

Meredith Green Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Meredith Green served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador from 1967 to 1969 on a community development project. She was known as Margaret Schroeder during her service.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Meredith Green

July 18, 2013
Madison, Wisconsin

By Phyllis Noble

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

NOBLE: [00:00:01] It's rolling. Today is July 18th, 2013. This is Phyllis Noble. I am interviewing my friend Meredith Green, who was known in the Peace Corps as Margaret Schroeder. Meredith served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador from 1967 to 1969 in a community development project. Meredith, will you say something so we can make sure the tape picks up your voice?

GREEN: [00:00:37] That's all correct. Life changing experience.

NOBLE: [00:00:41] All right. So, Meredith, tell us what you were doing a year before you joined the Peace Corps.

GREEN: [00:00:50] A year before I joined the Peace Corps, I was a student at the University of Wisconsin, which was a huge recruiting campus for Peace Corps volunteers.

NOBLE: [00:00:59] Ah yes.

GREEN: [00:00:59] And it still is, I think.

NOBLE: [00:01:01] Yeah, yeah it is.

GREEN: [00:01:02] But I was in school, looking, getting a degree in social work.

NOBLE: [00:01:06] Oh, terrific. We'll hear more about that in a minute. Let's go further back. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

GREEN: [00:01:13] I was born in Connecticut, but my family moved to Wisconsin when I was quite young, when I was about four. So I grew up in the Madison area.

NOBLE: [00:01:21] Uh huh. And you had brothers and sisters?

GREEN: [00:01:23] I had three brothers, two older and one younger.

NOBLE: [00:01:27] You're the only girl.

GREEN: [00:01:28] I was.

NOBLE: [00:01:29] And what sort of work did your parents do?

GREEN: [00:01:34] Well, my parents were both nurses. My dad also had been a welder in the shipyards in Connecticut during the war. But when he came to Wisconsin, he did welding for a little while and then he did nursing in a variety of places and taught nursing here also. And my mother actually taught obstetrics after she was a nurse.

NOBLE: [00:01:54] Terrific.

GREEN: [00:01:54] And they farmed. We had this five acre, four or five acres here, and so they farmed to feed the family. They didn't farm to sell, but they farmed to keep us in produce and livestock.

NOBLE: [00:02:06] Yes, and we're sitting here in a house. Is this the house, the very house that you grew up in?

GREEN: [00:02:12] The very house, the very house I grew up in.

NOBLE: [00:02:14] And so all this wonderful land and the gardens behind us were your gardens as a child?

GREEN: [00:02:19] They were. Yeah, they were.

NOBLE: [00:02:20] How wonderful.

GREEN: [00:02:22] They still are gardens, just not ours.

NOBLE: [00:02:25] Yes. And so you went to high school in Madison?

GREEN: [00:02:29] I did. I went to Central High.

NOBLE: [00:02:31] Central High.

GREEN: [00:02:31] I did.

NOBLE: [00:02:32] That doesn't exist anymore.

GREEN: [00:02:33] No, it doesn't. It was a really diverse school. It was sort of a city center school and had, I think, probably a lot more racial diversity than the other two schools on east and west and a lot of Italians and African Americans from the south side were among our classmates.

NOBLE: [00:02:53] Yep, yeah. And so what was your life in high school? Did you study a foreign language?

GREEN: [00:02:59] I took a little bit of French and that was it. And, um, I was very interested in art. Was not real strong in science. And had some good, some fairly good aptitude in language. But it just, it wasn't a strong language school, you know, so there wasn't a lot of opportunity. I didn't too much in the way of language until I got to college.

NOBLE: [00:03:23] What else did you do in high school? Were you involved in sports or any other?

GREEN: [00:03:29] I was a cheerleader. I was. I worked on the school yearbook. I was kind of a bit of a social butterfly. And did lots of different things with art projects. Yes, it was my fun thing.

NOBLE: [00:03:46] And um, outside of school in the summer vacations, did you and your family travel?

GREEN: [00:03:52] We farmed. No, we did not. We were busy planting and harvesting and putting food in the freezer all winter long. We had a huge freezer in the basement that my dad had built, and we did very little traveling, especially when I was younger. But I don't remember any, like we didn't take trips to the national parks or, um. A little camping now and then. But really, we were pretty much here for the summer.

NOBLE: [00:04:15] OK, so certainly not international travel.

GREEN: [00:04:18] Oh no, oh no, no, no, no.

NOBLE: [00:04:23] And then you went off to college. You went to UW?

GREEN: [00:04:26] I did. I went to UW, partly for financial reasons. Although my brothers had gone, well, most of them, two of them had gone in the service and used GI bills to help pay for school. But for me, it was very economical to live at home, so I stayed at home and commuted to campus downtown. Sometimes I stayed at my grandmother's, who was closer to campus. And one semester I lived on campus, but pretty much here, yeah, just exploring the big university.

NOBLE: [00:04:58] And so now, as a college student at the University of Wisconsin, did you study languages?

GREEN: [00:05:05] You know, I took Latin. I can't remember why I took Latin, but I took Latin because everybody thought it was a good basis for other things.

And I think I took some French. I did not take Spanish. I had not a whit of Spanish when I volunteered for Peace Corps and got assigned to a Spanish speaking country. So I had a lot of learning to do there. But some foundational ideas about the difference in language things.

NOBLE: [00:05:35] Did you get ever involved in the volunteer work in college?

GREEN: [00:05:41] I'm sure I did. But um, I can't remember right now what I might have been working on. I mean, there was definitely work affiliated with my, um, my social work program, where I might have been volunteering at a daycare or something like that as part of my, what do they call it? Work study or something like that.

NOBLE: [00:06:01] So your major was?

GREEN: [00:06:03] Social work. I started out as an art major and then within a year I transferred to social work.

NOBLE: [00:06:11] So there would have been field experiences.

GREEN: [00:06:15] Yes, yes, yes, yeah, for sure.

NOBLE: [00:06:19] And then somewhere, was it while you were at the University of Wisconsin that you got this idea to go into the Peace Corps?

GREEN: [00:06:28] It was actually, I think it was. I mean, Kennedy was president when I started school and when I was in school, and I really like the idea of that, but it really shook me when he was assassinated.

NOBLE: [00:06:43] Oh yeah.

GREEN: [00:06:43] And it just rocked my boat and I felt like I owed it to the world. You know, his ask what you can do, ask not what you can do. You know, it really just was embedded in my thinking and I couldn't wait to get out of school and try and save the world. That is not what happened, but.

NOBLE: [00:07:04] You didn't save the world?

GREEN: [00:07:05] Didn't save the world. It still needs saving. But that was my young 21, 22 year old conception of I can really make a difference. I can really change things, and I really want to do this for two years.

NOBLE: [00:07:17] So did you apply while you were a student?

GREEN: [00:07:23] You know, I think I actually had graduated. I got married just as I was leaving school and sort of had negotiated with my fiancé at the time. I said, I need to do this Peace Corps thing. It's just, my God, I have to do this. And you can either go with me or you can wait till I come back and see if I come back and see if I'm still the person you want to be with when I come back. And he said, no, no, he would apply. We would apply together. And so we actually applied as a married couple.

NOBLE: [00:07:55] As a married couple. So your name before you were married was Margaret Green.

GREEN: [00:08:00] Correct.

NOBLE: [00:08:01] Although nobody ever called you Margaret.

GREEN: [00:08:03] Right.

NOBLE: [00:08:03] And then after you were married, you were Margaret Schroeder.

GREEN: [00:08:07] Schroeder.

NOBLE: [00:08:07] And what was your husband's first name?

GREEN: [00:08:09] Gary.

NOBLE: [00:08:10] Gary. Yeah.

GREEN: [00:08:12] So um yeah. So we went, we were accepted together, and actually his engineering skills were really what they wanted more than my social work skills.

NOBLE: [00:08:22] So he was an engineer.

GREEN: [00:08:23] He was. And they had this electrification project in Ecuador that they wanted to help with. So I think that's why we ended up going to Ecuador.

NOBLE: [00:08:31] OK, so you and your husband, you're married, you fill out an application together. Did you have to take exams? Do you remember any of that process of getting accepted?

GREEN: [00:08:45] I don't think we did very much, you know. I mean, there were physical things we had to pass. But I, you know, in thinking about what that very first group, first groups we had to go through, I don't think it was nearly as rigorous as five years later or six years later, whatever it was that we were going in.

NOBLE: [00:09:00] Now 1967, um, was the draft for, I'm sorry, what was his name? Was it Gary?

GREEN: [00:09:12] Gary.

NOBLE: [00:09:13] Was this a factor for Gary?

GREEN: [00:09:14] It was not. He was 4-F. He'd had some surgery as a child and, um, had some issues relating to that, so he was exempt.

NOBLE: [00:09:23] Uh huh. OK.

GREEN: [00:09:24] It was definitely an issue for a lot of people, but no, not for us.

NOBLE: [00:09:28] Not for him. And he was as excited as you were then, eventually?

GREEN: [00:09:33] I don't know that he was ever as excited as I was. I think, you know, he was along for the ride. And he was a rural Wisconsin farm boy. Hadn't traveled much. Didn't have much of a world view.

NOBLE: [00:09:44] Well, neither one of you had traveled.

GREEN: [00:09:45] Neither one, absolutely not. Going to Montana for Peace Corps training was our first trip west of the Mississippi. I mean, it was a big deal.

NOBLE: [00:09:54] A big deal. So let's hear about training. So you got a letter inviting you to train for Ecuador.

GREEN: [00:10:01] Right.

NOBLE: [00:10:02] Had you expressed any interest in any particular part of the world?

GREEN: [00:10:06] I don't remember that we had a particular part of the world in mind. It's possible I might have said South America just because I felt like it was, you know, more closer to home in terms of what was happening politically. But I don't think it mattered very much. I wasn't, you know, wasn't specific about that. And they trained us in Bozeman, Montana, because of the elevation. Because they assumed that Ecuador is very, most of it is very high mountainous, you know, nine thousand feet, eleven thousand feet.

NOBLE: [00:10:38] Not all of it.

GREEN: [00:10:39] So they want us to get acclimated to the altitude. And we ended up on the coast. So for our entire Peace Corps stay, so the acclimation didn't make a healthy bit of difference.

NOBLE: [00:10:50] But where, so you were in Bozeman, Montana, for the summer?

GREEN: [00:10:52] Yeah. It was magical. It was incredibly hard work. I mean, it was immersion language, you know, we had language classes every day

for hours. And then on the weekends, we would have these hikes up into the mountains. I remember them just being exhausting. Like, I don't know if I can do this. And then they also had, I remember this so vividly, they sent us out one weekend. Everybody had to disperse into the countryside. They gave us cities to go to, but that was about it. You're going to go to this city and find a place to stay and find out something to do and then meet back here on Monday or something.

NOBLE: [00:11:32] And they gave you some money to sustain yourself?

GREEN: [00:11:36] I don't remember that there was very much money involved.

NOBLE: [00:11:38] So find a place to stay didn't mean the Conrad Hilton?

GREEN: [00:11:42] No, no. Find a home to stay in. And I remember being assigned to Anaconda, Montana, which is an old mining town. I don't remember exactly how I got there, but I got there on the bus. But I remember.

NOBLE: [00:11:53] Wait, were you traveling with Gary or did they split you up?

GREEN: [00:11:56] No, no. Yes. Everybody went separately.

NOBLE: [00:11:58] So you're totally on your own.

GREEN: [00:12:00] Totally on my own.

NOBLE: [00:12:01] And a totally new place.

GREEN: [00:12:02] Totally new place. They did speak English, however, they didn't speak Spanish.

NOBLE: [00:12:05] OK, and you were not expected to speak Spanish in Anaconda, Montana.

GREEN: [00:12:07] I was not.

NOBLE: [00:12:09] OK, so let's hear more about that.

GREEN: [00:12:11] So I had, so I found a Presbyterian minister, called him up and said, you know, I'm a Peace Corps volunteer. I'm in town. I need a place to stay. Can you help me out? And eventually they said, yeah, you can come over and spend the weekend with us. So I did, and I stayed up and helped them can produce or whatever it was. And then I was hitchhiking back to Bozeman, I remember that, and getting picked up by a trucker to take me back to Bozeman. So it was like fearless, absolutely fearless, that I could do this and it was quite an adventure. So that was one of the little extra training things. And then there was this overhanging always, the deselection, you know, twice at least in our three month stay, they would deselect people. So the fear of deselection was always sort of looming large, and then some people would be asked to leave. And you'd say, that's not right. You know, why are they asked to leave? And sometimes you were relieved because you felt like that was a good choice. But not always.

NOBLE: [00:13:15] Not always. Did you have interviews with psychologists?

GREEN: [00:13:18] I'm sure we did. I'm sure we did, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:13:21] And all kinds of tests.

GREEN: [00:13:23] Yeah, yeah. To be sure we stand for the.

NOBLE: [00:13:26] How big a group was it?

GREEN: [00:13:28] It was about 40 people and there were some other married people in the group and some single people, a bunch of guys that were going to be working on this rural electrification project.

NOBLE: [00:13:37] So were you at a university doing that?

GREEN: [00:13:39] Yeah, we were. It was, Bozeman was, I mean, at the University of Bozeman, we were housed on campus.

NOBLE: [00:13:44] During the summer?

GREEN: [00:13:46] During the summer.

NOBLE: [00:13:46] And so you would stay, the single people would stay in the dorms. Married couples?

GREEN: [00:13:52] Yeah, we were all in dorms.

NOBLE: [00:13:53] Did you have your own room as married couples?

GREEN: [00:13:54] Yeah, I think we had our own room. Yeah, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:13:58] And so you talked about intensive language training.

GREEN: [00:14:04] Yeah, we did. We had an immersion, Spanish immersion, as much as they could give us. They had Ecuadorian counterparts that were in Bozeman for the summer to help us with language. And I was much more able to mimic and pick up the sounds of Spanish than Gary was. So at the end of training, they said, well, you know, we sort of, it's conditional. You're going as conditional upon three extra weeks of language training in Flagstaff, Arizona, because his language skills weren't as strong as mine. So then we packed up and quite a contingent of us, probably 15 or 20 of us, went from Montana to Flagstaff, where we lived with Spanish speaking families and attended the university.

NOBLE: [00:14:52] So other people went on to Ecuador and began their work, people from your group?

GREEN: [00:14:58] Yes, they did.

NOBLE: [00:14:58] And those who needed a little more time with language went to Flagstaff.

GREEN: [00:15:02] Yeah. Yeah. And there was lots of, you know, well, we couldn't. We had to pack our trunks for Ecuador before we left Montana. And yet we had these three extra weeks in Flagstaff and it was.

NOBLE: [00:15:14] It's problematic.

GREEN: [00:15:15] Yeah, it was problematic. And I was rather outspoken about it. And I think there was, you know, I could have still been deselected at that time. I was walking a very fine line of my rebellion. My righteous indignation of this is not right, this is not fair. And, you know, I was like, just shut up and keep your head down, girl, if you want to go. So we made it. We did go and we did fly into Quito, and it was, you know, had the elevation to deal with initially. But then we were put on a bus very quickly for the coast.

NOBLE: [00:15:47] Now, before we go down to the coast. Between training and flying from Flagstaff to Quito, did you have any time back home to say goodbye to your mom or siblings?

GREEN: [00:15:59] I don't remember that. I don't remember that we did. We may have, but frankly, I don't remember coming home first. We may have been home for a few days before we left.

NOBLE: [00:16:10] Uh huh. Well, what was the attitude now of your family? You've got three brothers. You've got a mom. Was your dad alive?

GREEN: [00:16:20] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I think they just thought it was some of my sowing my wild oats kind of thing, you know, off she goes. Nobody else was that adventuresome.

NOBLE: [00:16:32] None of your brothers had joined the Peace Corps.

GREEN: [00:16:33] No. But like I said, two of them were in the military.

NOBLE: [00:16:36] That's right.

GREEN: [00:16:36] And had done overseas in Europe. It was before the Vietnam War had really heated up that they had done their work. So neither of those two brothers were at risk of going to Vietnam. But by the time I was finished with school, that was pretty real.

NOBLE: [00:16:52] Yeah.

GREEN: [00:16:53] And uh yeah. So we may have been home very briefly and then flown to.

NOBLE: [00:17:00] Flown to Quito, right. So you arrive in Quito. The altitude is everything they told you would be.

GREEN: [00:17:08] Absolutely.

NOBLE: [00:17:08] And did you, was there any further training or orientation in Quito, a few nights of?

GREEN: [00:17:16] I don't remember that there was much orientation. I think it was kind of like, we got to get you guys on the bus and get you to your sites. And there was a regional rep in the site. But we didn't see him right away, it wasn't like he was there to welcome us or meet us or anything.

NOBLE: [00:17:32] When was it that you found out that your site would be down on the coast and not up in the highlands?

GREEN: [00:17:37] Probably when we were still in Montana. Because there was one, there were a couple of returned Peace Corps volunteers that were training with our group. And one of the guys had been on the coast running a chicken project. And so he had talked to us a lot about the village that he'd been in.

NOBLE: [00:17:58] Oh, that's good. Yeah.

GREEN: [00:17:59] And um, and so we thought, well, that sounds like a cool place to go, you know, and following on the heels of another volunteer.

NOBLE: [00:18:06] And is that where you went, in fact, to the very village that that trainer had been in?

GREEN: [00:18:10] We did, the first six months we were there, we were in Santa Elena, which is a tiny little village.

NOBLE: [00:18:15] Santa Elena.

GREEN: [00:18:16] Off the Guayas peninsula, you know, about three hours bus ride from Guayaquil at that time.

NOBLE: [00:18:23] Three hours away from Guayaquil. So Santa Elena, describe, tell us more about Santa Elena.

GREEN: [00:18:28] Santa Elena was a sleepy little town. Boy, I don't think they even had a hotel. When we got there, we got off the bus and asked for a place to stay, and they said, there aren't any. You have to go to Salinas. So we had to get on the next bus and go to Salinas. And then we did find a hotel there where we could stay for a few nights. And I think we went back and forth. And Gary kind of made connections with other Peace Corps volunteers that were working on this project. And we looked for housing in Santa Elena and were commuting back there looking for a place to stay.

NOBLE: [00:19:01] There were other Peace Corps volunteers already in Santa Elena?

GREEN: [00:19:04] There were. There were, well, there was at least one other person from our group that was assigned there, another engineer, and there had been volunteers there before. In fact, once we moved into our place there, within a week some Ecuadorian kids came by with this little dog and said the last volunteer left this for you. And so we had a dog from then on and ended up bringing her back home with us.

NOBLE: [00:19:28] Oh my goodness.

GREEN: [00:19:28] At the end of our two-year stint. But yeah, it came complete with pets.

NOBLE: [00:19:31] Let's hear about this home. What was your housing like?

GREEN: [00:19:34] Well, the place we rented was a cement block housing. It actually was unfinished, which is not uncommon in Ecuador at that time at least.

NOBLE: [00:19:43] With those wires sticking out of the top?

GREEN: [00:19:45] Yes, yes. And there was a little tienda, a little store out front, and the people that ran the store lived upstairs. And so they had this sort of back section that they hadn't quite finished, but it had some running water. Oh I know, it had a water tank on the roof I think. So the truck from Guayaquil would come. It was very desert. It was extremely dry there. And so this big water truck would come out from Guayaquil and fill up roof tanks all over the little village.

NOBLE: [00:20:12] So the roof tank was on the top of the house that you lived in.

GREEN: [00:20:15] No, the top of the house the people, we were underneath. So like a two story building and then that there was a water tank.

NOBLE: [00:20:21] OK. I'm sorry, I didn't quite get it. So you've got, there's a tienda, a little store.

GREEN: [00:20:31] Right.

NOBLE: [00:20:32] And that's right on the street.

GREEN: [00:20:34] Right.

NOBLE: [00:20:35] And then you're behind this?

GREEN: [00:20:36] Yes, we were behind that. And it was like one bedroom, kind of a bedroom. Living room with a wall divider didn't go all the way up, but it was mostly a divider. There was a small bathroom and it wasn't quite finished, but they said, we'll finish it up for you. So they got the plumbing all working, so we did have a flush toilet.

NOBLE: [00:20:53] And you had a sink.

GREEN: [00:20:56] We did have electricity. We had a little sink. I remember having two big wooden wash tubs out back, so I had to draw water and wash my clothes all by hand out in back of the house was a little fenced in yard. Um, and I know that we bought a refrigerator from some other volunteers that were leaving, I think, a very old refrigerator. So the first few months we were there, we didn't have a refrigerator, which was really a challenge, and I think it was a light bulb hanging from the ceiling kind of thing. But we did have electricity.

NOBLE: [00:21:23] Uh-huh. And did you have a table where you could sit and chairs where you could sit down?

GREEN: [00:21:27] We bought a table. We went to the market, bought a table, bought chairs. Yeah, there was nothing, no furnishings in it at all. I'm sure we bought a bed, a lot pots and pans. And the Peace Corps had given us an allowance for a settling in. I think they had a settling in allowance. So we went out and bought what we needed for. And then, um, I would walk to the local market every day and get what we needed for food.

NOBLE: [00:21:50] Mm hmm. Just enough for that one day.

GREEN: [00:21:51] As best I could communicate my needs, which was very scary and very frustrating because my Spanish, after three months, was not very good. And I remember trying to buy bananas or something and or chicken and they were giving me bananas, or bananas and they gave me chicken. It's like, *guineos* and they give me *gallinas* or something like this. So the words were similar enough that I didn't know which it was, and I think I had a couple of pickpocket experiences in the market. I felt like I was a real target, you know, because I really looked different.

NOBLE: [00:22:20] Blond hair.

GREEN: [00:22:21] Didn't speak the language. Well, I wasn't that blond, but I couldn't speak the language and I was very fair skinned and, you know, I just stood out in my clothing and all of this. And Gary would go off to work and he had a counterpart, he had an Ecuadorian counterpart, so he had a

very prescriptive kind of job. I mean, he was translating plans. They were working off of an old PT boat that I think that was out in the harbor.

NOBLE: [00:22:42] He was translating?

GREEN: [00:22:44] Yeah, translating plans and getting this electricity.

NOBLE: [00:22:47] From English into Spanish? But his Spanish was a little weak.

GREEN: [00:22:50] Yeah, but it's technical. He understood. Yeah, yeah. So he had somebody that he could work with there. And I was sort of like, what do I do now? You know, who do I talk to? And so it was a very scary time for me, and it took me a long time to connect with the local people. I could figure out what was it I was going to do here that was going to be helpful.

NOBLE: [00:23:16] How was your health?

GREEN: [00:23:19] My health was good at that point, early in our adventure. My health was fairly good most of the time we were there. Gary was quite sick for a while at one point, but I didn't get really bad.

NOBLE: [00:23:29] What did you do about water, making sure that the water was okay to drink?

GREEN: [00:23:34] I think we boiled it, and I think we used iodine tablets for a long time. Yeah, that was kind of it.

NOBLE: [00:23:39] And did all of your neighbors have flush toilets or were people just?

GREEN: [00:23:46] No, there were outhouses and they were using the outside.

NOBLE: [00:23:48] Just outside?

GREEN: [00:23:49] Some people did.

NOBLE: [00:23:50] How close were you to the ocean?

GREEN: [00:23:53] I don't know, five miles?

NOBLE: [00:23:54] Five miles. So it's not like people would squat outside and wait for the tide.

GREEN: [00:23:58] No, they weren't doing that. No, not that so much. And of course, there were lots of animals running, wandering through, pigs and cows. Not too many cows. Burros. I remember burros and dogs and things like that. Chickens that were kind of just around. I don't know who owned them or who would collect the eggs or put them in the pot. But they just sort of were around.

NOBLE: [00:24:19] And the temperature in Quito would have been cool because of the elevation. But down in Santa Elena, in the desert.

GREEN: [00:24:28] We got there. When we got there, it was the cool season. So it was in the 60s, 70s, kind of overcast, gray days. And then it got extremely hot in a couple of three months. So I remember making connections with, I think, a local priest, and he would take me in his truck out to some very remote villages out along the coast. You'd just drive. People had houses up on stilts. There weren't so many in Santa Elena, but among these villages along the coast, they would be up on stilts. And bamboo houses, not cement houses. And, you know, chickens and things running underneath the house. And I was teaching people how to make these ovens out of oil cans.

NOBLE: [00:25:12] Oh, oh.

GREEN: [00:25:14] The oil can ovens. Because all they had really was like kerosene stoves or charcoal. Not so much charcoal, I don't think there was very much wood. I think it was mostly kerosene. And, um, so I had learned in Montana I think how to make these oil can ovens.

NOBLE: [00:25:32] I was going to ask how you learned that.

GREEN: [00:25:33] Yeah, I think that's where I learned it. And so that, well, and I was teaching nutrition, child, you know, child development nutrition kinds of things as best I could given the language barriers. I think a lot of people came out of curiosity as much as for what I had to say, but just the fact that the gringa was here and, you know, let's go see her. Let's go spend some time with her. And there were some established credit unions, so that would bring people together. You know, so it might be people that would come in for credit union services, but then I could offer childhood classes or nutrition classes or things like that. So again, very naive on my part in terms of what nutrition was available and what. I mean, I knew what worked here, but I didn't necessarily know what worked there and I was learning what was available.

NOBLE: [00:26:19] And what were the needs of the people then?

GREEN: [00:26:22] What were the needs?

NOBLE: [00:26:23] In terms of their nutritional, what was available for their?

GREEN: [00:26:26] I think it was getting them to do things like boil water so that kids don't have amoebas, because a lot of kids had amoebas and dysentery in Ecuador, both places that we worked. And, you know, I mean, I think they were eating. There was some fruits available. A lot of stuff was trucked in because, again, this was very desert. So it wasn't like people had gardens. They ate a lot of fish because we were near the coast.

NOBLE: [00:26:47] So they've got the protein there, but the vegetables and the clean water.

GREEN: [00:26:49] And even fruit, and that was like you had to go the market to get that. So you had to have money to buy it.

NOBLE: [00:26:54] Money to buy it, that's right.

GREEN: [00:26:55] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:26:59] And so the problem of getting the water bacteria free involves boiling the water and then there's the fuel to boil that water.

GREEN: [00:27:11] Right, kerosene fuel.

NOBLE: [00:27:12] Kerosene is something people had to buy.

GREEN: [00:27:13] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:27:14] And if you have this oil can oven, how does that work?

GREEN: [00:27:20] It sat on top of the kerosene stove. So they had these little two burner kerosene stoves and there was a hole in the bottom. I don't, I have pictures of it, but. And you would set this oven on there and the heat would go up into the oven. So I would teach them how to bake things in it, because first they couldn't bake because they didn't have anything to bake, but maybe they didn't need to know how to bake. I don't know, but I know how to bake, so I could teach them all kinds of things that they could bake in the oven. Um, so that was part of what I did initially when I first worked there.

NOBLE: [00:27:49] How did people get their income to buy things like kerosene and flush toilets?

GREEN: [00:27:57] I don't know. I think they, you know, lots of people have like little tiendas, so they would sell a few things. Sell their *panaderías*, or they would sell a little bread. Or walk the streets, I mean, there's a lot of street vendor stuff. Fruits, vegetables, brooms, you know, household things. And then there was the market. So I think there were a lot of small business kinds of things where people would get a little money. They'd go down to the tienda and get a can of tuna fish or a can of canned milk or something like that. They didn't have a lot. I remember going into Guayaquil to a grocery store and it was like, oh, I think I've died and gone to heaven. You know, it was like, oh, all these things were available, but not in the village.

NOBLE: [00:28:36] Right, not where you were. So you had a Peace Corps allowance?

GREEN: [00:28:40] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:28:41] That would come to you once a month or so.

GREEN: [00:28:43] Yeah, we did. And we sort of lived on one allowance and saved the other because we could do it. I mean, just didn't cost as much of anything to live down there. And at that time, we were not allowed to come home at all. And of course, there wasn't any electronics communication except a ham radio. Once in a while, we could connect with a ham radio person to call home and talk to people here. So we put our money aside for our trip, a trip when we'd been in country longer, and that was a huge adventure that we took. So I'm saving that.

NOBLE: [00:29:14] That was maybe at the halfway point?

GREEN: [00:29:15] It was a little past halfway point and we took a month off and went to Peru.

NOBLE: [00:29:19] Was that kind of standard that Peace Corps volunteers would take a month off?

GREEN: [00:29:23] I think so. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:29:24] After a year.

GREEN: [00:29:26] I think a lot of people did. And traveled all the way down to southern Chile and Argentina.

NOBLE: [00:29:31] And so is that what you did?

GREEN: [00:29:32] Yeah, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:29:33] Down to southern Chile?

GREEN: [00:29:34] We did. I remember sleeping in the Machu Picchu ruins and listening. Somebody had a radio. I think there was an election. Nixon was

being elected or something, I think it was Nixon. But we were in the ruins with some other camper kind of people.

NOBLE: [00:29:50] They just let you sleep there?

GREEN: [00:29:52] We just slept there. You know, there was a small hotel, but of course we didn't have money for that. And so we just slept in the ruins that night and thought it was a great adventure.

NOBLE: [00:30:01] No kidding.

GREEN: [00:30:01] A lot of great adventures. Yeah. So that allowance that we had, even though it was like fifty dollars a piece a month or something, it wasn't very much, but we didn't need very much. And we knew how to travel 4th class by the time we'd been in country a year or more, a year and a half. And so we really did take very local transportation. I mean, it was pretty uncomfortable at times. And, you know, 12 hours on a train sitting bolt upright in the seat. There wasn't any beds or, um, but we were young and foolish, and that's what we did. We went to Lake Titicaca and saw the reed boats there and bought some art along the way. And we had we had quite an adventure. I remember my husband took his fishing pole because he was a big fisherman, and when we were in Chile, we got off this bus. He went over to the bank, dug up some worms, threw his line in the water and had fabulous trout. I mean, he caught two or three trout in quick succession, and we took them with us that night and took them to wherever we stayed and they cooked up the trout for us. So there were just so many little things like that. But, you know, we just were like living in the moment off the land, off whatever goodness we could find.

NOBLE: [00:31:13] Did you meet Peace Corps volunteers along the way as you went up and down the coast from?

GREEN: [00:31:20] We did some. We did. [tape break]

NOBLE: [00:31:22] Starting the second half of tape one here. We were talking about your holiday travels at the one-year point, where you and your

husband were going down along as far as Chile. And I asked if you had, if you were running into Peace Corps volunteers along the way.

GREEN: [00:31:38] Yeah, yeah. And I don't think we stayed with Peace Corps volunteers or ran into them very much. So it was, I think, the hardest thing about that trip. One of the hard things about it was that as soon as we left Ecuador, it felt like the standard of living just kept going up as we went farther and farther away. We'd sort of gotten used to this is the way things are. And even in Bolivia, which I think is poorer than Ecuador now at least, I mean, maybe it was then, but all the other countries, it was just like a step up and then another step up. And by the time we got to southern Chile, it was like the U.S. in 1935, you know?

NOBLE: [00:32:19] Oh, OK, yeah.

GREEN: [00:32:20] They had cars and they had gardens and it was beautiful. Yeah, so it was a little hard coming back, you know, to retrace your steps and going down, down, down into this lower standard of less convenience. I mean, we were on, we took some busses that were like riding on airplanes. They had stewards on the busses.

NOBLE: [00:32:38] Oh my goodness.

GREEN: [00:32:39] They served meals on the busses. The seats reclined on the busses. Holy smokes. We were used to riding on these chicken busses that were open and people are just smashed in

NOBLE: [00:32:49] And you can see the street through the boards of the floor.

GREEN: [00:32:51] Absolutely, absolutely. So I mean, it was like, wow, OK. It was pretty interesting.

NOBLE: [00:32:59] Yeah. So you come back. Did it feel like coming home when you got back to, uh?

GREEN: [00:33:05] I think it was hard coming back, you know, we had some time away, had a different perspective, and were already on the last part of our

stay. So I think it was, um, you know, hard. And we had changed sites by this time. We had left Santa Elena and been moved to Machala I think, again, which is also a coastal town.

NOBLE: [00:33:28] Did that move happen?

GREEN: [00:33:29] About six months into our stay. I think that they had more need of Gary's engineering skills, and so they moved us to Machala.

NOBLE: [00:33:40] Machala. How far away was that from Santa Elena?

GREEN: [00:33:43] It was across the Guayas Bay, so instead of going out, this is a very dry peninsula, we would take this ferry boat across to Machala, which was not too far from the Peruvian border. But it was very humid and tropical and lush and bananas everywhere. I mean, we kept stocks of bananas in the house. So in Santa Elena, it was very dry. We didn't have anything like that. But I remember that there was a lot more. And we lived on the second floor in this place and it was more finished. But it also had a water tank on the roof and we had gravity fed showers.

NOBLE: [00:34:17] OK, that's very nice.

GREEN: [00:34:18] It felt like a step up.

NOBLE: [00:34:21] Did Peace Corps staff, what was your experience of Peace Corps staff coming out to visit you and lending a hand? Let's talk about Santa Elena first and then Machala.

GREEN: [00:34:31] They were not. They were pretty absent. When we went into Guayaquil, we could go into the Peace Corps office and ask for things or get help, or we knew who our area rep was. But as far as coming out and helping us settle in or make connections, the person that was there at that time was absolutely no help at all. And I think it was the same person that we had even though we changed sites. It was still the same region, the southern region of Ecuador.

NOBLE: [00:34:58] So the same, not much help person when you were settling into Machala.

GREEN: [00:35:03] We were really kind of on our own. And it was probably the hardest thing I'd ever done and, you know, I learned a lot about what I could do and couldn't do. But I also heard from other volunteers like, oh no, our guy met us at the thing and he helped us to get to a house and he helped us. And I was like, really?

NOBLE: [00:35:26] Oh, OK, so this is an individual. It wasn't like Peace Corps.

GREEN: [00:35:28] It was totally individual. And he maybe was at the end of his tether with, you know, his time of Peace Corps. I don't know. But, yeah, there were a lot of very different experiences. I mean, we had good friends that lived in Quito and brought their fine china and hung out with the embassy people. So there was quite a range of people had and had access to.

NOBLE: [00:35:50] So it seems like your husband had a job that was cut out for him. He had a counterpart and therefore he didn't have to figure it out.

GREEN: [00:35:57] Right. He didn't.

NOBLE: [00:35:57] But um, you, on the other hand, had to find your work.

GREEN: [00:36:03] I did.

NOBLE: [00:36:03] And I'd like to talk about your work a little bit more. I'm sorry, we're backtracking so much, but let's go back to Santa Elena again. How did you find? You talked about women coming to the credit union. And while they're there, you kind of corralled them, would kind of catch them when they were there.

GREEN: [00:36:23] Or they were sort of used to coming there as a place to gather and a place to come for classes. And they may have had contact with the previous Peace Corps volunteer or. So that was part of what I did. I mean, a lot of my time that first three months was just like making a living. I

mean, getting the house in order, shopping, cooking, cleaning, you know, there wasn't a lot of opportunity. And in that time, I got to know people a little bit more. And then I started traveling out to these very rural, even more rural community places, um, and would go out and spend a day and hang out with people in their villages and do some of what they needed and what I could do, what I had to offer. And then come back. So it was pretty loose.

NOBLE: [00:37:11] And Machala, was that a similar thing in terms of?

GREEN: [00:37:15] Machala is a much bigger city and there were other Peace Corps volunteers there, more volunteers. I remember teaching English as a second language there because they definitely wanted that. I taught in a high school. I taught an art class in the high school one semester at least, or maybe a year. The teacher wasn't available. And I'd never done that before in Spanish.

NOBLE: [00:37:35] Ah yes.

GREEN: [00:37:36] I'd never done it in English, so it was very intense.

NOBLE: [00:37:38] Buying food in the market in Spanish is difficult.

GREEN: [00:37:41] It was difficult.

NOBLE: [00:37:43] And teaching in Spanish.

GREEN: [00:37:43] It was difficult enough. And we ran a summer program, worked with another volunteer who was a single woman down there. And she was, we ran a summer camp for kids up in the mountains. So we took a whole busload of kids and then we got mattresses for them and they were on top of the bus and we took them up to Loja, I think, but out of the heat of the coast. And there was an old church up there that had been sort of not an old, um, I don't know what, was the residence for the nuns, but there wasn't hardly anybody in it anymore. It was pretty basic, pretty kind of crude. But we housed the kids there. And Gary went with me when we did that because I remember that he and another volunteer built soapbox

derbies with the boys. And this was a very hilly town. And so at the end of their time, there are two weeks at camp or whatever it was, we had these soapbox derby races down the hill, and I don't even know how they stopped those things. They must have had brakes of some kind.

GREEN: [00:38:43] But again, so we were doing, playing baseball with the kids, doing games, doing nutrition. They all went through, you know, physical checks. So we had a doctor come in and check them. And I think all the kids had amoebas and a lot of them had lice. So we had to talk about hygiene and boiling water and things like this, probably none of which made any difference when they went back home. But at least while we were there, you know.

NOBLE: [00:39:06] Well, you don't know.

GREEN: [00:39:07] I know you don't know. You don't know. And we did what we could and gave them another experience. So otherwise they would have been hanging out kind of on the streets in the heat. So that was one of our big adventures.

GREEN: [00:39:20] And then I also worked at a health clinic. I don't remember how I made all these connections. Maybe people came and asked me to do these things, but there was a women's health clinic and they were, women were wanting IUDs at that time, and it was very controversial. A lot of misinformation. And my Spanish had improved a lot by this time. So I remember working with a health project for several months, trying to help women feel safe and comfortable and knowledgeable about what their options were for reproduction. Because they were having a lot of kids and a lot of big families and not happy about it. But then there was also the machismo of, you know, Spanish speaking men that wanted big families and that was their, you know, identified who they were in the world. So there was that whole social conflict, which I wasn't very aware of or knowledgeable about or, I don't know, maybe respectful of, you know. I was more like women have a right to manage their reproductive lives. And they do, and I still believe that. But there's also this whole other element.

NOBLE: [00:40:26] In that context, yes. Were there moments like that where you're in a situation out there in Machala or in Santa Elena and you're thinking, wow, I wish we had been able to discuss the situation back in training? Why didn't they give us fill in the blank in training?

GREEN: [00:40:45] Yeah, I don't know. I think that was our situations were so different. It would have been very hard for them to anticipate.

NOBLE: [00:40:53] OK. For the people going to embassy dinners in Quito, and for you in Santa Elena.

GREEN: [00:40:59] Yeah, out in the boonies where there is very little resource. You know, no refrigerator for a long time and barely running water, we were which you are grateful for. So yeah, I I don't think they could have predicted all of the what ifs.

NOBLE: [00:41:11] Right, right.

GREEN: [00:41:12] We did rely on our Peace Corps connections more in Machala because there are more volunteers around.

NOBLE: [00:41:17] So for your social life, you?

GREEN: [00:41:19] We did more social with them and with the community too. But it would be like if we were teaching English as a second language, you know, you'd be making connections with all kinds of people in the community who would come in for classes, and I think the classes were free. And so we would do some social things with them. I remember there were parties, there were gatherings or events where we mixed or were just with Ecuadorians.

NOBLE: [00:41:43] Did you also have a chance to make personal friends with Ecuadorians?

GREEN: [00:41:48] I don't know that I, I mean, I did have friends, but they weren't friends that spanned my return.

NOBLE: [00:41:55] Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

GREEN: [00:41:57] They were friends in Ecuador while I was in Ecuador.

NOBLE: [00:42:00] Yeah, yeah. Did you have the sense that, um, being there as part of a married couple made things easier for you? Did that give you a road in with other women because they saw you as a married woman?

GREEN: [00:42:18] I think it made some things easier and some things harder. I mean, because I always had an English-speaking person to talk to, I think it took me longer to develop my Spanish skills. On the other hand, it was absolutely wonderful that I had someone I could vent my frustrations and my fears and my anxiety with. Someone when he came home at the end of the day and I'd barely made it to the market and back and cooked dinner, you know, and struggled with my Spanish all the way. You know, I had someone right there that could listen to that and be supportive. Um, but I think it also, when I saw some of the volunteers that were completely out on their own, their Spanish skills were like much better. And I have to say that the Spanish that we learned in Montana was a really wonderful, clear, beautiful. Um, the Spanish that's spoken in the mountains of Ecuador and the Spanish that's spoken on the coast.

NOBLE: [00:43:13] Is that a different thing?

GREEN: [00:43:13] It's fast. And they drop syllables and they drop endings, and it was like, I don't know what they're saying, what's wrong with me?

NOBLE: [00:43:21] And that's true in any costal.

GREEN: [00:43:22] It is, it is. But I didn't know that. And I'd just think, what's wrong with me? Why can't I communicate better? And then after, like, maybe we'd been in country two or three months and we went up to visit friends in Quito or someplace, and it was like, oh my God, I can understand what these people are saying. You know, it was like, this is lovely.

NOBLE: [00:43:41] Yes, something you learned.

GREEN: [00:43:43] I realized that it wasn't just me, but it didn't. It still is frustrating, you know, to not have that sense of being understood. And I had said, in one of my reflections, my personal reflections, was I had like a third grade level of communicating in Spanish. So I had this college education, you know, but I couldn't communicate at a college level much of anything. You know, it was like a third grader's basic, basic, basic Spanish. And it was hard. It was humiliating. It was embarrassing. It was frustrating. It was, you know, all those things for quite a long time. And I think about six or seven months into it, I started to feel like pretty comfortable, like I can go here and get by, you know. I can ride this bus and get off the right place, you know, buy this at the market. Haggling at the market was a huge thing.

NOBLE: [00:44:32] Yeah, yeah, bartering.

GREEN: [00:44:34] Yeah, it's like, so I'd ask how much it was and they'd tell me and it was like, OK, well, I don't want to pay that, but I don't know how to say, oh that's too much, you know?

NOBLE: [00:44:41] Right, right, right.

GREEN: [00:44:42] I got very good at that by the time I came home and I wanted to talk to the merchants, no, that's way too much. And what are you really going to take for this, you know? So it's an unlearning of haggling. But yeah, that was a huge thing to learn. I don't know that they prepared us for that particular thing in training so that might have been helpful.

NOBLE: [00:45:00] A simulated market.

GREEN: [00:45:01] Yes, yes. That might have been very helpful.

NOBLE: [00:45:04] So you're back from your international travel down to Chile and back up, and you're back to Machala. How do things look different to you now in your second year? Do you have somewhat different roles?

GREEN: [00:45:20] In some ways I'm more connected to the community.

NOBLE: [00:45:22] More language.

GREEN: [00:45:22] Yeah, more language skills, more able, knew more people, was able to do more comfortably than I had been able to do prior to that. But I also knew I was, like, headed home. You know, it's like, that things are. So, you know, is this project going to be two months or six months? You know, what am I investing here? So there was always that push pull of how much longer am I going to be here to support this? And what's really going to make a difference here kind of thing. So it was a little different time. And I got pregnant before I came home.

NOBLE: [00:45:57] Oh, OK.

GREEN: [00:45:58] So there was that element of, OK, I'm ready to go home now and start a family.

NOBLE: [00:46:03] First trimester of pregnancy can be difficult.

GREEN: [00:46:05] Yeah, although I wasn't particularly sick. And you know, it was just exciting to be. I was sort of started forward thinking, you know, instead of thinking about like, you know, what's going on here, what do I have to do? I was, you know, working on my job.

NOBLE: [00:46:20] Building your nest.

GREEN: [00:46:21] Yeah, thinking about, OK, we're going to be home. What does that mean? That kind of thing. So it definitely was a shift.

NOBLE: [00:46:27] And your health in other ways?

GREEN: [00:46:30] Was good for the most part. I know I lost a lot of weight.

NOBLE: [00:46:32] Ah you did.

GREEN: [00:46:33] But I don't remember being sick much. But I remember there being a time when we were, I think we were in Santa Elena and Gary was very, very sick for several weeks and lost a lot of weight and was running a fever. And it was kind of a scary time, and I don't remember how we

resolved it, if we actually got him into Guayaquil to see the Peace Corps doctor because that's where the doctor was.

NOBLE: [00:46:56] How would you communicate from either Santa Elena or Machala if you needed a Peace Corps doctor? Was there a phone? Was there a phone in the village?

GREEN: [00:47:07] There must have been a phone in the village. I do not remember being able to call anyone, you know, that we sort of had to go. We had to get on a bus and go and be there.

NOBLE: [00:47:19] Which is hard if you're a running a very high fever, to get on a bus.

GREEN: [00:47:21] Yeah, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:47:22] What is it, three hours?

GREEN: [00:47:23] Yeah, it was about three hours. And you know, and we'd think, well, he's going to get better. But when he didn't get better and didn't get better, I think we probably took him in to see the doctor and got some antibiotics. And he had some kind of an intestinal infection, bounced back from it eventually and did fine the rest of his time there. But there was like day after day with him running this fever and laying in bed and scary and not knowing what's going to happen. Is he's going to die here, you know, are we ever going to leave here?

NOBLE: [00:47:49] What are you supposed to do about this?

GREEN: [00:47:51] Right, right. We're going to get help. How do we manage this? Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:47:54] Did Peace Corps doctors ever come out like every six months or something, just to check on you?

GREEN: [00:47:58] No, we went in for six-month checkups. We did, and they didn't weight, measure, and yada yada, the whole thing. But they never came

out to our site. So I think they were spread pretty thin. I mean, I don't know how many. Ecuador is a country that always had a lot of volunteers, and I think they stayed pretty much at central and people came to them.

NOBLE: [00:48:17] Came in, yeah. So when you came to the end of your time, your thoughts are divided between kind of reflecting on what you've just done in the last two years and this very intense desire to look ahead and plan for the baby that's growing inside of you.

GREEN: [00:48:41] Yes. Yes.

NOBLE: [00:48:42] Was there some kind of close of service conference?

GREEN: [00:48:48] No, I don't think we had that. I do remember like taking a language test at the end, you know, having, so there must have been some kind of, wouldn't be an orientation, I don't know what you'd call it. There was. But I don't remember there being a big thing. I mean, there was in our village where people said goodbye, hosted parties and things like that. But I don't remember there being a big thing from Peace Corps other than just you have the doctor check you out, get your proficiency, your language proficiency thing. You know, they were just going through the bureaucratic steps of things before we took off.

NOBLE: [00:49:23] Did you, were you given an opportunity to sit down and write your reflections about what you'd accomplished?

GREEN: [00:49:31] I don't remember doing that.

NOBLE: [00:49:32] What were the good things?

GREEN: [00:49:33] Maybe I did, but I don't remember doing that. I remember reflecting on it a lot when I got home.

NOBLE: [00:49:37] When you got home.

GREEN: [00:49:39] And how simple my life had been there and how little I really needed to get by. And that sort of influenced my parenting and influenced

my life after that in his ways. But yeah, yeah. Had a bit of contempt for my friends that had been buying cars and buying houses and things like that. It was like, really, really, you know?

NOBLE: [00:50:01] Yes. So when you look back now at it.

GREEN: [00:50:07] Yeah, a long ways back.

NOBLE: [00:50:08] Mm hmm. Was it a good thing?

GREEN: [00:50:12] I think it was probably had more impact on me than it did on the Ecuadorians. I felt that right away, that this was more. And what I said when I came home was I wouldn't have missed it for the world and I wouldn't do it again if you paid me. I really felt that conflict of, wow, I learned so much about myself and about what the rest of the world is like.

NOBLE: [00:50:33] Yes.

GREEN: [00:50:33] In that two years. I couldn't have gotten it any other way from doing what I did.

NOBLE: [00:50:38] That's right.

GREEN: [00:50:38] And at that point, I was like, and there's no way I want to go back and do that again. It was so hard. It probably never would have been that hard again because I'd been through it once, you know. If I, whether it was the language I didn't speak or the standard of living or whatever. Gave me great compassion for people coming here, probably more than I ever had before I left, for people that immigrate here and struggle with the language and struggle with the culture and struggle with the value systems and things like that. So I learned a lot and had great respect for my Peace Corps experience. But it was hard. It was a hard time. So, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:51:23] Is there anything else that you'd particularly like to say?

GREEN: [00:51:29] Well, I definitely applaud the fact that Peace Corps is still there and they're still sending volunteers over. And when they come back, they

seem to have some of the same stories that I had. For some people, at least, the experience is still pretty intact, even though I'm sure there's way more bureaucracy now than there was when I was there. I think there's still that transformative, oh my God, this is what the rest of the world is like?

NOBLE: [00:51:54] Right.

GREEN: [00:51:55] That you can't get looking at National Geographic or even the wonderful programs on PBS. I'm sorry, but you know, smelling it, feeling it, tasting it, the only way to do that is to be there.

NOBLE: [00:52:05] That's right. And interacting.

GREEN: [00:52:06] And it just, it really changed things. I mean, I felt like if I could have water, running water to do dishes, I didn't need hot running water, I mean. And there was a lot of times when I didn't have it back home and I thought, I can do this. I know how to do this.

NOBLE: [00:52:21] Done that before.

GREEN: [00:52:21] Yeah, yeah. So um, and I think it was hard for my kids in some ways because I had this whole chutzpah of, well, we can do anything. You know, I've survived Peace Corps and I can do anything and took them, you know, to the edge a few times with adventures. Some of them were good, some of them probably not as good. But we survived it, all of us.

NOBLE: [00:52:41] And so you went on to have not just one, but three children.

GREEN: [00:52:44] Yes. Yes, we adopted our second child. And I had a daughter. None of them went in the Peace Corps. I was hoping I'd get second generation Peace Corps, you know, that some of my friends have, but no, none of them did that. I guess I wasn't that convincing about my time there.

NOBLE: [00:53:00] And in your profession? I know your marriage eventually came to an end. But in your professional life, you went on to?

GREEN: [00:53:07] Yeah, I came back and did a lot, did post-graduate work in early childhood, and then I got a master's degree in adult education and ended up working for the university and working with families who have kids with disabilities. And did that for the last 15 or 18 years, and there was lots of other social work kinds of positions. I worked in drug and alcohol counseling. I worked in reproductive rights things, worked for Planned Parenthood for a few years. So did all kinds of social work and kinds of things, always feeling like I still owed the world. You know, that I had been given whatever I had here, good health, good safe place to be, and that I had a responsibility to try and do things, you know, to do things that would make a difference for other people. Yeah, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:53:57] Have you ever been back to Ecuador?

GREEN: [00:53:58] I have not. You know, I thought I would go back. And, um, thought I would go back within, you know, 10 years. But then the three small children. It wasn't going to happen. And we didn't have much in the way of resources, you know, financially. So I haven't been back. But, you know, I've talked to people that have been there and connect with other Peace Corps volunteers. But no.

NOBLE: [00:54:19] Not yet.

GREEN: [00:54:20] No, not yet. Not yet. That's right. Isn't over yet.

NOBLE: [00:54:24] Well, Meredith, this has been quite wonderful talking to you. I'm always afraid to turn off the tape recorder thinking that there might be something.

GREEN: [00:54:32] Something profound is going to happen.

NOBLE: [00:54:34] Yet one more.

GREEN: [00:54:35] Well, you know, there were lots of other little incidents and memories and things like that that don't, you know? I mean, we took the bus rides and we couldn't get on a bus, so we would ride on the top of a

truck. I have pictures of us on top of the truck just riding up the mountains and the roads were narrow. And I remember Peace Corps saying always shake the bus driver's hand and smell his breath before you get on that bus. Like, what am I going to do if he smells like alcohol? I'm going to wait for the next bus, you know? Probably not. I'm probably still going to get on that bus. So there were, you know, there were definitely outstanding things that happened. And having other Peace Corps people in the communities did make a huge difference. When we were in Machala especially, there was a Peace Corps community and it was pretty wonderful. We didn't get together often, but it meant a lot to have allies, people who understood.

NOBLE: [00:55:26] That's right. That's right. Helps your mental health.

GREEN: [00:55:28] It did. It did. It made a big difference. Yeah. So thanks for letting me tell my story.

NOBLE: [00:55:34] Thank you, Meredith.

GREEN: [00:55:35] This was a long time ago. You can turn it off.

NOBLE: [00:55:40] As so often happens as we're chatting after ending this interview, there's some more that comes up. The book locker.

GREEN: [00:55:50] The wonderful book locker. When we were in Peace Corps, we got a book locker that probably had two hundred novels in it or books, and we could swap them with other Peace Corps volunteers. I read so much. We had no TV, no radio. It was our entertainment and I read Dostoyevsky there. I'm sure I never would have picked it up. You know, read Crime and Punishment, read all kinds of books and swapped books, and it was just a godsend. I was like, what are we going to do tonight? Well, which book should we read out of the book locker? You know, I think we read to each other, we read privately. But it was. And I understand they don't do that anymore. I guess they still have, we have all this access to electronic media now, so you don't need it. But it was wonderful.

GREEN: [00:56:30] And the second thing I remembered is when we had a lot of free time, even though, you know, I mean, because my time was pretty unstructured. But even Gary with his job had a lot of free time. And when we were in Santa Elena, even though we were about five miles from the ocean, he built a sailboat. Went to the local wood guy and got wood. And I remember hand sewing the sails for this sailboat.

NOBLE: [00:56:52] Oh my goodness.

GREEN: [00:56:53] And we were extremely trusting, you know, Midwestern values. The first probably two months that we lived in Ecuador, we didn't lock the house. You know, people say, what? You don't lock the house? I was like, well, no, why would we lock the house? We didn't lock the house I grew up in. And eventually people said, you have to lock the house, you know. But we never, I don't think, ever had anything stolen in two months we had the house unlocked. So anyway, Gary built this boat and it was a sloop like boat, and I stitched and stitched and stitched the sails because I had time. I don't know how many yards of sail I stitched. And he, and we took it sailing. We went out on the ocean with it. I don't think we went very far out on the ocean with it, but he loved to fish. I remember being out on the ocean with him and some other Ecuadorians once and being so sick I thought I was going to die. I get terribly seasick and he did not. So he was having a great time and I was wishing they'd just throw me overboard and feed me to the fish.

GREEN: [00:57:49] But we did take his boat sailing and he had it for probably two or three months there. And I think he had stored the sails in the boat and the sails did get stolen. I did not hand sew the next set of sails. He must have found someone that could make the sails for him because he did get a second set of sails made. But that was sort of a measure of our, well, we have all the time in the world. And he would just make sketches of it and he would go and find the next thing he needed and the kids would come and watch him build this boat and get paint for it and painted it up. It was called the Snoopy Sloop and it had a little Snoopy on the boat. And so there was definitely a lot of free time to explore other things. So that was part of his adventure there and mine, too, as far as being able to use what you have at hand and make it work. And it worked, it sailed. It was great. It

was a great little sailboat for a little while. I think he sold it when he moved to Machala because we didn't have access to any place to keep it and move it and all that.

NOBLE: [00:58:52] You are, I think of you predominantly as an artist. You are a wonderful potter. You've got a great eye and a sense of whimsy. Were you able to make art while you were in Ecuador?

GREEN: [00:59:04] I didn't very much. I mean, I taught art. That was the only time, the semester or whatever that I taught art at the high school. So I made some mobiles with the kids. I did some things, but they didn't have very much in the way of materials at all. So it was really trying to, coat hangers and cardboard kind of thing. So I didn't make much art. I collected some art, bought some art as we traveled, obviously brought back wonderful Ecuadorian art. Both, you know, two dimensional and three dimensional, I have wonderful carvings and the amazing craftspeople, and fiber art too, you know, but I wasn't doing that then. So I sort of, that was something I fell into after I got home, my pottery work. Would have been nice, and I think I brought back some Ecuadorian pottery, but it was very low fired and broke in the transit.

NOBLE: [00:59:48] Oh yeah, yeah.

GREEN: [00:59:49] But, um, we brought our little Ecuadorian dog back and she was with us for several years before she met her demise. And so that was one of our treasures and unexpected things that happened while we were there.

NOBLE: [01:00:04] Yeah, thanks for those extra memories.

GREEN: [01:00:06] There you go. Could say more, but we're done.

[END OF INTERVIEW]