. That's an issue in a lot of places. Up to the time you went into the training for Kenya, had you learned, had you studied any languages?

JOHNSON: [00:24:17] Yes, I was, I was, at that time I was fairly, fairly good in French. And I, and, and believe it or not, I was semi-fluent in Latin.

KLEIN: [00:24:29] In Latin? Were you ever considering becoming a priest?

JOHNSON: [00:24:33] No, no, no. But I took Latin all through high school, and I, and I used it as my language requirement in college and I, um, I think I took Latin 3 and Latin 4.

KLEIN: [00:24:47] Yeah. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:24:49] I liked it. It was easy. And I always figured that, hey, if I need a good, a good grade, that was a way in which to get it.

KLEIN: [00:24:56] Okay, so now kind of you report where for the training? Let me just back up. Your family's reaction to, and friends, your reaction to saying, well, I'm going to go to Kenya with the Peace Corps. You remember anything about that?

JOHNSON: [00:25:15] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:25:16] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:25:17] Thought I was crazy.

KLEIN: [00:25:19] Okay. Because they thought, well, you can have a career in Washington and why mess it or?

JOHNSON: [00:25:27] Well, you know, the, the idea at that time in 1964 of going overseas and living in a foreign country and being a volunteer and things like that and not a paying job, and that was, in particular in the Black community, I mean, that was not something that was, you know, people just didn't understand that.

KLEIN: [00:25:49] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:25:50] To any great extent. Now, you know, while I received support but, you know, sure it was questioned in the minds of my family and a number of my friends and things like that.

KLEIN: [00:26:02] What do you think, what was your own motivation for doing it?

JOHNSON: [00:26:10] Well, there are a couple of things that happened. I really got into, you know, into Peace Corps when I was in Washington to a great, well, when I was on, on the training program and also after I got to Washington and everything else, and I also had to go out and recruit people. You know, one of the things that if you were on Peace Corps staff in Washington and you were a GS-7 or above, you had to spend at least two weeks a year recruiting.

KLEIN: [00:26:48] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:26:48] So in other words, because we went out to college campuses and things like that. I remember trips to Kansas State University, in Lawrence, Kansas, and down to Texas and things like that. In Houston where we went, our team went to Rice and Texas Southern and things like that. That was, you were required to do that. And that's how they got their recruiters. I mean they just took.

KLEIN: [00:27:17] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:27:18] And. And, and it was hard sometimes talking to these young people. And actually, they weren't, I wasn't much older than they were, to talk about Peace Corps, being a volunteer and everything else, and really never having experienced it and not having any overseas

experience. Then the other thing was, was that, um, I, I wanted to go overseas.

KLEIN: [00:27:49] Hmm.

JOHNSON: [00:27:49] And that, um, I was about to, although no place had been decided at this point, but I was going to be going overseas on staff.

KLEIN: [00:28:00] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:28:01] And that, but that was at the time that the edict came down from Shriver that, uh, the first volunteers were coming back. And so criteria was set up so that the returning volunteers got first crack at those jobs. And if you didn't have prior overseas experience and you were under 30 and single, forget it.

KLEIN: [00:28:31] Yeah. Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:28:32] And that that was me.

KLEIN: [00:28:33] Yeah. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:28:34] And then in all honesty, the third factor which made me go when I did was because I got drafted.

KLEIN: [00:28:43] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:28:44] And that, uh, I had to make a decision, you know, as to whether or not that I wanted to go into the Army or go overseas as a volunteer. And I decided that I would take my chances and go overseas as a volunteer. And if when I came back home, if I got drafted, then.

KLEIN: [00:29:04] So be it.

JOHNSON: [00:29:05] So be it. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:29:05] And your board obviously was one that was willing to offer the deferment? I mean, it wasn't automatic, the board had to decide.

JOHNSON: [00:29:13] Right. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:29:14] Okay. Now you report out to Milwaukee, am I right?

JOHNSON: [00:29:21] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:29:23] And meet the Kenya group. What kind of culture shock did you go through in first meeting the group? What was your impression?

JOHNSON: [00:29:37] Uh, I didn't go through any culture group, cultural shock at all. That, you know, I think that our group, you know, melded very well.

KLEIN: [00:29:51] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:29:54] You know, there are a lot of, you know, similar interests and, um. And for purposes of the interview, I'll, I'll be honest and say that I knew more about them than they knew about me.

KLEIN: [00:30:11] Well, of course you would. Yeah, okay.

JOHNSON: [00:30:13] Because I had selected a number of the people who had, was in the group.

KLEIN: [00:30:18] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:30:19] Although that I have to say that I did not, for those that I didn't know, I had not gone and looked at their files. The ones who were in the group were those that happen to come across my desk and everything else. And I didn't know who all the final group was that went out there until I got there.

KLEIN: [00:30:42] Yeah. Okay. How many were, how many were in the group? Do you recall? Approximately.

JOHNSON: [00:30:49] About 38. And I think 33 of us went over.

KLEIN: [00:30:53] And the, um.

JOHNSON: [00:30:54] We had three married couples.

KLEIN: [00:30:56] Three married couples.

JOHNSON: [00:30:57] Right.

KLEIN: [00:30:58] Okay. And what was the, the role that you were being trained for? Was that fairly well defined in training?

JOHNSON: [00:31:09] Yeah. Yeah. I think for, you know, for some of us it was. We, we knew the kind of project that we're being involved in. We knew that we were going to work for the Ministry of Lands and Settlement. We knew that we were going to be assigned to a settlement scheme, either large scale or short scale, and that you might be assigned to a co-op or something like. And I think prepared us for that.

KLEIN: [00:31:38] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:31:41] So that what you did was to take some AB generalists, basically.

KLEIN: [00:31:48] How would, how would you characterize the background of the group? I mean, you, you were coming in with a, essentially with a degree in psychology.

JOHNSON: [00:31:57] It varied. I mean, we had a couple of lawyers in the group, that others had degrees in anthropology and English and whatever.

KLEIN: [00:32:10] Was there anyone who came from an agricultural background?

JOHNSON: [00:32:16] Uh, I think Jim Jorgensen did, and he grew up on a walnut farm in California. I mean, but there are no agriculturalists per se. Oh. And that was probably good. I think it was probably good.

KLEIN: [00:32:37] Why?

JOHNSON: [00:32:38] Well, because that for the most part, we didn't. I didn't need to be an agriculturalist per se. What I had to do was to be able to organize, get things done, and everything else, and I had the supports to do it, unlike some folk who might have gone to other places in community development projects and just thrown out there.

KLEIN: [00:33:08] Right, right.

JOHNSON: [00:33:09] And everything else. Because, you know, for example, where I was, I worked on a settlement scheme that was, that had three parts of it. I was in charge of one of them. The whole thing had 14,000 acres, which had been three farms owned by Europeans. It had then been bought out, they had been bought out and then the land was resold to 364 African farmers.

KLEIN: [00:33:40] Individuals, yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:33:42] That, uh, who were going to take that and turn it, and most of them coming from a subsistence farm economy to a cash crop. And so our, our job, my job was to, one, was to help them do that. And to do that, though, I had, since we, our crops were tea, pyrethrum, maize, and milk cream. And to take those, those four things using best practices and helping them to understand best practices.

KLEIN: [00:34:29] And there was a governmental structure within Kenya?

JOHNSON: [00:34:32] That is correct. That is correct. I mean, I was really, I ran a government office.

KLEIN: [00:34:37] Yeah. So that it wasn't as if you were operating in a vacuum and deciding what was appropriate. You, you had certain guides.

JOHNSON: [00:34:45] That's right. And we had veterinary staff, we had agricultural staff.

KLEIN: [00:34:50] Let's jump back to training before you get to Kenya.

JOHNSON: [00:34:54] Okay.

KLEIN: [00:34:54] I assume there was an emphasis on language.

JOHNSON: [00:34:56] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:34:58] How? Tell me about the language training.

JOHNSON: [00:35:02] Well, at dinner you could not use English.

KLEIN: [00:35:06] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:35:07] Given day one.

KLEIN: [00:35:09] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:35:11] And then, and the language of course was Swahili.

KLEIN: [00:35:15] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:35:16] And that we had language training several hours a day. Every day.

KLEIN: [00:35:20] Was it?

JOHNSON: [00:35:21] Five days a week.

KLEIN: [00:35:22] Completely conversational?

JOHNSON: [00:35:26] Uh, not. No, it wasn't completely conversational. It was also in, in working in terms of what you're doing. So it wasn't just, you know, hello, how are you? This set me up.

KLEIN: [00:35:38] Yeah. Were you made aware of the fact that your ability in the language, in Swahili, would affect the selection process?

JOHNSON: [00:35:50] That's correct. Absolutely. Everyone, everyone understood that.

KLEIN: [00:35:55] And what was it that they understood?

JOHNSON: [00:35:58] That if you didn't pick up the language, you probably might be deselected simply because that whatever you did, because of where you're going to be.

KLEIN: [00:36:09] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:36:10] Unless you got assigned to as Jim Finucan and some of the others to Nairobi, that you were going to have to work in the language. And me, you know, as others did, worked in two languages. I worked in Swahili and Kinandi, you know. Some worked in Kiswahili and Kikuyu.

KLEIN: [00:36:31] But you went in with a certain level of competence in Swahili?

JOHNSON: [00:36:35] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:36:37] Was that measurable, I mean?

JOHNSON: [00:36:39] Yes. Yeah. I mean, they, they had ways in which they measured it. A lot of it was based on Foreign Service test kinds of stuff.

KLEIN: [00:36:46] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:36:47] And then, and then actually when, when we completed our, our service, you were again tested in terms.

KLEIN: [00:36:57] Oh, at the end of the Peace Corps?

JOHNSON: [00:36:57] Yeah. Oh sure. Yeah. Oh yeah. They, they wanted to know, you know, you know, as a way as, as to how well you progressed while you were there.

KLEIN: [00:37:09] What else went on in training? Language was, clearly was an emphasis. You must have done that every day.

JOHNSON: [00:37:15] Well languages, uh, then of course there were area studies. And so that you learn about the country you're going to. You learned about the area that you were going to and, you know, the history, cultures, ta da da da da da. And that they, and that they brought people into the training programs from the area. I mean, so that, for example, our Swahili teachers were from East Africa.

KLEIN: [00:37:48] Okay. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:37:52] And that which, you know, they hired. A lot of our area studies people were also from East Africa or experts in, you know, in the field.

KLEIN: [00:38:05] Was St. Clair Drake in your training program or not?

JOHNSON: [00:38:09] Uh, I don't think he was. I don't recall. I don't recall.

KLEIN: [00:38:12] He did Ghana program mostly. Okay. I was just. And were there people from the Land Settlement Ministry that came out to take part in the training or just?

JOHNSON: [00:38:28] No. No, they did not.

KLEIN: [00:38:30] Was there anyone who had ever been a settlement officer who came?

KLEIN: [00:38:34] No.

JOHNSON: [00:38:34] All right.

JOHNSON: [00:38:35] However, having said that, I should say that after we got to Kenya, before we went out to our assignments, we spent two weeks at Kabete, which is this training center. And we interacted with all those kinds of people and gave us a better introduction into what was going on. I mean, we had, we had one person who was on the training staff that knew about, who knew about what was going on. And they, you know, they talked about it. But in terms of anyone coming from Kenya and everything else to just to talk about that, no, that happened after we got there. So we spent two weeks at, uh, at this training center.

KLEIN: [00:39:23] But you also had some agricultural training?

JOHNSON: [00:39:26] Oh, yeah. We, not only, not only, we went up to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where they had, where the University of Wisconsin has its agricultural school.

KLEIN: [00:39:38] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:39:38] And we spent time up there.

KLEIN: [00:39:40] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:39:40] And everything else. So, yeah. So we saw cows before we went out to.

KLEIN: [00:39:46] Even if they were American cows.

JOHNSON: [00:39:48] But actually, actually though. The cows that they, that they were trying to encourage, you know, are based on Guernseys and different things like that. Because one of the things that, that we got involved in is that on these settlement schemes that you could only use AI to breed cows. And where I worked, if in fact that anyone brought a *konyegi* cow, and particularly if it was *duma*, a male that had not been castrated.

KLEIN: [00:40:32] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:40:34] You'd confiscate. Hey, we used to have cattle raids.

KLEIN: [00:40:39] How did you take to the agricultural studies? I mean, it didn't quite square with your background, I mean.

JOHNSON: [00:40:45] Well, you know, I didn't see it any different. You know, I've been one of these people who have been fortunate in that I've grown up in the concrete jungles of New York and everything else. And then in the, you know, the concrete areas of the Midwest of Cleveland and then have also spent time in small towns along the Ohio River where I had relatives. And that and if you have an open mind that, so I've had, you know, so I've had exposure to those kinds of things. So it wasn't, it wasn't like it was cultural shock to me. And even when I was out at Lincoln University, I mean, Lincoln University was on 252 acres and at one time had its own farm.

KLEIN: [00:41:30] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:41:31] I mean, our milk that we drank when I went there as a freshman was, you know, came from the farm.

KLEIN: [00:41:37] Did the group begin to develop an esprit, a special spirit? But, you know, you were the first to go to Kenya. You were kind of a unique group, different than a lot of Peace Corps projects. Was there some sense of being special?

JOHNSON: [00:41:56] Well, I don't know that it was special.

KLEIN: [00:41:59] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:41:59] But I do think that we developed a, an esprit de corps.

KLEIN: [00:42:05] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:42:05] And that while, you know, today we don't see each other that often, we know where everybody is and that we, you know, we talk with

people. And if you call somebody and you hadn't talked with them in ten years, your call gets returned and you pick up where you left off.

KLEIN: [00:42:26] Yeah. Well, I mention esprit particularly in relation to the selection process, because in training often that's where the sense of group comes out when.

JOHNSON: [00:42:38] Well, in training I think, I think, I think that it did. I think we did develop a good group and I think that I think everyone sensed who was and who wasn't.

KLEIN: [00:42:49] Was selection a tough process, I mean, was there much stress around it or?

JOHNSON: [00:42:55] I don't, I don't think so, because I think that most people, I think, sensed who was going to be selected out.

KLEIN: [00:43:05] Okay. And a few were, weren't they?

JOHNSON: [00:43:07] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:43:07] And so there wasn't, the group.

JOHNSON: [00:43:10] And there were no surprises.

KLEIN: [00:43:12] Okay. So the group didn't disagree and say, well, that guy ought to go or. Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:43:15] I mean, even though everyone didn't have a clear sense. I'm probably the only one there that had a clear sense because I'd been at, I'd sat in selection groups and other groups and everything else at other college campuses and that. So I had a fairly clear sense, which I did not share with everyone. But I think that no one was really shocked at the ones who were selected out. And I think we, I think we lost three. I can't remember right now.

KLEIN: [00:43:49] Okay. Training's over. Any break between finish of training and heading out? Did you get some leave or?

JOHNSON: [00:44:01] I think it was about a week.

KLEIN: [00:44:02] Yeah. Came back home?

JOHNSON: [00:44:05] Uh, I went, I went home and then up to New York and had a big party for the group. And my mother threw a big party for the group because she lived in New York. And one of our other volunteers, Phil Schaffer, I don't know if you remember Phil?

KLEIN: [00:44:19] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:44:19] Phil had a party also because he lived in New York. And so before we took off and everything else.

KLEIN: [00:44:23] Yeah. And did you come over as a charter group or was it regular commercial?

JOHNSON: [00:44:31] Regular commercial. TWA.

KLEIN: [00:44:34] All right.

JOHNSON: [00:44:36] TWA and Ethiopian.

KLEIN: [00:44:39] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:44:40] We went, we went from New York to Spain on TWA. We had a layover in Spain.

KLEIN: [00:44:49] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:44:50] In Madrid.

KLEIN: [00:44:51] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:44:51] And then I think it was Ethiopian Airlines that we then took over from there, stopped in, stopped in Athens and then on down.

KLEIN: [00:45:01] You remember arriving in Nairobi?

JOHNSON: [00:45:04] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:45:07] What was the first couple of days like?

JOHNSON: [00:45:12] Uh.

KLEIN: [00:45:12] Any real surprises?

JOHNSON: [00:45:18] Not really. We stayed at the YW-, YMCA. That's where we were put up.

KLEIN: [00:45:23] You wanted to be at the YW but you didn't. Sorry.

JOHNSON: [00:45:28] And it was near the end of the year. And so, um. And I'll say there wasn't a lot of activity going on. And so we just sort of wandered around and we had some sessions and things like that. And then, and then like that following Monday we then went out to Kabete, which was where the training center was.

KLEIN: [00:45:48] Was this Jomo Kenyatta College or not?

JOHNSON: [00:45:51] Well, at this time it was called, I don't know what it's called now, but it's Lower Kabete. It was Lower Kabete Training Center.

KLEIN: [00:45:58] Okay. Do you recall interacting with Peace Corps staff? I mean, Peace Corps staff was there.

JOHNSON: [00:46:05] Oh, yeah. They came around and.

KLEIN: [00:46:06] Was Quimby on board when you arrived?

JOHNSON: [00:46:08] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:46:09] Or did he come later?

JOHNSON: [00:46:09] No, Quimby was on board.

KLEIN: [00:46:12] Yeah. Up to Kabete. Did you all immediately sort of corner?

JOHNSON: [00:46:20] Now, this is just my group. The teachers went on out to.

KLEIN: [00:46:22] Yeah, no, no, no. Just your group. Did you find yourself cornering Kenyans and trying to speak Swahili to them?

JOHNSON: [00:46:31] Uh, well, we'd try to speak Swahili whenever we could. But we spent two weeks at the training center and that we're sort of isolated except for staff and things and that. And most stuff was done in English. And we're trying to learn how to ride motorcycles and all kinds of stuff like that.

KLEIN: [00:46:47] You were assigned motorcycles?

JOHNSON: [00:46:49] Yeah, we had, we had piki pikis.

KLEIN: [00:46:51] Oh, okay. And then at what point did you, were you given your assignment?

JOHNSON: [00:47:01] When we, just before we left the training center.

KLEIN: [00:47:06] And what was the pattern of assignment, do you recall, particularly whether, you know, some people said, well, why the hell am I going here? Or how it broke down?

JOHNSON: [00:47:17] Yeah, I mean, as I recall, we just took it as we, as we saw it. And we didn't ask as to why that I'm going here and someone else is going there. You know, we weren't always sure what the housing accommodations were going to be and stuff like that. And so it was, you know, we just went. You know, we just accepted what they told us for the most.

KLEIN: [00:47:44] And the arrangement, as you understand it, is that you were working for the resettlement ministry, agency?

JOHNSON: [00:47:53] Correct. That's right.

KLEIN: [00:47:54] But you were being paid by the Peace Corps?

JOHNSON: [00:47:57] Correct.

KLEIN: [00:47:57] A living allowance of whatever.

JOHNSON: [00:48:00] 800 shillings a month.

KLEIN: [00:48:01] Okay. Plus a settling in allowance to get you going. Where were you assigned?

JOHNSON: [00:48:07] I was assigned to a place called Lessos, which is about 200 miles north of Nairobi.

KLEIN: [00:48:16] What's, physically what's the area like? Is it highlands or?

JOHNSON: [00:48:21] It's in the highlands and it's all really farming and everything else up there. It's one of the, you know, agriculturally it's one of the richest areas and everything else.

KLEIN: [00:48:35] Okay. Were you assigned alone?

JOHNSON: [00:48:39] As a volunteer?

KLEIN: [00:48:40] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:48:40] Yes, but not alone in that there were other people. I worked with a European settlement officer who was already there.

KLEIN: [00:48:53] Okay. And were there.

JOHNSON: [00:48:54] So I had, there were three of us. There was, the settlement officer in charge who was the European.

KLEIN: [00:49:00] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:49:02] And then there was a, an African who was another settlement officer who was in charge of one of the other complexes, and I was assigned to the other. So there are three, there are three complexes. And we each, the three of us, we each had one. And there was one person in charge who was sort of the boss. And then, and we ran the office and did all the stuff that we, that we had to do.

KLEIN: [00:49:33] What was the background of the European who was the settlement officer?

JOHNSON: [00:49:39] Same as most of them, that they grew up as farmers and different things of that.

KLEIN: [00:49:44] In Kenya?

JOHNSON: [00:49:44] In Kenya.

KLEIN: [00:49:44] And had stayed on.

JOHNSON: [00:49:45] Stayed on.

KLEIN: [00:49:46] Okay. Were there any problems with that, do you recall, as you settled in?

JOHNSON: [00:49:51] Where I was, no.

KLEIN: [00:49:52] Okay. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:49:54] I didn't, I didn't have any problems.

KLEIN: [00:49:58] Um, from the get-go did you have a clear sense of what it is you were supposed to be doing? I mean, what I mean, you.

JOHNSON: [00:50:07] Not, not from, not from day one. No, I think that once I got there and I we began to talk and everything else and saw what was going on. Then at this particular place, it became a clearer sense of what we were going to do or going to try and do and that. And trying to figure out the best way in which you could do that.

KLEIN: [00:50:33] What was the typical day like, I mean, during the first four or five months there?

JOHNSON: [00:50:42] Uh. Up in the morning, wondering whether or not that we'd have any hot water.

KLEIN: [00:50:53] Well, let's back up. What were your living arrangements?

JOHNSON: [00:50:56] Well, my initial living arrangements was this little rendezvous in that the settlement officer in charge invited me to live in their house.

KLEIN: [00:51:13] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:51:14] Because this was, had been the servants quarters before, for the, uh, the European farmer that had been there.

KLEIN: [00:51:22] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:51:23] So then, so I lived in this house and that was an old, you know, European house that, you know, built by brick and everything else.

KLEIN: [00:51:33] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:51:35] It had running water, but the water came from outside and you had a 44 gallon drum and everything else. It wasn't your fancy dancy, you know, water reticulation scheme.

KLEIN: [00:51:50] Yeah. Electricity?

JOHNSON: [00:51:55] By generator. The refrigerator ran by paraffin.

KLEIN: [00:52:00] Yeah. Did, uh, since the settlement officer invited you to move in with him, then there was a steward or somebody who took care of the meal preparation and the food shopping?

JOHNSON: [00:52:13] Right, that's right.

KLEIN: [00:52:14] And so you didn't have to worry about it. You didn't have to bother with that.

JOHNSON: [00:52:18] No.

KLEIN: [00:52:21] Okay. You were lucky.

JOHNSON: [00:52:25] I understand, but. And the thing is, is that, you know, people can say what they want. But I felt those circumstances also made me a little bit more productive, because given that, you know, having to cut firewood, all this other stuff, I mean, there's no place you'd go buy it.

KLEIN: [00:52:44] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:52:45] And everything else that, you know, and that another thing is that you're helping someone with the job and everything else.

KLEIN: [00:52:52] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [00:52:52] And that I like to think that we paid above the minimum wage, you know, so to speak, in the area. Um.

KLEIN: [00:53:01] So your living arrangements.

JOHNSON: [00:53:03] I mean, because I was, I was gone, you know, most of the day. You know, you know, we were out in the fields, you know, seeing that things are being plowed properly.

KLEIN: [00:53:16] Now, did you, did you have a settlement office on your particular piece of the scheme? Was there, physically was there an office?

JOHNSON: [00:53:24] There was only one office. So all of us worked out of that one office.

KLEIN: [00:53:28] Okay.

JOHNSON: [00:53:29] And then and we had, we had a sort of a complex.

KLEIN: [00:53:32] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:53:33] And that there was also the office of the cooperative which we are working with, which is also one of my assignments, working with the cooperative for these, you know, for these farmers, because that all the, all the milk and cream was sold through the cooperative. The tea was done through the Kenya Tea Cooperative, all it, you know, all those kinds of things, you know. So they took up a lot of things.

KLEIN: [00:54:02] Yeah. So you'd meet in the main office on any given day, and would you tend to head out to the fields to deal with it?

JOHNSON: [00:54:12] Right. Depending upon what the day was or things like that. There's always someone there to man the office because people might be coming in to make loan repayments or different things like that or to get a loan or, you know, or what have you, because all of them had lines of credit that they could borrow against to help further development of their plots and things like that.

KLEIN: [00:54:38] Why wasn't your position being taken by a Kenyan?

JOHNSON: [00:54:48] Uh, there are probably a couple of reasons. One is that a lot of Kenyans were being trained to do a number of other things and that they also saw a chance for, quote unquote, good cheap labor.

KLEIN: [00:55:16] Okay. The government of Kenya?

JOHNSON: [00:55:19] Yeah. And that, uh, they knew it wasn't going to be a long-term thing, at least in this particular aspect. And that I think that they also thought by bringing in some Americans who are Peace Corps quote volunteers, that it would also reduce the number of the European settlers that they had to hire to do the jobs that they didn't have enough of their own people to fill.

KLEIN: [00:56:00] Okay. The long-term concept of the resettlement program was that eventually the resettlement offices would disappear.

JOHNSON: [00:56:09] Basically.

KLEIN: [00:56:10] The land would be in the hands of the.

JOHNSON: [00:56:11] And that basically has happened. That basically it's happened.

KLEIN: [00:56:14] And the Kenyans and the co-ops would be fine. We were talking about why there wasn't a Kenyan. Were there Kenyans with whom you worked closely and what was their position? I mean, was it, were they lead farmers? Were they clerks of the co-op or?

JOHNSON: [00:56:36] Over my couple of years there that I went from a, um, settlement officer in charge who was married to an African woman, to a defrocked Kenya farmer who was a failure at farming but a wonderful person, to a Kenyan who was a settlement officer in charge. And that the co-op was always, you know, while I was always an advisor to it, that was always run by the, you know, the local people. And then of course we dealt with the chief and everything else and all the people. All of the agricultural veterinary staff except for the veterinarian were, you know, were Kenyan.

KLEIN: [00:57:39] So it was really a considerable structure there that. So I'm a little confused as to what was, why, why were you needed, you know?

JOHNSON: [00:57:53] Well, let me, maybe I can help by this, is that because there was also community development.

KLEIN: [00:58:03] Hmm.

JOHNSON: [00:58:05] Well, someone had to, needed someone to run these various schemes, so I had, you know, maybe a hundred and some odd farms. So I was responsible for working with those 100 farmers.

KLEIN: [00:58:15] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:58:16] And being available to them, helping them do what they ought to be doing, encourage them to do what they ought to be doing.

KLEIN: [00:58:25] Like what?

JOHNSON: [00:58:27] Well, you know, using, using hybrid maize so that you get better yields and understand that, because it costs more. And those who are supposed to grow tea. Tea is very hard to grow. You don't get any return for about three years and then it's modest. And what, and it's hard work. And so because you got to keep it clean, you take care of it. And you put all this money in and they weren't and they didn't see anything coming back. But once it was okay, then you know, that tree if you took care of it, that tree bush was good for 75 years. So and it was trying to work in that.

KLEIN: [00:59:14] Was the government sort of directing them or encouraging them to go into tea, to keep that product going in Kenya?

JOHNSON: [00:59:21] Oh, yeah. Well, tea is a major product of Kenya.

KLEIN: [00:59:24] But the farm, a farmer didn't necessarily choose?

JOHNSON: [00:59:26] These people had not been, had not necessarily been involved in the, in the growing of tea.

KLEIN: [00:59:32] Right.

JOHNSON: [00:59:33] Because the Europeans had primarily been involved in growing of tea. And most, most native Kenyans involved in growing of tea were few and had very small shambas that they, that they grew too. They didn't have large acres and things like that. So you're talking about two acres of tea. That, that was really a lot. And that, and that, that takes a lot of work if you're almost starting from scratch. Or taking it over for someone who already has it and still and then maintaining it and the work that goes into it. So it was still with those things.

JOHNSON: [01:00:11] There's also that the other community development parts of it whereby, you know, whether or not it was building a bridge so that it could be easier access to parts of the settlement scheme, because when it was just the Europeans that they had their own routes and some of the stuff didn't make sense and or they didn't have to do. And so, you know, yeah, I was involved in the building of two bridges.

KLEIN: [01:00:35] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:00:36] And I don't know anything about building bridges, but we did it. And then, but then the, the major, the major thing I think that happened. Um. And I've been back and I've seen, you know, the results, was that convincing the cooperative and its members to develop a water reticulation scheme whereby every farm would have water. And then after they got water to the farm, then they could deal with it the way they wanted to. I mean, if they tried to expand it to go into the house to set another, but it would get to that farm. And spent lots of time in *barazas* and everything else talking with them because it was not free.

KLEIN: [01:01:36] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:01:38] They would have to take out loans and things like that to get it.

KLEIN: [01:01:41] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:01:42] Now they got a lot of technical assistance that was free, but the, a lot of the actual stuff and then there would be a water bill.

KLEIN: [01:01:49] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:01:50] And getting them to, to buy into that took a lot of work. And when I left that it had been, they had approved it. And that some of the work had begun for it, for it to happen.

KLEIN: [01:02:08] Whose decision was it that it was a priority to have water, the water supply system developed?

JOHNSON: [01:02:18] I, I think that it was a combination, that some of it may have come from top down, but I think it also came from bottom up in the sense that, uh, people had to find water. That means they had to move their cattle to go different places where there was water and different things like that, because they didn't have water on their own land and things like that. So to have water on your own land made it easier for you to, one, feed your cattle, which they all, which they all did. Two, get water to, you know, for your, for your veggies and whatever else you did. It was also a way in which you might in the long run. [tape break]

KLEIN: [01:03:11] Tape two. Okay.

JOHNSON: [01:03:14] Mungu meaning, you know, God.

KLEIN: [01:03:16] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:03:16] And that, you know, for your, your maize and everything else that you need water. And so that if you, if there was a time when the rains weren't as good as they should be or you need it, then it might be ways you can develop by having water on your plot to water your, your maize and different things like that, feed your animals. Do your stuff.

KLEIN: [01:03:43] In doing this community development, did you work much with traditional leaders within the tribal structure or the traditional structure?

JOHNSON: [01:03:54] Absolutely. Absolutely. Everything we did was with the, uh, the traditional leaders.

KLEIN: [01:04:03] And the particular group with which you were working were what?

JOHNSON: [01:04:09] Nandi.

KLEIN: [01:04:10] Nandi. And as of '64, when you were there, there was still, uh, it was independent and there were other governmental structures that had. There was still a strong traditional division and, oh, interconnection or whatever you want to call it. Did that still exist?

JOHNSON: [01:04:35] Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely. I mean, it was, you know, you had to deal with the traditional leaders, the chiefs, and all the rest of them. I mean, that was, or else you couldn't get anything done. And that if you want to do anything that involved all the farmers, that if the chairman of the cooperative wasn't convinced that it was a good thing, then you had problems.

KLEIN: [01:05:04] Were you also, did you begin to teach yourself the Nandi language?

JOHNSON: [01:05:09] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:05:11] Just on your own?

JOHNSON: [01:05:13] Well. Well, sort of, yeah. Yeah. I mean, you listen and you pick up things. I've, I've always been fairly good with languages and, you know, I didn't sit down with anyone and say, well, you know, sometimes I did, you know, certain kinds of things. And because it was funny, because a lot of times.

KLEIN: [01:05:29] Your old Latin background.

JOHNSON: [01:05:30] A lot of times it was that I'd be in a meeting with the co-op and with the board and that they were all speaking Kinande. And I listened

for a while and everything else, and then pretty soon I would interject and say, you know, can you speak in Swahili, you know? And, you know, over a period of time, you know, they can still speak in Kinande and I knew what they're talking about. I knew exactly what they were saying. But most, and I think they did too, knew that I knew.

KLEIN: [01:06:08] So very little of your business was conducted in English. Most of the farmers and co-op people.

JOHNSON: [01:06:14] That's correct.

KLEIN: [01:06:14] Weren't likely to get into an English conversation with you.

JOHNSON: [01:06:18] That's, that's correct. Right. The only, there were some who did, and that's because they wanted to use English or learn their English because they, they, particularly some of the staff, the veterinary staff, the agricultural staff. And, you know, they'd gone to maybe a training course or something like that and then got their job and that if they could. And maybe finished the maybe eighth grade or something like that. And if they could improve their English, they thought that I was going to help them improve themselves in terms of. So, yeah, they would want to, a lot of times they would want to speak in English.

KLEIN: [01:06:58] And most of them lived up on the scheme also?

JOHNSON: [01:07:01] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:07:01] Was there a nearby city, I mean?

JOHNSON: [01:07:04] Well, the closest city to us was Eldoret.

KLEIN: [01:07:09] Okay. And did you go in to Eldoret very often?

JOHNSON: [01:07:16] Several times a month.

KLEIN: [01:07:17] Shopping, recreation, just?

JOHNSON: [01:07:24] Uh, usually it was probably for shopping. Occasionally you went in there because usually the lawyer from the co-op would pick up the mail and then bring it out. And so when I went in, it would probably be for shopping or for some official business or something like that. Therefore, I could take my Land Rover or my motorbike, motorcycle.

KLEIN: [01:07:50] Okay, yeah, yeah. Did you, did you? The Land Rover was, belonged to the settlement scheme.

JOHNSON: [01:07:56] Right. And the motorcycle belonged to the settlement scheme. Had a GK.

KLEIN: [01:08:01] But Peace Corps had arranged to have that assigned to you?

JOHNSON: [01:08:05] Yes. And every volunteer in settlement was allowed, I think, 200 miles a month. Which they had to pay for.

KLEIN: [01:08:35] Oh, okay.

JOHNSON: [01:08:35] For private use.

KLEIN: [01:08:36] Okay. Okay. During your first year, was there a point when you sort of sat back and said, oh my God, I'm here, I'm doing this? I mean, was the, did you have a sense that it was happening? Did it change during the first year? It was tough at the beginning, easier, or?

JOHNSON: [01:09:01] Uh. Actually, it was great the whole time. I didn't, I didn't really have any major problems. Uh, the. Sometimes the moving. I lived in three different places, not to different locations, but three different sites on the settlement scheme. And that, that was bad. And particularly the last, the last couple of months that I was, that I was there. Just simply because it was more of a personal situation as opposed to. I was living with another volunteer and that.

KLEIN: [01:09:44] Oh, okay.

JOHNSON: [01:09:45] And that, um.

KLEIN: [01:09:46] Someone from the second group of settlement people?

JOHNSON: [01:09:49] I think it was, I think he might have been in the third group.

KLEIN: [01:09:52] Oh, okay. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:09:54] And actually he was, he was going to be the one that was going to be the technician on the water stuff and everything else after we put all this other stuff together.

KLEIN: [01:10:03] And you were.

JOHNSON: [01:10:03] Well, and I got put out the house that I was in before because we got a new settlement officer in charge and he wanted the whole house. So we had moved. I had to move up to this other one and then this guy came and, you know, but it wasn't, you know, made the adjustment and.

KLEIN: [01:10:21] You didn't have much choice, I mean, it was expected that.

JOHNSON: [01:10:25] I didn't have a choice. But I mean, it was fine. I mean, you know, one of the things that I, I had learned is that, you know, you adjust with what happens. So it wasn't no big deal.

KLEIN: [01:10:35] Did, did the group meet at different points during your service? Were there conferences or get-togethers?

JOHNSON: [01:10:45] There were, um. We had parties.

KLEIN: [01:10:52] Well, of course. I mean Peace Corps sanctioned conferences.

JOHNSON: [01:11:00] I think there were only, as I recall, I think there may have been only one during our, my tenure that was Peace Corps called, where we had to be.

KLEIN: [01:11:16] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:11:17] Until the end. Yeah, pretty much we were on, pretty much we were on our own. All the other meetings we went to were basically business meetings or that when we got people together or we decided we were going to meet in Nakuru or Nairobi or.

KLEIN: [01:11:31] Did you have much contact with Peace Corps staff?

JOHNSON: [01:11:38] Not, not really.

KLEIN: [01:11:39] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:11:40] I mean, you know, if we needed them, we talked to them, but, you know, they came out and visit. I mean, you know. You know, Tom, you know, came out to, to see me this one time.

KLEIN: [01:11:49] Right.

JOHNSON: [01:11:50] And, uh. Actually, I think that was about it.

KLEIN: [01:11:55] Probably the doctor, because he liked to travel. Campbell, was that his name? The hunter.

JOHNSON: [01:12:05] Campbell?

KLEIN: [01:12:06] Well, I could. Speaking of that, generally speaking, how was your health?

JOHNSON: [01:12:14] Fine. Had no problems with health.

KLEIN: [01:12:17] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:12:18] In fact, that, you know, it was funny. I developed malaria, but that was in the late eighties, and I'm not sure where I got it, whether or not it was in Africa on one of my trips or in Latin America on one of my trips in that short period of time. And there was six months between the time that I'd been to those places and the time that I got it.

KLEIN: [01:12:46] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:12:48] But I did not have any problems while I was there, even though it was, I was six months into the thing and found out that, uh, that our cook was using the water from the tap, which was not purified, to make ice.

KLEIN: [01:13:07] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:13:08] Because this ice was only used for booze, I guess that destroyed it so I never got sick.

KLEIN: [01:13:15] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:13:17] And no, I didn't, I did not have any health problems whatsoever.

KLEIN: [01:13:21] Uh huh. Did you get a major break between first and second year?

JOHNSON: [01:13:27] No.

KLEIN: [01:13:28] No, no travel outside Kenya or even inside?

JOHNSON: [01:13:34] Uh, there are a group of us that took one trip. We traveled throughout Uganda and went to the game, game parks and stuff like that. Went to the Congo and.

KLEIN: [01:13:50] Oh.

JOHNSON: [01:13:52] You know, we just rented a car and just sort of drove and we had a tent and we'd camp out at night and stuff like that. Uh, and then it wasn't until I guess the nearing the end of my service and I'd used up all, all of my time, for the most part. And a buddy of mine in the group, we, um, decided to take this trip. And we went from, I'd like to think it's the longest hitch that anyone's ever taken. We got, we hitched a ride in

Nairobi, went down through Ndare, went to Ngorongoro. Then we went to Zambia. Traveling through Tanzania.

KLEIN: [01:14:45] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:14:46] Then and then through Tanzania down to Victoria Falls. Had a difficult time getting into, um, Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, because we had no diplomatic, uh. This was during the time that we didn't have any diplomatic relations with them. We finally got across, stopped in, um, we couldn't find a hotel to stay in. There were three of us. Two Blacks, two whites, and that, um, and so we couldn't find a hotel that we could stay in in Southern Rhodesia right across Victoria Falls. So we traveled on. We found one of these hostels or, you know, roadside hotels. And we went in, we slept there. And in the middle of the night, the police came.

KLEIN: [01:15:41] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:15:43] And so we had to leave. [phone rings]

KLEIN: [01:15:47] Let me.

JOHNSON: [01:15:47] And so we had to, uh, go out and we wound up sleeping on the side of the road. And the professor that we were riding with, he slept in the car. We had this Volkswagen, but it wasn't a van. It was his, one of those station wagons.

KLEIN: [01:16:06] Yeah, little things. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:16:07] And so then we got up the next morning and we went to Bulawayo where we had to get petrol because that was very limited. And then we kept on down to Harare. And we said, okay, now what are we going to do? And decided that we'd stop at the first hotel and that one of us would go in and, and I. And so I went in and said, I'm looking for a hotel where we can stay. And they said, you found one. And so we then checked into this hotel and spent some time and then we left. I couldn't

go to South Africa at the time because you had to send the picture and everything else, they wouldn't let us in.

JOHNSON: [01:16:56] So we'd left this professor who was from San Jose State who was traveling and he was all education, he was all this stuff. And so that my buddy and I, we then were going on to Malawi and, um, and we thought we were going to take the bus to see the scenic route and everything else. They wouldn't let us go because going back to what I told you about in, um, when I was in college and about this conference. Well, I found out, and I didn't realize it was still in play, but I was persona non grata in all Portuguese territories because I was the one whose name was on all the correspondence and all the communications and things like that for this and with the Portuguese. So I, I could not, I could not go. So we just flew to Malawi from, from Harare and then we took a bus up there and.

KLEIN: [01:17:54] Quite a circuit.

JOHNSON: [01:17:55] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:17:55] But now this was after you were done as a volunteer or just?

JOHNSON: [01:17:59] Just before I finished. We did it that summer. Did it that summer. Because I had all that time that I hadn't used.

KLEIN: [01:18:06] Yeah. Two things. Do you have much impression or much contact with the group of Peace Corps teachers that came?

JOHNSON: [01:18:20] What do you mean by contact?

KLEIN: [01:18:23] I mean. Well, generalized, I mean.

JOHNSON: [01:18:25] Yeah, no, I knew a large part of the, of the teachers, stayed in contact with them. There were some that were close to me in proximity. We'd visit. I'd have them to my settlement scheme. I'd visit them at their schools.

KLEIN: [01:18:42] Right.

JOHNSON: [01:18:44] And that, you know, there are some I'm still in touch with it at this, at this point. So that there was that communication.

KLEIN: [01:18:56] As two years comes to an end, or as it's coming to an end, what kind of evaluation do you make of yourself and of the Peace Corps?

JOHNSON: [01:19:09] Of, of our group and what I saw. And I traveled and I probably visited most of our group at their, at their sites one way or the other. And we'd get on the weekends. And because, you know, unlike the teachers, we had, we had transport.

KLEIN: [01:19:30] Right, right.

JOHNSON: [01:19:31] We could use our *piki pikis*. And so and that really that really made a difference.

KLEIN: [01:19:36] Right.

JOHNSON: [01:19:37] And that, uh, I think for the most part that they gave a helping hand that made a difference, particularly in the future. Everything wasn't quite there.

KLEIN: [01:19:55] Right.

JOHNSON: [01:19:56] But I think that the, the groundwork that was laid really made a difference.

KLEIN: [01:20:03] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:20:04] And I guess I sort of say that because, one, I know most of them worked their butts off. Now, we had a couple that were sort of, a couple of them had to go home and things like that for other kinds of problems. But for the most part that they worked their butts off trying to do a good job and everything else. And I, I've seen the fruits of some of

those labors. Um, well, I clearly cannot take credit for what happened at Lessos. But right now, every farm does have water. I mean, that project did get completed.

KLEIN: [01:20:49] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:20:51] And that many of them have full running water in their homes and everything else on there. The place is, is, uh, they have their own post office now. They, you know, there most of the roads are paved. I mean, we, we put in roads that were more than everything else. The bridges are probably about the same. I mean, I don't think they've changed that much. They put a few more logs in there or something like that.

KLEIN: [01:21:25] But you've been back through the years?

JOHNSON: [01:21:28] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:21:28] Made a few trips. Do you have any idea how many Peace Corps settlement projects followed yours? You mentioned a group three.

JOHNSON: [01:21:40] Actually, we were the only one who did what we did.

KLEIN: [01:21:44] The across the board kind of settlement?

JOHNSON: [01:21:47] Right. Everybody else that came over after us who got involved in settlements or something like that were primarily cooperatives or technical people working with the water and different things like that. But who did what we did? I think we were about the only group.

KLEIN: [01:22:02] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:22:05] And we may have been the cause of that.

KLEIN: [01:22:08] Your success or your failure?

JOHNSON: [01:22:11] Well, there are some papers.

KLEIN: [01:22:15] Yes.

JOHNSON: [01:22:15] That were written, uh, that were not appreciated.

KLEIN: [01:22:25] Oh. This is new to me.

JOHNSON: [01:22:30] Well, at the end. At the end of our service.

KLEIN: [01:22:34] Right.

JOHNSON: [01:22:36] We were asked to reflect on by the ministry.

KLEIN: [01:22:41] Yes.

JOHNSON: [01:22:42] And the Peace Corps what we thought about settlement and everything else. And, and I guess that, I don't know what everyone else wrote, but I know what Tom Giddings and I wrote.

KLEIN: [01:22:56] Okay.

JOHNSON: [01:22:58] And Tom and I were fairly close to each other. He was in Ainabkoi. I was at Lessos and about 30 miles as the crow flies. And we were asked to do this paper on settlement. And what we pointed out, it was sort of like a, a management kind of paper that said what changes had to be made if settlement was going to work, you know. And we hit on some very bad notes, like, you know, people don't need to take tea breaks 40 times a day and have folk running around and that the records need to be, you know, made, made whole. I mean, I can remember times that I would go down to Nairobi armed with books to go through their records to get them clarified because, I mean, they were dunning people for this and saying people are doing this and things were not paid and we'd send all the stuff down there and it didn't, it didn't get in there.

KLEIN: [01:24:02] Right.

JOHNSON: [01:24:02] And so, you know, we just raised a lot of hell about stuff like that. And, uh, and so when they asked us to write, that's what we wrote. That's what we told them, told them what it was.

KLEIN: [01:24:11] But someone took it to heart, I mean, either they were offended or they?

JOHNSON: [01:24:15] They were offended, but that we would write that.

KLEIN: [01:24:17] Oh, okay. But did Peace Corps make the adjustments, saying that in fact there's truth in that?

JOHNSON: [01:24:23] No, Peace Corps. Peace Corps didn't really support that at all, I mean, because they were, they were catching hell. They didn't want, they didn't want the program to, you know.

KLEIN: [01:24:35] [inaudible] directed by them?

JOHNSON: [01:24:37] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that, you know, they were thinking, you know, could you have said it a different way? I said, well, it's the only way I know how to say it.

KLEIN: [01:24:45] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:24:46] Yeah. But we knew how to say it, and it was, you know, and Tom and I, you know, worked on it. And I think I still have a copy of the paper and I look at it now, it's so benign. I said, if I wrote that today.

KLEIN: [01:24:58] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:24:58] I mean, it certainly wouldn't sound like this. But they, they really did take offense at it, at what we wrote.

KLEIN: [01:25:05] But Peace Corps, obviously, in the long run, didn't hold it against you.

JOHNSON: [01:25:09] Oh, no.

KLEIN: [01:25:10] Tom went on to a Peace Corps career.

JOHNSON: [01:25:14] Uh, yeah, he was.

KLEIN: [01:25:14] Yeah, he was in Ghana with me.

JOHNSON: [01:25:16] Yeah. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:25:18] Well, you know Tom died.

JOHNSON: [01:25:19] Oh, yeah, yeah, that I know.

KLEIN: [01:25:22] And, um, what about you? Two years. It's been incredible, I gather. And you must have begun forming plans for a future. I assume you decided you didn't want to stay on beyond the whatever the tour was?

JOHNSON: [01:25:41] No, I. I had some other plans, and I did not. And I think most of other plans I never followed through with because I got waylaid.

KLEIN: [01:25:53] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:25:54] Because actually, I planned to go back to Washington, maybe work for Peace Corps, Peace Corps Washington, or do some other stuff. But then a friend of mine was running for mayor in the city of Cleveland and had lost in a prior year, prior election, and by a slim margin and was going to run again. And when I went back home, a lot of my friends were going to be involved in the campaign and everything else. So I decided that I would stay in Cleveland at the time, work to help get Carl Stokes elected the first Black mayor of the United States of a major city.

KLEIN: [01:26:32] Yeah, yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:26:33] And that's what I did. And so that and that led to a lot of other kinds of things, but never minimized my involvement in either

international affairs or the affairs of the Peace Corps, which I have been actively involved until today.

KLEIN: [01:26:49] Oh, yeah. Did you, did you go on for further study at some point?

JOHNSON: [01:26:54] I started, uh, and, and never finished. And again, it always seemed like it was for the wrong reasons that I chose this job.

KLEIN: [01:27:06] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:27:08] Literally. I was in law school.

KLEIN: [01:27:09] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:27:09] And, uh. When Carl Stokes became mayor, on this one day I had three meetings for job interviews and people wanted to talk to me. No. Two. Two. But I had three meetings. The third one, I did not realize they were going to offer me a job.

KLEIN: [01:27:33] Uh huh.

JOHNSON: [01:27:33] And I knew Carl also offered me a job in his cabinet. And the other one was going to work for this other organization as director of this education kind of thing. And that, then I went to this other place, which happened to be a foundation.

KLEIN: [01:27:53] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:27:55] And that the Cleveland foundation and unbeknownst to me, they offered me a job. I said, well, and I said, I'm not expecting, I wasn't expecting this. And I said, I have to let you know that when I leave here, I'm going over to City Hall to meet with the mayor and that. And they said, well, you know, I don't know what he's going to do. And I said, you know, I'm not sure either and what's really going to be offered. It's, I know it's going to be a high level appointment.

KLEIN: [01:28:26] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:28:29] And they said, well, the only thing is we're not going to get into a bidding war. That's it. And so when that happened, then I took about two weeks to decide. And I decided to go with the foundation because I figured that that would be better for me going to law school because I was going at night.

KLEIN: [01:28:52] Yeah. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:28:55] No.

KLEIN: [01:29:02] That didn't happen.

JOHNSON: [01:29:02] Not working for that foundation. I spent my time traveling a lot and involved a lot of activities, and I probably would have been better off going to the city. And so I just, one of, one of, one of them had to give, had to give. And I gave up, I gave up the law school. I never.

KLEIN: [01:29:17] When did you go back to Kenya?

JOHNSON: [01:29:21] The first time was probably in early seventies, and the last time was about '92.

KLEIN: [01:29:32] And was it on business, this trip in the seventies?

JOHNSON: [01:29:35] I always traveled on business.

KLEIN: [01:29:37] Okay, good. Did you get a chance to go back up to the settlement?

JOHNSON: [01:29:42] I'd been up there about four times.

KLEIN: [01:29:45] What was your first reaction or their reaction? Did anyone remember you?

JOHNSON: [01:29:51] Yes. Walked into the post office and the first person I see.

KLEIN: [01:29:55] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:29:55] Is one of the former staff who had a farm there. And we went back to his home and had tea and sat and talked about things. And of course, he tried to get me to help him find some money for some of the country, United States, to go to school, you know.

KLEIN: [01:30:16] Sounds familiar. I ask people, it's not always easy to answer. What do you think was the effect of having joined the Peace Corps on your life, your career, and what have you?

JOHNSON: [01:30:41] I. It reinforced for me the kinds of things that I wanted to do in life. And then secondly, that it also gave me an opportunity, particularly at the time in which I did it, was to step back and look at the United States in a context in which it was, it would have been difficult for me to do here.

KLEIN: [01:31:14] Mm hmm.

JOHNSON: [01:31:14] And that, and what this country was. And what I was in the country.

KLEIN: [01:31:24] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:31:25] And it's a luxury that one doesn't often get. And as a Peace Corps volunteer, you can do that. I don't know that you could do it that well even if you're in the military and you are stationed abroad, because you're in a different mode. But there when you have these lonely nights, you're reading these books, you're writing all these letters. There's no one else around you. And you begin to think about things, um, and, and you try and put them in perspective. Then it makes you realize certain kinds of things that you may not have otherwise. At least to the, to a, or you can take them to a different level. And I think that that's what, that's what happened.

KLEIN: [01:32:17] I don't know if you can respond to this, but did you have a, a special awareness or insight into the fact that you were a Black American serving in the Peace Corps? I mean.

JOHNSON: [01:32:32] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:32:36] Oh, okay.

JOHNSON: [01:32:37] And part of it is also because of my experiences prior to that.

KLEIN: [01:32:40] Oh, yeah. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:32:41] You know, whether I was recruiting someone, going out and everything else.

KLEIN: [01:32:46] Or echoing the discussion with Williams, I mean.

JOHNSON: [01:32:50] Right. And so I did that. And then experiences that I had overseas, you know, particularly that I had in Kenya, that where, you know, you know, people wanted to adopt me and all those kinds of things and that. But at the same time that in many respects I was also viewed as just an American. You know, *wazungu*, you know. So that you can be of but not be from. So that it, it. So it's sort of dependent upon the level. So it worked in my advantage and it worked for my disadvantage.

JOHNSON: [01:33:39] I mean, there was this one time in, we were at, uh, in Malawi traveling by bus, waiting for the bus next morning to go to Dar. And and my buddy and I, we were staying in this roadside hotel. And so we went into town, walked into town, we, and went to this, where all volunteers go, to a bar. And both of us spoke fluent Swahili. And we know at this border town that Swahili is spoken there. And we're both, you know, you know, Black. So, um, so we speak in Swahili, you know, you know, to the folk and everything else. They say, where are you from? Oh, we're from Kenya. Da da da da da. And so, uh, and then sometimes we spoke something in English and everything else.

JOHNSON: [01:34:33] We had a couple of beers, go back to the hotel. And when, oh, maybe just as we almost got settled in the bed, hear a car. Hear people get out of the car and they come marching down. You know, everything is wood. And so they have on boots and everything else. And we don't know what's, we just figured someone's coming in because, you know, you come in at all times at night and everything else at those places. And the police break in, open the door, and they have their guns drawn.

KLEIN: [01:35:14] Ooh.

JOHNSON: [01:35:16] And they tell us to get up and we get up and the first thing we do is reach for our passports. They say, who are you? And we get our passports and everything else, that's what we show them, that we have U.S. passports and everything else. And to make a long story short, is that some people that had been in the cabinet of Banda and had been ousted and were threatening to come back and it was close to President's Day or something like that. And so there was a lot of rumors and that, you know, the word went back to the police that they had these two.

KLEIN: [01:36:00] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:36:01] And they didn't know who we were. So they came to us. And so after we had this talk that, no, we, you know. No, it wasn't a race card, it was an American card that we pulled.

KLEIN: [01:36:13] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:36:14] And that, um, and so we. And so it turned out we got up, got dressed, and we went back to the pub with the police and had a drink.

KLEIN: [01:36:22] Yeah. Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:36:24] And kind of, but it was, that was, that was one scary moment that, at that moment.

KLEIN: [01:36:31] And coming back did you feel that you had, I mean certainly there was more than enough civil rights activity both before and after '64, '65. Did you feel that you had missed out or that you?

JOHNSON: [01:36:50] No. No, not at all. Um. I wasn't gone long enough to, to really have missed out and because I'd been involved before.

KLEIN: [01:37:00] Right.

JOHNSON: [01:37:01] And then certainly, given the way things were, there was still a lot to do.

KLEIN: [01:37:06] Oh, yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:37:06] So that. No, not, not at all. Not at all. And in fact, as I said earlier, that's one of the reasons that I went back to Cleveland, which I had not planned to at that time, to work specifically in Carl Stokes' campaign.

KLEIN: [01:37:26] One last question. Would, would you recommend that a young person today, 19, 20, 21, that they join the Peace Corps? If someone came to you and said, wow, you were in once.

JOHNSON: [01:37:41] I do it every day that I can.

KLEIN: [01:37:44] What, why, and what argument do you use or what point?

JOHNSON: [01:37:48] Well, some practical and some, uh, some idealistic. And that, um, is that I, I think that Peace Corps can be one of the great graduate degrees and graduate schools that you can go to. Um. It's still to me, to use an old cliché, the hardest job you'll ever love. But it's also one of the jobs that you have that you can learn so much about, also about yourself.

KLEIN: [01:38:35] Mm hmm.

JOHNSON: [01:38:36] And that while you may start out thinking you're going to save the world and help a lot of people, the real, the real deal is that you have not helped a whole lot and you're not going to make that much of a difference at this point, maybe in the long term like so many other things. But for you, it can mean a big difference in terms of how the rest of your life is going to be.

KLEIN: [01:39:02] Mm hmm.

JOHNSON: [01:39:02] And that it's that kind of, of, it's, Peace Corps can be an intervention in your life that can make a difference which will help you make a greater difference I think later on.

KLEIN: [01:39:14] Yeah.

JOHNSON: [01:39:16] It's, and I guess one of the examples is that at the conference in, um, of NPCA in June, the guest speaker or one of the main speakers is going to be the president of Peru. And the only reason that he is doing this is because, as you probably know, that he was taught by Peace Corps volunteers.

KLEIN: [01:39:46] In fact, I interviewed both of them.

JOHNSON: [01:39:48] Pardon?

KLEIN: [01:39:48] I interviewed both of them.

JOHNSON: [01:39:51] Oh, okay.

KLEIN: [01:39:51] We, uh.

[END OF INTERVIEW]