

Janet Gerardy Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Janet Gerardy
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Biographical Note

Janet Gerardy served as a Peace Corps volunteer in India from 1965 to 1967 on a poultry project.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Janet Gerardy

April 7, 2006
Denver, Colorado

By Joanne Roll

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

ROLL: [00:00:01] This is testing to see if this will work.

UNKNOWN: [00:00:07] You might want to try the microphone too.

ROLL: [00:00:11] Okay. Just a moment. This is a test to see how the recording is going to work. This is Friday morning, April 7, and this is the oral history project for the Peace Corps archives of the JFK Library.

ROLL: [00:01:09] This is April 7th, 2006, and we are going to be doing an interview for the Peace Corps archives at the JFK Library. And Janet, can I ask you just to give your name and your training, where you trained, and where you served? And the years?

GERARDY: [00:01:31] Sure. My name is Janet Gerardy, and I did my training at Davis, California, and I served in India and our group was India 13.

ROLL: [00:01:42] Okay. Now, Janet, what years? What year did you begin training and when did you go to India and when did you come back?

GERARDY: [00:01:55] We began training I think in February, maybe it was March, of 1965 at Davis. It was three months of training. And I remember it was May of '65, 1965, when we went to India, and I terminated in February or March of 1967. And then I traveled home through Asia and arrived back home sometime that summer, I believe.

ROLL: [00:02:23] Okay. What led you to join the Peace Corps?

GERARDY: [00:02:27] Oh, my goodness. Well, when I was in junior college, Peace Corps was new, and I had a couple of friends that went before me. And interestingly enough, all of us had had a professor that had been in India in the Second World War and talked a lot about India. So all of us were in love with India. All of us requested India. But one friend went to Cyprus and one friend went to the Philippines and I was the third one to ask for India and I got it so.

ROLL: [00:02:56] Where were you going? Where were you born and where were you living when this happened?

GERARDY: [00:03:00] I was born in Colorado, but I didn't grow up in Colorado. I grew up in Kansas. And then my parents had moved back to Colorado and I was living in La Junta, Colorado, southern Colorado. I went to the junior college there and I had finished the junior college and was sort of at odds as to what to do next, did not have money to go on to college. So that was also a way of getting a little money to go on to college. But it was a way of getting out of my hometown and going off and doing something. But I had also always wanted to travel.

ROLL: [00:03:31] What kinds of skills did you see yourself bringing to the Peace Corps?

GERARDY: [00:03:36] I guess I do, I don't recall thinking a lot about that at that age. Um. I think I was just more interested in travel. I had always been interested in people and people from other cultures. We had had

students from other cultures at the college in La Junta, and I certainly was surprised by the project I got offered because that was a poultry project. I did not grow up on a farm. I had never picked up a chicken. So I probably was more interested in languages and teaching and that sort of thing. And looking back from this point, I can see more what my skills were because I've always taught something. You know, in high school I taught swimming and now I teach ESL. But you know, I think I've always been teaching something all of my life.

ROLL: [00:04:21] Were you involved in 4-H at all?

GERARDY: [00:04:23] No, never. Never.

ROLL: [00:04:26] How did your family react? How did your friends react?

GERARDY: [00:04:30] Uh, I think most people were kind of in admiration and excited and probably envious and certainly lots of friends over the years have looked at it that way. I think they look at it as something they would have liked to have done, but see it as an impossibility or something. I'm actually surprised that my parents as I get older because I think my mother let go and let me do things very easily. But I think I would have trouble doing that as a parent, letting a young girl go off. But then I know it's over there and she probably didn't so.

ROLL: [00:05:04] What was the Peace Corps process like, the application process?

GERARDY: [00:05:07] I don't remember very much about the application process. I remember more about the training and I remember deselection was a big thing at that point.

ROLL: [00:05:16] Talk a little bit about that.

GERARDY: [00:05:18] Oh my goodness. Well, ours was a very large group, I think, I don't really know, but I think it was around 250 people that trained together. And it was wonderful because it was spring and summer and Davis, California, is a lovely place and we all had bicycles and we could

bike around the town and get together. So it was really fun. But everyone was very afraid of being deselected. I do remember that. And I remember we had big deselection interviews and I remember the interview. They asked me, well, what's a girl from a little tiny town like you are wanting to go overseas for? And I thought, well, what a strange question. You know, for me it was strange because I had always wanted to go overseas and I didn't see any difference being from a small town or anything else. But apparently they did. And I had worked at a drugstore in my hometown, and I do remember they came and interviewed the boss of the drugstore, who then later told me that's what he had been doing and I was, you know, it's like having an FBI checkup or something. You sort of wonder if.

ROLL: [00:06:14] It was.

GERARDY: [00:06:14] It probably was. But, you know, you sort of wonder why they're looking at you and things like that. So to me, it was strange.

ROLL: [00:06:22] Did you, were you afraid you'd be deselected?

GERARDY: [00:06:26] I think we all were. I think we all were. And I don't recall if they deselected people along the way. They probably did. And, you know, when people would just be deselected, you didn't know why or what happened to them and things like that. You know, I think I have a better view of that now because later when I came back from Peace Corps, I worked on some trainings. And I remember there was one that they were going to send people, I don't remember what country, but to villages. And they were very concerned about one girl because she simply couldn't catch on to speaking the language. And, you know, all of us were in favor of sending her anyway, but the psychiatrists said, you know, we're not here to make ourselves look rosy. We're here to make sure she's going to be comfortable to where we're sending her. And he said if she was going to a city, it might be different, but in a village that she would be really at a loss without language. And then I realized there was a reason why people sometimes are deselected, but I didn't have that perspective then.

ROLL: [00:07:21] What was your training like?

GERARDY: [00:07:25] Um, well, it was lots of fun. We had language teachers and we had poultry training. I remember there was an older man out in California that was doing the poultry training and he was an expert. But his definition of an expert was anybody who was more than 30 miles away from home, which I've always remembered that. And I very much remember the language teachers. They were wonderful. Some of them were wives of students that were going to the University of California at the time. And I remember being very fascinated with a number of things. One of the language teachers, I remember that when she would gesture with her hands that her, when she would put an open palm out, that her fingers absolutely tipped backwards. And I've often noticed that with people from India's hands. So very fascinating. And they would tell little stories that were traditional stories from India. And I remember liking that very much. I've always liked languages.

ROLL: [00:08:27] Did the training you receive prepare you for the assignment that you had in India?

GERARDY: [00:08:34] Both yes and no, I guess. I don't know how one ever prepares someone totally for an overseas and a different cultural experience, but we had good language training. It was in Hindi Urdu, and of course I was in a Punjabi speaking area. And if you're a native speaker of either of those languages, you can probably understand something of the other language. But of course, three months training does not teach you a language and Punjabi is still different than Hindi. So that was difficult. I think the technical training for poultry, considering I knew nothing about chickens, I actually had a pretty good training. I didn't fully need everything I was trained in when I got there. And the actual experience, of course, always ends up being a little bit different. There was a heavy emphasis on community development type of projects and I don't think to this day I fully understand what that is or what it's supposed to be. And there was a lot of joking among the trainees trying to figure that out.

GERARDY: [00:09:34] And I remember we went out to some villages or small towns in California. I think one of them was called New London. I may be

wrong, but anyway, these were areas where people from the dustbowl days had settled in California and we would go out trying to apply these skills and we had no idea what we were supposed to be doing. And I think that was difficult. But we did have an experience and I think it was one or two weeks long where we went and stayed in migrant labor camps, and I think that was actually very good preparation for India. The, you had to walk and get the water from a well, you know, there were only communal showers. It was very dusty, it was very hot, and you know, the food supplies were limited and we had to figure out how to do them and we were actually trying to do some of the Indian food. So I think that was very good preparation.

ROLL: [00:10:23] What was your initial entry into the country? What was your impression? What was that like?

GERARDY: [00:10:29] Unbelievable. We landed in May and it was incredibly hot. It was the middle of the night, I think 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. And it takes an hour or two to get processed with a big group like that through the airport in New Delhi. And then we were taken by busses, several busses, into the hotel. I think it was the Oxford Hotel. I may be wrong about that. But anyway, a large hotel in Old Delhi. And I had the feeling at the time, because it was getting dawn, and I had the feeling that in that ride, which was a rather lengthy one from the airport into the city, that we saw probably at least a small amount of everything we would be seeing in the next two years. And that included people sleeping outside on their *charpai*, a rope strung bed, uh, camels, ox, oxen pulling around the wells, people walking, people carrying things on their head. Oh my goodness. People going to the bathroom by the side of the road. Just about everything you can think of was in that ride going into New Delhi.

ROLL: [00:11:38] Were you met? Were you totally then being accompanied by Peace Corps staff or had you begun to meet some of the host country nationals?

GERARDY: [00:11:47] I think at that point when we took the ride in, we were just still meeting Peace Corps officials and we were in New Delhi I think two or three days. And we had some officials from the Indian government that

met us, I think the President of India and several other people at that time. And, you know, we walked out into Old Delhi. I remember one experience, I think it was the very first night I was there. A small group of us were walking in the bazaar and something suddenly went across my feet. And of course, I screamed. And it was a child who had one of those little wooden snakes on a string pulling it across from one side to the other. So that was I remember.

GERARDY: [00:12:28] And also in our language training, I remember that there was a phrase and it was [speaks Hindi], which meant, how much do the, what's the price? But we were asking the price of something called ber fruit, if I recall right. And none of us knew what a ber fruit was. So one of our reasons to go to the market that day was to find out what the ber fruit was. I think it took me another year before I actually got to see it because it's not very common in the market either. But it was a little purple fruit that grew on a tree.

ROLL: [00:13:01] Um, how did you, how did your assignments? How did you get your assignments and how did you first get to your site? And were you assigned alone or with a partner? What was that like?

GERARDY: [00:13:13] That's a pretty incredible experience too. I think the staff in India had been preparing our assignments for some time and I think we even got a written version of them maybe while we were still at training or in those few days in New Delhi. I've forgotten which. But I was assigned to a gram sevak training center, which is a center where people usually both men and women, or young men and women, come to get training to do work in the village. And they're trained in everything from childcare, nutrition, poultry, dairy projects, etcetera. But I didn't know very much beyond that. And it was, uh, the gram sevak training center was near Nabha in the Punjab. And after those three days in New Delhi, we were put on a train, the group that was going on up to the Punjab.

GERARDY: [00:14:06] And there had been a former volunteer named Ernest Peters, Petersen, Ernie Petersen, and I think he had been in Group III or something like that. But anyway, he had stayed on and was working with

Peace Corps. And we went up first to, I believe it was Chandigarh and, um. Or, yeah, I think it was in the area of Chandigarh where he had been assigned earlier. And then I think we stayed one night overnight there. And the person that, the Indian person from the site where we were to go came to meet us and pick us up there. And I remember several things. First of all, again, it was very hot. It was the time when the monsoon is due but had not hit yet. And they gave us little round plastic canteens to take water on the train. And within an hour it was scalding hot and you could hardly drink it. So, you know, it wasn't insulated or anything like that. We were all laughing about that and it was so hot we wanted to bathe in it, you know, and didn't particularly want to drink the boiling water and were very thirsty.

GERARDY: [00:15:12] Then we arrived to Ernie's site, which I recall was kind of a two story building, and he had an Indian cook who had prepared a meal for us. And I remember the cook had cut the vegetables in the shape of roses and flowers and things like that, and that was in the center of the table. And I think there were 13 or 14 of us that went to the Punjab. And then the next morning I met the principal of the gram sevak training center where I was to be stationed. And, um, I'm trying to remember his name. It doesn't come to me immediately. But anyway, this gentleman was a Sardarji, a member of the Sikh religion, and one of the five things that they do is they never cut their hair. So he had long hair wrapped in a topknot on his hair, and on his head, and wore a turban around his head.

GERARDY: [00:16:08] But and also they keep their beard usually and often they twist their beard or comb it different ways and twist it and wrap a kind of cloth around it to press it in the morning. So and then this cloth was wrapped around his beard and up over his head and tied in a great big bow up on the top of his head. And he looked like a giant Easter bunny. And I remember he was probably ten years older than I was, or maybe more. And I was rather, and he was shy and quiet. And I remember being rather uncomfortable riding on a bus back to my site with this person that I didn't know at all.

ROLL: [00:16:43] Now, you, at this site, you are going to be the only volunteer assigned to that particular?

GERARDY: [00:16:50] Correct. I think there had been three or four. I may be wrong about that. Maybe one, I don't know. But anyway, there had been some Peace Corps boys assigned there in an earlier group and they had started a poultry project there. There was an incubator there, and they would hatch out eggs and take day old chicks out to the villages, to youth clubs that they had started. And I don't know who those people were, but one of them I remember they referred to as Mr. Tom, and they all, like the local people, very much liked and respected Mr. Tom. And I think he may have married an Indian girl from there, but anyway, he was well respected, so that made it easier going to that site.

ROLL: [00:17:31] So did you live at the site?

GERARDY: [00:17:33] I did. And actually, I was probably one of the lucky people because I've heard lots of other Peace Corps volunteers talk about their accommodations. And this one actually had a little house that I believe had been built specifically for the Peace Corps. But I think it was because there were two or three guys that had lived in the house, but I was the only volunteer there at this time. And so I had that house to myself, but the house was not immediately available.

GERARDY: [00:17:59] And I remember my first accommodation for maybe it was a week, a few days anyway, was they had set up a bed in the, the. Well, she would be like the principal of the ladies' side of the gram sevak training center. And I slept there and I remember it was one of those rope strung chaff pie beds and it had a mosquito net up over it. And of course, being a typical American, growing up in the 1950s, I had my baby doll pajamas. And the next morning after the first night there, a bearer, like a servant, came in with a cup of morning chai, morning tea. And I was totally shocked, you know, some man walking into my bedroom, bringing me morning tea. But anyway, eventually I got into the house and that was nice.

ROLL: [00:18:44] What was the house like?

GERARDY: [00:18:47] Um, it was, I think, made either out of cinderblocks or concrete, and it had one, two, three, three main rooms and a little kitchen off the back. And the kitchen was also attached to a kind of back screened-in porch. And I remember several things about that. One is that there was a big coal pile out on that back porch that they used for the cooking, and there was a mouse that resided in that coal pile when I first moved in. And there was a space under the door that you could close between that back porch and the living room. But the mouse would come under that opening at night. And I eventually, because I would be sitting there reading, and I got a big stick so that I could just tap it on the floor and the mouse would go scurrying back out from under the door. So that was how I dealt with the mouse. Didn't know how to get a trap there, I guess.

ROLL: [00:19:40] Did you have electricity and running water?

GERARDY: [00:19:42] I did have electricity and I think, yes, there was running water. I think a little spigot down in the bathroom, which was a latrine, essentially, and that was out off the back yard. And I believe there was water, running water in the kitchen.

ROLL: [00:19:59] Did you do your own cooking or did you have somebody that cooked for you?

GERARDY: [00:20:04] When I first got there, I was very lucky because they, as I recall, they assigned a cook to me and it was an older man and he had been a professional cook for British people and things and actually was a very good cook and knew how to cook with coal and a little pump stove and, you know, would put a roast on that and let it cook all day. And so I had good food, but he didn't stay very long. Like after a month or two, he needed to go back to, I think he was from the Kullu Valley and he went back to, uh, I think his reason was for a daughter's wedding. But then I lost him as a servant and then I had to do my own for a while, which was very challenging because you have to go to the market. Everything's from scratch.

GERARDY: [00:20:46] I remember once being in the market, which was several miles away, and I saw a pumpkin and I thought, ah, I could make a pumpkin pie. So I managed to figure out what I, what spices and things I needed for that. Translated it with the dictionary, went to town, but that's when I discovered that nutmeg was indeed a whole nut and, you know, things like that that I had no idea before I went to India. I didn't know how to cook much before I went to India. My mother was a good cook, so I hadn't bothered to learn.

ROLL: [00:21:15] Did you take the bus to the market or did you have to walk or what was your transportation?

GERARDY: [00:21:19] Well, in those first times, usually it was by Jeep with somebody from that center. So it was only occasionally that you had a ride. Eventually, and I don't remember how, but I got a bicycle and we could bike into town. Or if you had a servant, which most of the teachers did have one, then you could send them of course. And it was very difficult to do work because the work with the poultry would be to outlying villages and youth clubs that had been started. So if you went out to a village all day, it was hard to have time to go to the market and get supplies and do the cooking. So one of the people, one of the other teachers eventually suggested that I hire one of the dhobi man's sons. That's a washerman. And I did. And I trained him. He wasn't a cook at all. But and that was actually more comfortable for me because I have two younger brothers and it was kind of like having your younger brother around and showing them how to do things. And hopefully I help them a little too, because I would teach them a little bit like the alphabet and writing and things that they didn't know.

ROLL: [00:22:22] Did you? What kinds of initial difficulties did you encounter that maybe you hadn't anticipated?

GERARDY: [00:22:29] Well, lots of things. First of all, the heat, going directly to India in the hot season was absolutely overwhelming. And, you know, those were in the days where we were hose. And so I remember that first few days in New Delhi, I was still wearing my hose. And, you know, most people in India wear sandals, which eventually I took off the hose and

wore sandals and accommodated more. But it was very difficult, the heat. And I got sick. And adjusting to the hotter food and just the differences in bacteria and things. And people would eat very late at night. And so I got sick, and I remember the people at the center were very worried about me. So they decided that it would be useful to send me up to the hills where it would be cooler. And there was a government lady official who happened to come through about that time and was riding in a jeep with her servant and her elderly mother, who I believe was a widow, and was kind of doing, what do you call that when you travel around and go visit all the temples? Kind of a pilgrimage.

GERARDY: [00:23:30] Anyway, they sent me with her to go up to the mountains to be cooler. But as I recall, there were about seven people in that jeep and it was anything but comfortable. And we would be in that bouncing hot jeep all day long. And the accommodations where we stayed were not good and I probably became more sick from that. So first thing was just trying to get myself well again and so I could do anything.

ROLL: [00:23:52] Did you have access to medical care?

GERARDY: [00:23:56] Um, not that I knew where to get or go. The teachers and the principal eventually brought some Indian doctor and he said that I needed to be kept cooler and I needed to drink more liquids. So I remember they would squeeze by hand oranges and give me this orange juice and they would bring ice, which you had to buy in a great big block. And they put it in a tub and put a fan behind it to blow toward me to lower the temperature of the room. I don't think it did much of that, but anyway. I didn't actually find out until my time of terminating that they had paid for this out of their own money. And at the very end of my two years, then they were saying, we hate to ask you this, but they needed to ask for that small amount of money back.

ROLL: [00:24:37] To be reimbursed?

GERARDY: [00:24:38] So, you know, yeah, to be reimbursed. So, you know, lots of things that you don't know how to do when you first get there. And I think I was very lucky to have their help because I think it's very easy to die of

tropical diseases. And who knows what I really had. It may have just been dehydration, but that can make you very ill.

ROLL: [00:24:54] Was there a Peace Corps medical help available at all or how did that?

GERARDY: [00:24:58] There was a Peace Corps doctor in New Delhi. But, uh, you know, I don't even remember if I knew that at the time. But, you know, eventually then, of course, if we had something, we could go to New Delhi.

ROLL: [00:25:09] Well, it sounds like you were treasured.

GERARDY: [00:25:12] Thank you.

ROLL: [00:25:15] By that time, were you communicating well? Did you feel comfortable with the language? You said that there was a difference between the language you had been taught and the language that was being spoken where you were assigned.

GERARDY: [00:25:25] No, I don't think I'm that good in Hindi or Punjabi, even at the end of my two years. Of course, you get where you can get by and buy things in the market and things like that. But I was never fluent. But one reason you don't become fluent is that a lot of people that are educated in India speak English. That's not true out, well, it may be now, but out in the villages you did not find people at that time that spoke English. But all of these people that were teachers and the veterinarian that were attached to the center could speak English.

ROLL: [00:25:55] What was the typical day like?

GERARDY: [00:25:57] Well, I don't know if there is a typical day in India, but the way we started was, and this was kind of the principle I think, trying to figure out what to do with me. There was a veterinarian that was attached to the center and was one of the teachers, but he primarily taught poultry and dairy science to the boys side. And the boys side was literally on one side of the street and the girls side was on the other side of the

street, and they were very separated. And of course, the principal thought that I should be teaching the girls' side. Well, the trainees, of course, did not speak English. So the first thing they wanted me to do was teach about poultry to the women teachers who did speak English. So I would prepare little lectures and they would very kindly sit and listen to my little lectures. I'm not sure how interested they really were in that or the poultry.

GERARDY: [00:26:48] And occasionally they would send me out to a village with the veterinarian who didn't seem to be very interested in working with me. And that was very hard because I really didn't understand what I was supposed to be doing out in the village. And I thought, well, he's a veterinarian and surely knows more than me. But a couple of things that I would say about that. One is that working with the Indian women who were often asked to teach something to the trainees. And even if they knew absolutely nothing about it, they would open a book, figure out what they could, and start teaching it. So I learned a good lesson from that. And the second thing is, I was very fortunate that another man who was a veterinarian at a government poultry farm down the road actually came and replaced that first veterinarian.

GERARDY: [00:27:37] And he was quite a different person and he was much more open and was interested in working with me. And he would take me out to villages and he would introduce me to some girl in the village and explain that I might come back on my own. And if I did, would she take me around to the families that were keeping poultry and the youth clubs and so forth? And based on that, eventually in the second year, I moved out to a village where there was a teacher at the local elementary school who was interested in having a woman, because I don't think they had any women teachers even that would work with the girls. And as far as he was concerned, it wasn't just for poultry. It was anything. We could teach English, we could teach volleyball, just, you know, some interaction with the girls in the village. So eventually I did that.

GERARDY: [00:28:27] But Dr. Dalrymple was the second veterinarian that I worked with, and maybe about ten years ago he came here to Colorado. He had the opportunity to go to CSU as a visitor for three months, and we got to

see each other again. And we've remained in touch over the years. And at that time that he visited Colorado, he told me how much that, uh, my being in India had influenced his life and that he had gone on to go back for graduate degrees and things like that. That really surprised me very much.

ROLL: [00:29:03] Gosh, yeah. It seems like I'm going to stop just for a second. [tape break] We're starting on the second side of the tape, and I want to go back a little bit. You had talked about being sick and how the people in your site had helped you and they'd even brought an Indian doctor. You didn't, it didn't occur to you or you didn't have a way of accessing medical help through the Peace Corps. How, help, if you had wanted, if you had needed to get more medical care, how would you have done that? How far were you from Peace Corps medical care?

GERARDY: [00:29:48] Um, well, there was a Peace Corps doctor in New Delhi, and I don't remember. I think that was either 3 hours by bus or 6 hours by train. And there was a telephone at the center where I was. And I remember about the telephones that you had to absolutely yell into the phone, even with local calls, to be heard. But I'm sure if it had been an emergency, you know, I could have requested that they call the Peace Corps in New Delhi. I don't think it occurred to me. You know, first of all, I was just sick, you know, diarrhea, heat, all of that. And so you don't feel like getting on a bus or train and going anywhere. And it just probably didn't occur to me to try to go to New Delhi or something.

ROLL: [00:30:26] The other thing I was going to ask, if you could elaborate a little bit on, you replaced male volunteers and when you talk about your initial contact, they very much want you to work with women. And when you were taken out to the village you were, to one of the villages, you were introduced to a young woman who was going to be your liaison. How, did the male volunteers work with women when they were there? Or were you brought in to kind of work with women to follow up with the work they had done? It seemed like there was a lot of gender specific.

GERARDY: [00:30:59] I really don't know. It's like I know that the male volunteers that had been there before were highly respected, which made it easier

for me to come. And they had started youth groups, was my understanding, out in the villages, but I actually was not given like from Peace Corps, as I recall, very much information about that. And I don't remember the Indians telling me very much about those youth groups or anything. When I went with that second veterinarian that came, we sometimes went out where some of his trainees had started youth groups and they had distributed day-old chicks. And I remember because we would go out and find chicks hanging, you know, in baskets like a bird cage and under baskets and in all kinds of crazy situations that, you know, they didn't always know how to care for them, or in trying to protect them from getting eaten by dogs or other things, they did things that we wouldn't have approved of. But I don't remember knowing very much about what the volunteers that came before me had done.

ROLL: [00:31:56] The veterinarian that you went out with, his youth groups that his trainees had set up, were they all male or were they?

GERARDY: [00:32:03] Yes.

ROLL: [00:32:04] Ah.

GERARDY: [00:32:04] Yes. And I don't remember any girl youth groups or anything like that. And I guess it never occurred to me to start those, looking back. Um, hmm. Interesting.

ROLL: [00:32:15] But yet when you, in the training group, you were asked, rather at the training center, you were asked to train women or you worked with women? Or maybe I didn't quite understand how that went.

GERARDY: [00:32:26] Well, I think neither the Indian people on the staff at the gram sevak training center nor I knew exactly what I was supposed to be doing there. And so I think just in exploring the possibilities, they asked me to work with some of the women staff and give some lectures on poultry to them. And I think in turn they gave some of those lectures to the women trainees. You know, whether any of that ever did anything or not, I don't know. And, you know, again, in going to the village, you would just meet different circumstances in different villages. And there

were several villages where he would introduce me to a young lady in the village, but the particular village where I ended up, I just made, for whatever reasons, a good connection with the principal of the elementary school there who was interested in helping and having a woman teacher there. And that helped. And then the particular young lady that they introduced me in that village probably was my best friend in India later.

ROLL: [00:33:26] Well, let's, let's talk a little bit about how you went out to the village. This was in your second year?

GERARDY: [00:33:32] Well, we went, you mean when I moved to a village?

ROLL: [00:33:35] When you moved to a village.

GERARDY: [00:33:35] Yeah, that was in the second year, as I recall.

ROLL: [00:33:37] And what did you do in the village? What, how did that work? How did that come about? And why did you want to move and what did you do when you got there?

GERARDY: [00:33:46] Well, that was interesting. This principal had asked if we could do that. And I don't know whether he asked for somebody to come out and stay or to go back and forth. But anyway, somehow they negotiated a space. And the space that I ended up using, they had a sewing teacher that came from Padijala, which is a nearby town, and she gave sewing lessons once in a while. And I think she came maybe once a week or once a month. And there was a big, like the traditional Moslem [Muslim] gateways into a village, that style of architecture. And there was a room up above that gateway, and that's where the, part of it was an open space with no roof. And then there was a room on either side, and that's where the sewing teacher would give her lessons. So they thought that would be a good place for us to be also. So I stayed in those rooms and it was a marvelous place to be because the very first days that I moved into that site, you could look out from that gateway and everything that came and went through the village.

GERARDY: [00:34:47] And they had the Ramlila, which is a performance of the story of Ram [Rama], the very first three days I was there in the evening. And there was a kind of a walled little platform area that extended out from the gateway, and that's where the performers used it like a stage to give the performance. And then people from the village would bring the *charpais*, the rope strung beds and, or just sit on the ground in the open area out in front of that gateway and watch the performance. All of the performers in that story were males, and some of them would dress as women as part of the performance. But, you know, the very first day I watched that entertainment and the crowds out there, so that was a very interesting place to live. But we would stay there. I say we because later another volunteer who had been in Rajasthan joined me and we would stay in the rooms and stay like four or five days and then go back to the training site on the weekends or things like that.

ROLL: [00:35:46] You were in a Muslim area, that was the religion?

GERARDY: [00:35:49] No, uh, most of it as far, well. I don't know a lot. These are some of the things that I didn't always know. Of course, India separated from Pakistan in 1947, and there were probably people who had been Muslim living in the area that went to Pakistan and vice versa. And I only know that from people talking to me. Actually, that second veterinarian that I worked with who was a little older than I was, remembered as a child sitting on a bridge and seeing dead bodies float down the river, of people being killed, because a lot of people were killed on both sides in that movement. So probably there had been Muslim people there. But because that's, Punjab is fairly near the border area, I would doubt that there's many Muslims there now. You know, we saw Muslim people in the traditional Muslim dress on trips to New Delhi, but I think most of the people in my village were either Hindu or Sikh, and that's, Punjab is a largely Sikh populated area.

ROLL: [00:36:50] How did that impact the, what women were allowed to do in? How that, how people may have viewed you, or were you just seen as being totally outside that culture so that none of the regular norms applied to you?

GERARDY: [00:37:07] No, the norms applied because, you know, and I don't know whether that's necessarily Muslim influenced or, you know, Hindu influenced or something, but traditional culture, because I remember that my mother had made some little flowery skirts and blouses out of cotton to wear in this hot climate. And that was fine when I was at the center, but when I first went out to the village, I wore these same clothes and I remember older Punjabi women coming up to me and elbowing me in my ribs and, you know, pointing down at my bare legs from the knees down. And these were not short skirts, but they felt that I should be covering my legs. So eventually I ended up wearing a shalwar kameez, which is the traditional bloomer like pants and a split dress with split sides over it. And the chunni, I think they call the scarf that you wrap around your head and things. That scarf that you wrap around your head has a lot of practical uses because it's very dusty, and you can wrap that around your hair and your nose when you're riding on a jeep or walking in and out in the hot sun and things so.

ROLL: [00:38:17] Do you think the fact that you were a woman hindered your ability to teach or to work with?

GERARDY: [00:38:24] I don't think it hindered my ability or I wouldn't choose to use that word. I think that it's different what you can do as a female and a male. I mean, that's everywhere in the world. But, uh, you know. Hmm. How to answer that. You know, like at the school, I think I ended up teaching the girls more than the young boys. And I remember that you get uncomfortable. You know, I'm a curious person by nature. And so I like to stare at people, you know, put me in a bus station or a train station, I'm going to be looking at the crowd. But you eventually learn there and, well, I shouldn't say eventually, rather quickly that you have less direct eye contact with men and you tend to look away or avoid eye contact and things. And I think these are things you just kind of naturally pick up in the situation, but I don't think it totally limits your, your ability to work.

GERARDY: [00:39:18] For example, there were things that surprised me. Women, Indian women, can be rather assertive, in my opinion. And, you know, there are things that were even more open there than here. Like I

remember there was a huge emphasis on birth control because of the population in India. So there would be billboards advertising birth control, which certainly, you know, in the early 1960s that was not the case in the United States. And things like vasectomies and that were much more openly talked about in India. But that's at a public level. You know, on a more individual level, of course, people can be very shy. And, you know, traditionally in some villages, the women were protected from the view of men coming into the home and things like that, but not as much as other countries I've heard about. For example, I don't think that's as much so in India, at least where I was, as it was in countries like Afghanistan and things from what I've been told.

GERARDY: [00:40:16] And one thing too, the Sardarjis from the Sikh religion often are taxicab drivers and things in other countries. So many of them have been outside the village and brought some of that information back in northern India. So I don't think that everybody was completely traditional. But I have had people, you know, that didn't want women in their village and things confront you out in public. And that is a very difficult situation.

ROLL: [00:40:46] Give an example.

GERARDY: [00:40:48] Uh, like after I had been there a year, we helped with a training for a new group of volunteers that were coming into the country. And I lived with two of those girls in a little house in Chandigarh for, I think the training we did with them was for a week or two. And one day we went on our bicycles into the market just to get food supplies and things, and somebody that just totally disapproved of us for whatever reasons, whether it was because we were women or Americans or what, confronted us in the marketplace and was just, you know, causing a scene and other people coming. And it was very uncomfortable. And, you know, I just got out of there as quickly as possible, was my solution.

ROLL: [00:41:28] Can you give an example of what a typical day would be like when you were working at the training center, and then what a typical day would be like when you were out in the village?

GERARDY: [00:41:38] Well, I'll try. As I said, there's not a really typical day, but for example, uh. Usually people, because it's a hot climate, people get up very early and start things early. So the classes and things that were given with the trainees were usually early in the morning. So we would wake up at 5:30, 6:00, and, you know, have our breakfast or our tea, and then the classes would start with the women's side or the men's side. And for example, on a particular day, I might be going over to the women's side to observe or participate in their classes or demonstrations because they taught other things besides poultry, like food, nutrition, childcare and things. And so I might be involved with that or working out in the kitchen garden. They had demonstration plots.

GERARDY: [00:42:29] Or on other days I would be going with one of these male veterinarians out to visit a village or two or three villages, and we would be out for most of the day, and we would go find the people who were keeping chickens in the village, and we might be going out to vaccinate those chickens or to advise them about feeding them or something like that. And then, uh, let's see. And there were other days like where they had a youth festival I remember where lots of youth clubs came from various villages and participated in races and movies and things like that at the center. And sometimes at night the various teachers would invite us and like we might sit out and a group of us would do the old hand-crank ice cream making, or they might have us show slides at a outdoor theater for both the boys and girls side and activities like that. Or ride our bicycles to the market. I remember going in to get tea or samosas, my favorite snack.

GERARDY: [00:43:31] And then when I moved out to the village, um, I did. There was another couple that were Peace Corps volunteers in another location, and the man was an artist. And so he had given me some ideas to do at the elementary school. And so we might go over to the elementary school and do some things with crayons and art or English lessons. Everybody always wanted to learn English. Or, you know, I learned a lot in the village. Like we would go out to the fields and we watched them cutting the sugar cane and making brown sugar in the fields. Or, um, you know, we had a chance to help participate in planting rice where you stand in the water. And that's an interesting experience

because it's very slick to stand there in about a foot of water. And it's very beautiful at that time of the year. The monsoon clouds come in and the fields turned green. Or also they grew cotton in that area and they grew peanuts. So we learned how they go out and pick cotton and we might participate with that. So there was just a lot of getting acquainted with people in the villages and participating in the agricultural world that exists there.

ROLL: [00:44:40] What was your leisure time like and were you interacting mainly with host country nationals, or was there also a Peace Corps community that you could visit with or have friends?

GERARDY: [00:44:52] Well, locally, when I just stayed there, first I was just by myself for a long time. And then I don't remember how long, maybe two or three months after we got there, there was fighting between India and Pakistan, and we were called into New Delhi at one point and had to stay there for a while and they had blackout and so forth.

ROLL: [00:45:11] Let me interrupt. Can you tell me exactly how that evacuation worked, how you were notified, and how you got to New Delhi?

GERARDY: [00:45:19] I don't really recall. I suppose that they either just called the center and we were informed that we had to go to Delhi or something like that. I don't really remember how I got the notice. And then, you know, but people from all of the Punjab area were called in. And I remember after that one of the Peace Corps boys in my group had been stationed up at Amritsar on the border, near the border, and they didn't allow him to go back to that area. And he then was stationed at the same town of Nabha at the government poultry farm. So that ended up being a very good friend that I could occasionally share meals with or ride bicycles with and so forth.

ROLL: [00:46:02] Were you afraid, when you were?

GERARDY: [00:46:06] Uh, I think I was too young to be afraid. You're sort of invulnerable at that age. But I do remember when we were in New Delhi at the hostel, which they had there, because it was very hot we would

put our beds up on top of the roof and sleep outside. And I remember on one of the nights we were awakened in the middle of the night and we heard like gunfire. And I remember that people from around the area in New Delhi would come around and make sure that the lights were all off and that you were observing blackout and had the blackout curtains up and things like that. But other than that, one time of hearing some gunfire or something, which was probably from planes in the air, I don't remember being afraid. But I remember people in New Delhi were kind of nervous and afraid, and afraid of foreigners, and people would be afraid that maybe we were Pakistanis. I don't think they even realize fully what a Pakistani looked like.

ROLL: [00:47:02] How did the people in the training site react when Peace Corps evacuated you?

GERARDY: [00:47:08] I don't remember much about that. I think we were just so happy for a lot of us to be together again in a hostel that we were enjoying the time in New Delhi and not very aware of those things.

ROLL: [00:47:21] Then when you went back, how did, how did that happen, that you went back?

GERARDY: [00:47:26] I don't know whether the fighting stopped, but eventually we were sent back and I don't remember much about that either, to tell you the truth.

ROLL: [00:47:37] Okay. Now, what was your? We were talking about leisure when you mentioned kind of as an aside, you've been evacuated because of violence.

GERARDY: [00:47:44] Right. Um. Yeah. You were asking me if it was mostly with people locally. When I stayed there the first year, yeah, it was all with people that were local. And, you know, sometimes the women got together to sing songs and do music. I think they had kind of an accordion or something like that that they played. And, uh, what else did we do for entertainment? You know, just visiting mostly and taking walks, lots of long walks and things in the evening. And oh, that was one

thing I do remember about the difference between males and females is because Indians often, when you go for a walk, hold hands. And I wasn't bothered by another woman holding my hand, but the male volunteers were usually very bothered by a male Indian wanting to hold their hand.

GERARDY: [00:48:29] But anyway, as far as leisure, you know, singing is a popular group activity and it's kind of assumed that people can sing. And I'm not considered a good singer here and therefore I don't know many songs. So I remember I often sang Christmas songs when I was asked to, you know, do my share of the singing. But it was fun being with the other people that were just the trainees and things.

ROLL: [00:48:53] And then did that change? Were there, did Peace Corps volunteers come into the area and did you meet?

GERARDY: [00:48:58] There was a girl that had been trained in a kitchen gardening project and originally been in Rajasthan. [coughs] Excuse me. And she was not very happy there for some reasons. And so they sent her to my area, and this is when I was just beginning to move out into the village. So we did a kitchen garden demonstration project outside in that area that I had talked about, outside the gateway.

ROLL: [00:49:24] I get the impression that you were very happy while you were there. Is that my impression or?

GERARDY: [00:49:29] I think that's the impression that one has after any travel, when you come back and look at it in retrospect. Um, I don't think I was unhappy there, although I think there was some very difficult times. You know, I think I'm a person that's generally happy by my nature. But there were lots of difficult times too.

ROLL: [00:49:46] What are those difficult times, do you think?

GERARDY: [00:49:49] [clears throat] I'm sorry, I've got to catch. Um. I think, first of all, when you're stationed somewhere by yourself and in a different culture, it can be very lonely and you have to depend on your own resources. It's not always clear what you're supposed to be doing, and

therefore sometimes you don't feel like you're accomplishing much and that this is a very old culture that's not changing very fast and your impact's not a lot. And, you know, a lot of my leisure time was spent just reading or things like that because you just don't know what you're supposed to be doing.

ROLL: [00:50:27] Were you? Here we go. Janet, where did you get the books? You're talking about doing a lot of reading. What kind of reading material was available? How did you get it? Was it pertinent to the work you were doing or?

GERARDY: [00:50:44] We were given a book locker, which was a black little cardboard shelf about three feet high and about two feet wide that was filled with paperbacks, and that was given to each site by the Peace Corps. And I think many of the books were classics. And I remember reading one called The Tin Drum, which was totally not understandable to me at the time. I remember a volunteer giving me and telling me about Lord of the Rings and wanting me to read it and had said to take all three volumes. And I thought, oh, just give me one. And if I'm interested, I'll come back for the others. And reading that in India was very interesting because of course there are all these different kinds of people and creatures in that book and going along on a bus in India and seeing people in bright colors from Rajasthan and Gurkhas and all kinds of different costumes, you could relate to that book. And so I did read it and then couldn't wait until I got to the second and third volume. But we had a lot of time on our hands, so it was a good time to read.

ROLL: [00:51:46] So when you, in your second year, you said that Peace Corps volunteers in the area, that there were more opportunity to be with Peace Corps volunteers in the area?

GERARDY: [00:51:56] Well, there was the boy that was about ten years older than me that had been stationed up at Amritsar, was stationed at the government poultry farm nearby, just down the road. And then the girl that had been in Rajasthan came and lived with me. And there was another boy from my group that was in Patiala, which was, I believe, about ten miles away, ten or 15 miles away. And there was another girl

from a different group that was at an orphanage in Patiala. So that little cluster of people often got together. And then there was only about, I would say, about 14 of us that were stationed in the Punjab from that original group. And there was an older couple in Chandigarh, I believe they were in their sixties, and another girl that worked with a goat project that lived in Chandigarh. So there were other volunteers in the area.

GERARDY: [00:52:45] And then the couple that I mentioned that, the artist and his wife, they were a little further away. I'm trying to remember the name of the place they were. It's between New Delhi and where I was. Near Ambala. That's not the exact location, but it would be near there, and I went to visit them sometimes like on the weekend or things like that.

ROLL: [00:53:07] Do you think that contact with the other volunteers was productive or that it may have hampered you in terms of relating to host country nationals?

GERARDY: [00:53:17] Um, I think it was productive in the sense that it keeps your sanity, for one thing. And, you know, I think people from a culture share a kind of sense of humor and things. I remember being at the hostel in New Delhi once, maybe it was during that evacuation time or another time, and at the breakfast table they had cornflakes, which I think was kind of a British leftover tradition. And of course you had to boil the milk there. So it was served with hot milk and ends up tasting kind of like cardboard in hot milk. And plus often we had diarrhea. And that would be the topic of the conversation around the meal, which is probably not a normal topic of conversation. But you can all identify and, you know, there's a sense of humor and joking and things that keeps your perspective, I think.

ROLL: [00:54:02] And you were 23 when you first went over?

GERARDY: [00:54:05] I was 23, I think, when I, uh, I think I was 22 when training started and 23 before that finished and 25 then when I terminated.

ROLL: [00:54:13] And did you have any romantic attachment?

GERARDY: [00:54:16] Many.

ROLL: [00:54:20] Do tell.

GERARDY: [00:54:20] Well, I'm not sure I'm going to put all of those on the tape.

ROLL: [00:54:23] Just to give an idea of how.

GERARDY: [00:54:26] No, I think at that age you're often attracted to other people. And there were several of the volunteers that I was attracted to. There was a little group of us that often traveled together. At the time, there wasn't any romantic involvement. But Tom O'Connor, who was the one that was stationed there with me, who was about ten years older, I think he was very attracted to me. And I remember when we were in New Delhi with the evacuation process, you know, the Peace Corps wanted us to keep a little bit busy. And so they sent us over to paint the doctor's house. And there were several of us and I remember.

ROLL: [00:55:01] The Peace Corps doctor's house?

GERARDY: [00:55:02] Yeah, the Peace Corps doctor's, the interior of his house. So there was a small group from my original group that were over there painting the house, and something got said about dating and things. And I made the comment that I only like to date people my age, not somebody a whole lot older. And later, Jane, uh, I can't think of Jane's last name, but she was the one that did the goat project, made the comment that she thought I had hurt Tom's feelings. And I wasn't aware that he liked me at that time, but obviously he did. And then, uh, but Tom O'Connor was kind of my buddy that often traveled when we went to conferences around the country. And Kurt and Lois, Kurt Nelson, who was the artist and his wife Lois, often the ones that traveled with us. And then there was a tall guy, Bill Moore, that was stationed up in the Kullu Valley that often traveled with us. But anyway, at various times I was attracted to various people, and Bill Moore was one of those people.

ROLL: [00:56:00] And what happened after Peace Corps? Did those relationships continue or?

GERARDY: [00:56:05] Well, I actually traveled home through Asia to Thailand and Japan, and I traveled with Bill during that time. I'm not in contact with him now, but he did visit Colorado after that and, you know. And I still occasionally correspond with Tom O'Connor, the one that was stationed where I am. And he's visited Colorado several times. Kurt and Lois Nelson, I had, you know, made some phone calls and exchanged letters over the years, but we had kind of lost contact for a while. And then about five or six years ago, I went out to California and they ran a daycare center called Chocolate Chips and I visited them. And I know it had been about 30 years since we saw each other because I had not met their daughter, who was 29 at the time. But it was a very meaningful reconnection.

GERARDY: [00:56:57] And I found that those people we made friendships with long ago that there really was some basic values and things that we shared because it just picks right up again as if we'd never been apart. And Lois, that friend, has since died of a brain tumor. But I went out and was part of her care near the end of her life. So it was a very meaningful. Sometimes you feel like it was a meant-to-be thing.

ROLL: [00:57:25] Let me take you back to when you were in India in the sixties. You were in India during the time that the U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated. Were you aware of that? How do you think that might have impacted how people saw you? Was that ever, was that part of conversations you had with those country nationals? Was that, or not?

GERARDY: [00:57:50] Well, during my training, that was something very definitely on the minds of some of the male people that were volunteering, because many of them would have had to go to the draft otherwise. I don't remember being questioned a lot about it in India, but then when I was traveling home, I remember when we were in Thailand there were people that were on their R and R leave that had been soldiers in Vietnam. And we met some of. [tape break]

ROLL: [00:58:20] And we're continuing with Janet, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in India. Janet, could you maybe give a real brief summary of

how things were at the end of your first year, how you might sum up, and then how you felt at the end of your tour, your sense of achievement or failure?

GERARDY: [00:58:41] I think at the end of the first year, it seemed like that year had taken forever. And you feel kind of discouraged because you're not sure you're accomplishing anything and you're not sure even what you're supposed to be accomplishing. And so I think I felt very frustrated. But the second year, I think, went very quickly. And you're not expecting that because the first year took so long and it just goes whizzing by. And maybe because I was feeling more comfortable, you know, it's definitely easier to go into that hot monsoon season when you've been there, going into it gradually and you've learned how to adapt and what to wear and how to get out of the sun and how to keep your liquids up and things like that. But the second year and being out in the village, I think I really enjoyed it very much.

GERARDY: [00:59:25] There's still hard times, but you know, I think every place that you stay in life has its own beauty. And looking back at it from the perspective of my age now, I realize how much more we were out in nature than I am here living in a city, and how I almost knew the phases of the moon. And when the sun, and the beautiful sunsets and beautiful moon rises, and taking bicycle rides along the canal and seeing peacocks dancing out in the monsoon. There just are a lot of lovely things that I can sort out from this perspective, from the negative things that I might have been feeling at the time.

ROLL: [01:00:07] At the end of your tour, what was your, what was your sense of achievement?

GERARDY: [01:00:15] We had a termination conference down in Kerala with some of the other groups that had gone with us, done the training with us. And I remember one of the things that we were asked is what kind of things we thought should have been different or improved. And one of the things that seemed to be a consensus for a lot of us was that we should have been more technically prepared. For example, the Peace Corps poultry projects. We had been taught how to vaccinate birds, how to feed birds,

and things like that. But the poultry had grown phenomenally in India and really what they needed at the time were market experts and things which we were not. So we felt sometimes inadequate for what we had meant. But I don't know if that would be my perspective today.

GERARDY: [01:01:03] I think that looking back, that I think the impact that one has is much more individual. And the veterinarian that I had worked with actually had a chance to come to the United States to Colorado State University once. And he told me, you know, the personal effect that I had had on his life of being more interested and having a different perspective about foreigners. Like he had only heard of British people at a distance before us and had always thought that they were very aloof and things. So meeting an individual American and becoming more acquainted and things had affected his life. And, you know, having had ESL students now for many years, English as a Second Language, I think that the impact that we have is more individual. But at the time, of course, I thought India was a 2,000 year old culture and that my impact was nearly zilch.

ROLL: [01:01:59] Were you, did you have any regrets about joining the Peace Corps?

GERARDY: [01:02:04] At the time, hmm. I probably did at the time, but I don't now. And now looking back it just seems like it was all part of a pattern that was meant to be, because I've gone on to do other things like teach in China and work with Kosovar project when the refugees came into the country. And I've been in English as a Second Language teacher and I studied anthropology, and it just seems like that was one stepping stone to all these other things. So now it just seems like it was a natural path. But at the time I'm sure there were many days when I would have liked to have been somewhere else.

ROLL: [01:02:44] How do you think that your time in India helped to promote better understanding of other peoples by Americans? What do you think you brought back from India to this country specifically, and how did you share that? Did you, when you came back to the States, did you talk to schools, did you? How was that?

GERARDY: [01:03:11] I did do some of that. I did a Peace Corps training where I helped with the training out in California and one in Kentucky. And one of my former professors, which who was a major influence on me choosing India in the first place, because he had been there during the Second World War and always talked about India. He was invited to a high school and we both went and talked about India from those two perspectives, and that was a lot of fun. And I did several of those. And but when I came back then, I also was still student age and had not finished my college. So I went back to the University of Colorado and I, of course, immediately joined the Cosmopolitan International Club. And so I'm sure that was part of that motivation.

GERARDY: [01:03:58] I had an Indian boyfriend during my college years. I sort of look on him as my first husband, although we were not married, and I'm sure that came directly out of my Indian Peace Corps experience. And I had a number of other really good friends that I'm still in contact with who were from India at the University of Colorado. And they used to put on an Indian days there and we participated in that. So a lot of things. I think I went to college eating Indian food most of the time because you could make a one pot meal and eat it all week. And then I studied anthropology at college and then later happened to fall in right at as the Vietnam War ended and lots of people from Vietnam came here, I sort of accidentally ended up becoming an English as a Second Language teacher.

GERARDY: [01:04:46] But I think when you've been in another culture, you're always very grateful for any kindnesses that were shown to you, and you can never forget that and how important that is to you when you're in another culture. So I always remember that, of course, with people coming from other cultures here and certainly with my students over the years. And so I think that's a very important lesson that you come home with.

GERARDY: [01:05:11] And also when you meet prejudice and bias and things in Americans, it's hard to let that lie. I remember having a class once where I was teaching American students who were not very educated and they lived in an apartment house near some Vietnamese families, and they

were complaining about the smells and how they hated Vietnamese and the Vietnamese food and so forth. And I gave them a homework assignment, because I found out they had actually never tasted Vietnamese food, to go out and try it. And they came back with much more open minds, having enjoyed a very good meal. But you know, I think I constantly in my classes keep trying to broaden people's experiences and make them more aware of cultural things and make them more sensitive and to just at least look with more open minds at other cultures.

ROLL: [01:06:05] Have you had any continuous contact with your country of service with India? Did you go back, for example?

GERARDY: [01:06:12] I went back after. It was one of the things that was very important to me because I knew people often went back somewhere after many, many years, but I really wanted to go back not waiting 25 or 30 years. And so I went back in 1970 with my Indian boyfriend from college. And I'm very, very glad that I did that because I realized that a lot had changed in those three years. And when I left India the first time, I did not expect that things would change. And when I came back, there were paved roads into the village where I had been. They had extended the school. There were two wells, there were tractors, you know, things that maybe even don't look that big here to us in terms of change in America. But they were certainly big things and a big difference to the people who live in those villages and, you know, their ability to get people to a doctor and their ability to talk on a phone, their ability to get education and things.

GERARDY: [01:07:11] You know, a road makes a tremendous difference. When we were there, we had to take a bus out from Nabha and then we had to get off at the bus stop and walk two or three miles into the village. And it was either rainy weather and very muddy or it was hot and dry and about two feet deep of sand and dust and carrying the suitcase on top of our head. So, you know, and the only means of transportation for people, like if somebody was sick, was a bullock cart or a bicycle or by foot. So it makes tremendous difference in terms of contact in these things.

ROLL: [01:07:44] How did the people greet you when you came back to your village?

GERARDY: [01:07:49] Oh, Indian people are tremendous anyway, I think. And I remember one time being at a bus stand and looking across the heads of many people. And there was another, I don't know, probably American, but I remember how they stood out like a sore thumb, you know? So white. But I realized that I was not made very conscious of that in my dealings with local people. I never felt that I was, you know, treated horribly as an outsider or something like that, although I'm sure I was obviously an outsider. But I do remember like one of the teachers at the center once picked up my hand and could see the little red spots and age spots and blue veins and was commenting on all the different colors in my hand, but never in a way that was harmful to me or made me feel bad, so yeah.

ROLL: [01:08:44] When you went back, when you went back to visit India after, in 1970, did you go, when you went back to your village, were there people there who you had worked with?

GERARDY: [01:08:57] Yes. And probably the most, well, I visited the principal at the gram sevak training center again. I did see the veterinarian that I had worked with. I had a very good friend that I hadn't known in India, but she was from New Delhi, that had been a graduate student at the University of Colorado, and I visited her in New Delhi, and that was an important help. And the most important person, though, would have been my girlfriend, the one I was originally introduced to in the village. And that village name, by the way, was Mandour. And she and her family were very warm and welcomed me. And when I left there, she had given me a little paperback book, a story about Nehru, and she had put a little piece of paper in there. And I still have that book. And I remember the piece of paper said, I will wait many years to meet again. I was very touched by that and I'm glad that I had that chance to at least do that once.

GERARDY: [01:09:54] But I took a trip with her in 1970 and we went up to a village further north near Amritsar that her sister lived in. And it was a little bit

different than the village where I had been, and I remember that was an interesting experience. I again got sick on that trip. So again, the monsoon came at that time and I remember just, I probably had heat stroke or something, but came home very ill and was a month recuperating from that. So it's very difficult. You know, you get amoebic dysentery, heat stroke, things like this. It's difficult living in India.

ROLL: [01:10:32] Now, how would you say you've been. You've talked about being a teacher of English as a Second Language. How did that come about? How, you studied anthropology at CU and then?

GERARDY: [01:10:47] Well, kind of by accident. I studied anthropology at CU and then Dr. Boast, who had been my original teacher down in La Junta, Colorado, at the Otero Junior College. That was my original connection to wanting to go to India in the Peace Corps. He was the dean at Red Rocks Community College, and so I was invited to teach one summer when they were first starting the college. I worked in the library and then I taught anthropology at Red Rocks Community College. And while I was teaching there in 1975, the Vietnam War ended and suddenly many, many Vietnamese students appeared. They did not have ESL classes at the time, but they came to the labs where we worked. And I was suddenly told, do something. And because I had been in another culture, I was comfortable working with people from another culture.

GERARDY: [01:11:45] So we started doing things with grammar books and little tape machines and things like that, but I felt rather inadequately prepared. And then I met a wonderful lady named Sue Heritage, who had been formally trained as an ESL teacher and gave us some coaching on what to do. And I saw instant results from techniques that she showed me, and we began to have little groups and clubs and ESL classes, and that's sort of how I fell into the field, and I've been doing it off and on ever since.

ROLL: [01:12:18] How would you say that your Peace Corps service impacted you, how it may have changed you in your career plans? It sounds like India was always something that was of interest.

GERARDY: [01:12:33] Um, well, I don't think it was always of interest. But I remember as a child in the days when we did not have television, we only had radio. And I would listen to programs on the radio and they would tell where it was being broadcast from. And I remember the sounds of words like Chattanooga, Tennessee, which, by the way, I've still never been to and would like to visit. But I made a list of these interesting sounding places, and I always wanted to go everywhere. And my dad liked to travel. He never had been abroad or anything, but he would take us on vacations and I had been in many of the Western states as a child. And so I think travel just was kind of part of my interest from the beginning.

GERARDY: [01:13:11] And then I must have some little ability in languages because I'm always attracted to trying to learn other languages. I ended up marrying a man from Czechoslovakia, so I understand and speak a little Czech. I studied three years high school Spanish, two years college French, one year college German. And I'm not proficient at any of these languages, but I keep trying to learn and I like them. And then later I ended up going to China and teaching, but I didn't learn a lot of Chinese. That was very difficult.

ROLL: [01:13:44] How did, how did you get to China? How did that happen?

GERARDY: [01:13:48] Well, I ended up getting a divorce after about 14 to 16 years of marriage. And I was pretty unhappy. And I started thinking about when I was the happiest in my life. And one of the times that I was very happier, it was a very right place for me to be, was Peace Corps India. And I decided I wanted some kind of experience like that again. I even considered rejoining the Peace Corps, but I ended up going looking for a job, and I'd been teaching out at Front Range Community College at that time. But I went and applied to Spring Institute and I taught here in Denver with them. But right from when I interviewed with them, I told them that I was very interested in going abroad again and they agreed to try and work on that possibility.

GERARDY: [01:14:34] And they had a couple of projects in China and one of the teachers came home sick. So I was invited on very short notice to go

and replace her. And I had just finished teaching down at Glendale Library one evening, and then I met the next day with the lady who's president of Spring Institute, and she said, I would like you to go to China. We have a teacher who's sick there that has to come home. But she said the problem is you have to be there in ten days. Can you do that? And I agreed to do that. So I ended up in China, but with very little preparation. No Peace Corps training and no language.

ROLL: [01:15:12] How long were you in China?

GERARDY: [01:15:14] Um, I went, I stayed for 15 months, but I was one of the lucky ones. They had four teachers there and originally I went for three months, came back at Christmas. The teacher who had been sick came back, but then another teacher quit. So I went for another six months. Then the whole project got renewed for a year, so I went for that second year. So I ended up teaching three terms, students at an oil company there, and I loved it. Great experience.

ROLL: [01:15:40] How was China different from India? How was that experience different from the Peace Corps?

GERARDY: [01:15:44] Well, I actually expected it to be very similar. And I went on in October, and the very 1st of October is a holiday in China. And so I got to spend one day in Beijing looking around. Of course, Beijing is a very large city. And then I was picked up by a driver and taken out to Tangshan, the town where I was to be. And on the way I kept looking at the towns and villages we passed, expecting them to look somewhat like India, like little villages in Asia, because I had read Pearl Buck and expected them to look similar, but actually they looked very different. It was the fall of the year and they were harvesting corn and, you know, it was very dusty as they were processing these. And the villages were like little concrete block things along the road and not that beautiful adobe thing that you see in India. Later I visited an area in the south of China and it did look more like India there, but I didn't get much chance to get out actually into the villages. But it's just a very different look. It looks more like little truck stops along the way.

ROLL: [01:16:48] How did the people treat you as you had been treated in India?

GERARDY: [01:16:53] Well, they certainly treated me very well, especially because I literally went there, not even knowing how to say hello in Chinese. And I had 14 students and all of my students were college graduates. And I understand that at that time that was about 5 percent of the population in China.

ROLL: [01:17:13] What year would this have been?

GERARDY: [01:17:13] I believe I went in '97, I think, and came back in '98. You know, there aren't, now it's pretty much higher. But at that time I think it was about 5 percent of the people that get to go to college. So they had already had some years of English, but their English was not very active, but they knew grammar very well and would argue points with you. But what they needed to do was activate their English. So we had the fun of having conversations and dialogs and practicing telephone calls and practicing getting up and giving speeches and having debates. So it was really a lot of fun, but they were also my primary teachers for figuring out where I had to go to do what and things. But I was fortunate that they did have some English.

ROLL: [01:17:56] So let me ask you, you were a little girl in Kansas who became a world traveler. What other, what else would you like say about your Peace Corps experience?

GERARDY: [01:18:10] Oh my goodness. Well, it's interesting because I was born in Colorado, but I grew up in Kansas and I kind of identify with Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz and getting spun into this different world. And I'm still very connected to those roots in a funny way. And in the last few years, I've had a chance to go back to my 40th high school class reunion, and I realized that I still share a lot in common with the people I grew up with. So I think those strong Kansas roots are still there. But Peace Corps just is a major, major experience in my life, and I think I would be a very different person without that. It's definitely been the stepping stone that's led to where I am today.

ROLL: [01:18:57] Anything else?

GERARDY: [01:18:59] Um. Well, there are probably lots of other things to say, but I can't think of them right now. So I guess this is a good place to stop.

ROLL: [01:19:06] Okay.

GERARDY: [01:19:06] Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]