

**Laur Ebone Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Laur Ebone  
**Interviewer:** Kelli Haynes  
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**Biographical Note**

Laur Ebone served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guinea from 2013 to 2014 on health and youth projects.

**Access**

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Oral History Interview

with

Laur Ebone

June 21, 2019  
Austin, Texas

By Kelli Haynes

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

HAYNES: [00:00:01] Hello. This is Kelli Haynes. I am a returned Peace Corps volunteer who served in Botswana. I am interviewing Laur Ebone, who served in Guinea from 2013 to 2014. We are talking on June 21st, 2019, in Austin, Texas, at the Peace Corps Connect conference. So Laur, I would love for you to tell me why you decided to join the Peace Corps.

EBONE: [00:00:31] Yeah. So I was in college in undergrad at University of Missouri, where I'm from. And for most of my undergrad, I was like, I'm going to be a doctor. I'm going to go to medical school. And three years into undergrad, I was like, oh, I don't want to do that anymore. And, well shoot, what should I do now? And I guess Peace Corps had been like, I don't know anyone who's done the Peace Corps, I didn't. Like but it had been somehow on my radar. And so I applied for it. And I had an interview and I got accepted. And I was like, great, I guess this is what I'm doing after undergrad. So I was accepted in the winter before I graduated in 20-. Oh, I think, yeah. In 2013.

HAYNES: [00:01:27] 2013.

EBONE: [00:01:27] The winter of 2013 is when I was accepted.

HAYNES: [00:01:31] Okay.

EBONE: [00:01:31] And I was originally supposed to go to. I got my assignment in May and I was scheduled to go to Kenya in September. And then five days before I was supposed to leave to go to Kenya, there was a terrorist attack on the mall in Nairobi.

HAYNES: [00:01:47] Wow.

EBONE: [00:01:48] So I got a phone call that said you're still in the Peace Corps, but you're not going to Kenya.

HAYNES: [00:01:53] Wow. Five days.

EBONE: [00:01:55] Okay, great. And then I was kind of in a holding pattern until I got a hold of, I think the government was also in a shutdown or something. But I talked to some very nice people at the Peace Corps office that were very kind and empathetic and understanding.

HAYNES: [00:02:11] Good.

EBONE: [00:02:12] And I lived at my parent's house until I got a phone call that said, um. They said, okay, we have a placement for you. You have an option. You can go to Guinea in November or you can go to Tanzania in February. Because I was already in the holding pattern and I was like not doing anything, I picked the earlier one.

HAYNES: [00:02:37] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:02:37] So I picked to go to Guinea in November.

HAYNES: [00:02:42] Mm hmm.

EBONE: [00:02:42] And then I went.

HAYNES: [00:02:44] Wow.

EBONE: [00:02:44] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:02:45] Okay. So tell me about, like you said, you grew up in Missouri.

EBONE: [00:02:51] Yes.

HAYNES: [00:02:52] Tell me about growing up. Was there anything while you were young that you think might have made you want to go work internationally or where you even heard about the Peace Corps?

EBONE: [00:03:04] I can't tell you where I heard about. I have no idea. My older sister is a huge influence on my life. She's six years older than I am and she started, I think, before, before I decided to the Peace Corps, she was an international backpacking guide for students often from East Coast schools. But she would take them to different countries because she's an experienced backpacker and experience guiding. And I thought that it would be cool to go international. Yeah. So I think that that's the biggest influence. Also of note, my parents and my family moved a bunch before we stopped in Missouri. And so it's not that Missouri doesn't feel like home, but it's also like, it's not maybe doesn't have as strong of ties to keep me there.

HAYNES: [00:03:56] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:03:57] Because we just moved all the time.

HAYNES: [00:04:00] So moving is kind of what you did.

EBONE: [00:04:02] It's kind of what we did. It's like a little deceiving to say that because I only moved once, because I was three. So I don't really feel that. But like our extended family isn't in Missouri, our like, there isn't. Like I have a long history there, but my siblings were all born in different states

and my parents are from different states. So we just don't have that much that holds us there. And it just almost feels like traveling and wandering is like in our blood.

HAYNES: [00:04:32] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:04:33] So Peace Corps sounded like a great option.

HAYNES: [00:04:35] Yeah, yeah, perfect. So tell me about. You finally decided on November.

EBONE: [00:04:42] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:04:43] And you got on a plane?

EBONE: [00:04:45] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:04:46] Tell me about training. What happened when you landed in country?

EBONE: [00:04:49] It was very hot, I remember, because November in the States is kind of cold. And so it was a funny, funny packing thing because I wanted to bring a coat, but I also didn't want to have a coat in the middle of Africa with me because it didn't feel necessary. You know, I was like trying to keep my belongings down. I also somehow, because you know you have that that like pre-training in the U.S. for a couple of days?

HAYNES: [00:05:22] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:05:22] So we went to Philly and somehow in the Philadelphia hotel I lost my wallet.

HAYNES: [00:05:29] No!

EBONE: [00:05:31] So I didn't figure that out until we got to the airport. I couldn't find my wallet, I didn't know where it was. And so it had cash, it had my ID, it had my credit cards. But I have my passport.

HAYNES: [00:05:44] Okay.

EBONE: [00:05:45] So I had that. So I was actually pretty calm.

HAYNES: [00:05:52] Okay.

EBONE: [00:05:52] And I like had just met all of these people that I didn't know very well. And I also had decided not to have brought my cell phone with me to Guinea. So I left. Then I had an iPhone that I had just like shattered the face of like a couple of months prior. And I was like, well, this is a stupid thing to bring to Guinea. Like, I'm not going to be able to get it fixed and it's just going to get worse. Like, I don't need it. So I didn't have a phone. So then I was borrowing these people that I'd just met, my fellow volunteers, their phone and like sort of telling people what happened. Like all, all my volunteers were very nice. They're like, if you get hungry in the airport, I'll buy you a smoothie.

HAYNES: [00:06:35] Aww.

EBONE: [00:06:36] So people bought me food until we got into the country and I like then was like welcomed and like we were in the training center and then I just didn't have to worry as much. So that was a great introduction to my new friends who were very kind to me in the whole airport process. Very lucky that I didn't lose my passport.

HAYNES: [00:06:59] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:07:00] That was good and fortunate. Um, in country, right? We landed in the capital, Conakry, and we stayed. We must have stayed in headquarters for a couple of days before going to our training village, which was like an hour and a half north to Dubreka. And once we got to Dubreka, then we were placed with host families for, um. I actually wish I had read my journal before doing this because I think I have some very funny musings from my first night there. But I can remember writing something about the goats because there were two goats that were right outside my window and they just made noise constantly. I'm like, I guess I

don't need an alarm clock here because I have the goats. And they're just chatting away at all hours of the night at my house.

EBONE: [00:07:58] I remember that the host family I was placed with had hosted volunteers before, and I thought that maybe they did this, but I think maybe the Peace Corps staff did this, but everything was labeled because they speak French. So everything like had these really nice, like there was like a paper on the pillow that said pillow and there was like the paper on the sheet that was lidra and um.

HAYNES: [00:08:23] Everything was labeled in French so you could read it.

EBONE: [00:08:25] Everything was labeled in French so I could like learn and like learn some vocab. And also they had these hilarious posters that were like almost like maybe a tear out from like a Seventeen magazine, but definitely not a Seventeen magazine. And there were all these rap and hip hop stars in various poses with their names, and there were three of them, and they were on the walls of my room, which was just so funny. And one of them was Rick Ross, who I didn't know who that was. Like there was like Beyonce and Rihanna and people I recognized. But then, like, people would be like, yeah, America, Rick Ross. And I was like, I don't know why you guys care about Rick Ross. I don't even know who he is. But it was very cute that they had these, like American superstar posters on the walls waiting for me.

HAYNES: [00:09:25] Oh, wonderful. So what was your training? What were your training days like?

EBONE: [00:09:31] Training days. So, like wake up in your host house and eat breakfast with your family and then just walk to the training center. And then there would be like topic specific and language classes. I think language classes were both morning and night.

HAYNES: [00:09:53] Night?

EBONE: [00:09:53] Sorry, not night but.

HAYNES: [00:09:54] Like afternoon?

EBONE: [00:09:55] Yeah. Like twice a day. Um. And we all had to start in French first. And then if you got to a certain point in French you could like pass the French proficiency and then start learning local language for whatever region you were going to. But we didn't know what region we were in at first. It's just all focused on French. I did not speak French before I came. I had studied, in college I had taken a year of French, but like in a typical college fashion, like didn't really.

HAYNES: [00:10:36] Didn't retain any of it.

EBONE: [00:10:38] No. And I wasn't really forced to speak, like it was a lot of vocab. I think it was useful. I had a good idea of like sentence structure, but I still, it was still really hard to learn French. Yeah, I can remember my host mom one day, I think. I think our home coordinator was like coming in, doing site visits like in our, in our training village just to make sure that everything was like good. And I remember my host mom like miming that. She was, she was talking to the, to the coordinator and she was like miming breastfeeding and kept saying that I was like her daughter. Like she was breastfeeding me. I got, like the miming helped because I definitely understood what she was saying. But it was a very, I was like, this is, this is a very strange way to say that I am like your daughter.

HAYNES: [00:11:39] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:11:39] That you would offer me breast milk. Yeah, very funny. But she was great. I really liked her quite a bit. Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:11:51] So were you all in the same training village or did you have different training villages?

EBONE: [00:11:55] No, we all were in the same training village. So they did for our group, our agroforestry and health volunteers came in and I think we were a group of about 30 and we all had home sites in the same Dubreka training village.



HAYNES: [00:12:13] Cool.

EBONE: [00:12:13] Yeah, it was great.

HAYNES: [00:12:15] And you were a health volunteer?

EBONE: [00:12:16] I was a health volunteer that then got merged to be a youth volunteer.

HAYNES: [00:12:20] Okay.

EBONE: [00:12:21] They said the placement coordinator had apparently requested Washington to send him five youth people.

HAYNES: [00:12:30] Mm hmm.

EBONE: [00:12:31] Which he then thought was me, but I don't really think that it. Like, I thought I was a health volunteer.

HAYNES: [00:12:38] It was a miscommunication somewhere.

EBONE: [00:12:40] I think there was. So also I was like reassigned too. Like I was reassigned to Guinea. So I was like, did you really? I don't know about this, but I just like had a lot of summer camp on my resume. So I think that that's what he zeroed in on and was like, oh, she's a youth volunteer, which was fine. I was jazzed to be a youth volunteer. It was a little bit trickier because there wasn't really a youth program anymore. Like this was the last of the, of the youth program, and they were just going to have health programs. So I didn't get so much youth specific training, but it was fine because I was doing health topics with the youth. So it was like, fine, I could have the health training and.

HAYNES: [00:13:19] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:13:20] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:13:21] Okay. So tell me about your site.

EBONE: [00:13:25] My site, Koundara, is up in the Boké region. The Boké region is the coastal region that also extends inland. So I didn't have any coast in mine and I was very north. I was kind of the farthest. Yeah, I was like the farthest north that they had gone. They had gradually worked their way back up there. It took 15 hours by taxi to get there from the capital. Uh, it's about, Guinea is about the size of Oregon and it takes 15 hours to get from the southern part to the northern part. And the roads are pretty terrible.

HAYNES: [00:14:10] When you say taxi?

EBONE: [00:14:12] Yeah. Bush taxi. So like an old Saab that's falling apart that. It was either called, you would get you would get a *six plas* or *neuf plas*, which would be six people or nine people. But it was like always like, like in the *six plas*, you could put nine people and like a bunch of goats on top and maybe someone's holding a baby and like chickens hanging out the window. Yeah, like the nine place taxi would be more like a station wagon. Everybody's super crammed in. And traveling in Guinea it seems like you need to take everything with you. So everyone has a ton of baggage. No, definitely not air conditioning. Windows down unless the driver had recently cleaned the inside of his car because then he didn't want the dust to come inside. So then he would want the windows up, which was miserable.

HAYNES: [00:15:07] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:15:08] There were times that I would end up, because they stretched the six places to be much more, there were times that I would end up like straddling the stick shift.

HAYNES: [00:15:21] Uh huh.

EBONE: [00:15:23] In the front seat, which was pretty uncomfortable given that then the driver would need to use the stick shift to change gears while you were driving. You're like, well, hmm. Okay. I guess this is what I'm doing. And they always wanted to put the white volunteers, the white people in

the front. Our safety and security officer, who was great, she was Guinean, was always like, sit in the seat right behind the driver. It's the safest place if you were to get into an accident. But I would try and sit there and then the driver would like get more people into the taxi and then he would make me sit up front. So fine, I'll sit in front. Very frequently you were handed a baby to hold. Very dusty, very hot. And very dirty. Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:16:14] Fun 15 hours.

EBONE: [00:16:15] Just 15 hours.

HAYNES: [00:16:16] Bouncing around.

EBONE: [00:16:17] Yeah. Bouncing around. The roads are really terrible. At some point, it's like different parts of roads had been paved, but then the infrastructure to fix the potholes wasn't there. So like someone would have come in with great intentions to make this road super paved. But Guinea has a rainy season and like after a couple of rainy seasons and no repairs, then it's, it's almost like the asphalt is worse. Like you would have been better off having dirt roads and gravel roads. There were some times when you would encounter on the way, there are these kids, these entrepreneurial kids that would stand on the side of the road with like somewhat larger rocks. And right before a taxi came up, they would like put the rock in the hole. Like, look, we're repairing the pothole. And they would demand money. So the taxi drivers would pay them.

EBONE: [00:17:10] But I was talking to a taxi driver at some point and he was like, oh yeah, they just keep doing it with this same rock. Like, they're not like actually fixing anything. They just wait until a car comes and then they take the rock out that they just put in. Put the rock in. And if you don't pay them, then they throw the rocks at your car. So.

HAYNES: [00:17:30] It was very entrepreneurial.

EBONE: [00:17:33] It is very entrepreneurial. I don't know if it's created a lot of social good, but the kids are getting some pennies to spend on something. Yeah. Yeah. Very cute.

HAYNES: [00:17:42] Yeah. So tell me about your village.

EBONE: [00:17:45] So my village was more actually like a city by Guinea standards. I think that we had 20,000 people. We did have paved roads for like our city block, which was very nice. And because we were right next to Senegal and we were one of the major trade routes out. And so Senegal, or maybe even it was the World Bank, someone had paid to like make the roads and the roads extended the 15 kilometers into our town, which was very nice. I mainly walked inside my city, so it wasn't that big of a deal. But it was nice to have paved streets without kids to throw rocks for fixing the potholes.

EBONE: [00:18:32] I lived in a family compound with the old mayor of the village. And so he had, um, two wives. And so inside his compound, he had his hut and then he had another, um, another structure that he rented out to a family, and then another structure where both of his wives and all the children lived. And then another structure that was kind of like a duplex but for three. I don't know if you call those a three-plex.

HAYNES: [00:19:04] Triplex?

EBONE: [00:19:07] Triplex. So there was, there was three separate rooms. And each of them had two rooms. So I was on the corner and I had a front room and a back room and I had an indoor bathroom with a Western toilet, but there isn't running water.

HAYNES: [00:19:25] Mm hmm.

EBONE: [00:19:26] So I really only peed in that toilet because otherwise you have to, you have to like use a bunch of water to flush the toilet. And I just used the family latrine because it was so much easier and less smelly since the room didn't have a door and was right next to my bed.

HAYNES: [00:19:43] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:19:44] So. But it was nice to be able to take a shower. There was like a drain so I could just take a shower in my house and not walk to the latrine to take a shower. So that was really nice.

HAYNES: [00:19:54] When you say shower, like a bucket bath?

EBONE: [00:19:56] Yeah, I mean a bucket bath. There was a drain where I could take a bucket bath.

HAYNES: [00:20:01] Could dump water on your head.

EBONE: [00:20:02] I could dump on myself and.

HAYNES: [00:20:06] Not be standing in a bucket

EBONE: [00:20:07] And not standing in a bucket and not be out in the open and not, uh, not have to worry about anybody coming in, because it was. Although one day I left my front door open when I went to take a shower, a bucket bath. And, um, I thought I heard something and I just like thought it was like my little host brothers and sisters, even though they weren't supposed to come in unless I told them they could come in, they still sometimes came in. So I just thought it was them. And then I came out of the shower and I poked my head into the front room to like, you know, admonish the kids. And it was a goat. So shooed the goat out. Guess I really shouldn't leave the door open because the goat will come into my house. I got food in my house too. So, like, of course, the goat wants to come in and, like, eat the dried grains of rice.

HAYNES: [00:20:53] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:20:54] Whatever other goodies I had waiting for it to eat. Yeah. So that was pretty funny.

HAYNES: [00:21:00] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:21:02] My village itself had a market every day, so I didn't have to worry about market day. So I had good access to food, which was not true

for everyone who lived in Guinea at the time that I was there. So that was definitely a blessing. Usually I often ate with my family, but I also quickly made other neighborhood, family friends. So I would just sort of rotate and eat with everyone. Sometimes I cooked for myself, but I like, because I was trying to rebel against the constant presence of rice and bread in my life. So I would like make a salad for myself. I would go to the market and get some cucumbers and carrots and onions. No, no lettuce, um, and like just eat a bunch of vegetables. And then I would proudly go out and like tell everyone that I had prepared a meal for myself. And then they would like put down a plate of rice and sauce in front of me.

EBONE: [00:22:05] And I'm like, no, weren't you listening? I just ate. And they were like, you didn't have any rice, you haven't eaten. And it's definitely one of those places where you, like you don't refuse food. So like you have to eat. So I stopped cooking for myself because I just have to keep double eating because it didn't matter even if I told them over and over, like I'm not hungry or I don't want anything. I was always gifted food and it was impolite to refuse it. So I just ate with everyone else which was really nice.

HAYNES: [00:22:37] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:22:38] Yeah. Even strangers.

HAYNES: [00:22:39] Wow.

EBONE: [00:22:40] Yeah, people just, because I stood out so much, like I would walk to the market and people would be eating. And it's really common even for, to talk to locals among locals, like if you're eating and you'd see someone or make eye contact with them, you say, *invitation*, which is just like, come eat with me, come share my food. And it's always genuine. Like you can always walk over and go eat some of the food. And like it gave people such pleasure for me to, like, walk over and eat a bite of their sauce and be like, wow, your sauce is really good. And so, you know, I just ate with whoever.

HAYNES: [00:23:14] Yeah. So it sounds like you made a lot of friends.

EBONE: [00:23:18] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:23:19] In your village.

EBONE: [00:23:19] I did. I did. Everyone was super welcoming. The children especially wanted to talk to the white girl in village. The word they would use is *porto*. *Porto* just means foreigner. It got, you know, like some days it's fine. Some days you're like, oh yeah, let's talk to the kids. But other days it's just exhausting. Or like after. And it wasn't just children either. And it feels very much like you're being called out for being an outsider. Although there was no malice ever, like no one was trying to wish me any harm when they. They really just wanted to talk to me or they wanted to do the exchange in the local language, like the greeting exchange. But some days it's just like, I just, I just want to walk to the market and buy bananas, and I don't want to talk to anyone and.

HAYNES: [00:24:17] Yeah. Just sort of be invisible and fit in.

EBONE: [00:24:18] And yeah, I just want to be invisible. And you absolutely never can be.

HAYNES: [00:24:23] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:24:24] So that was sometimes hard. But if you could keep a good humor about it, it's a, it's a very sweet thing that everyone just wants to say hi and ask how you're doing.

HAYNES: [00:24:36] Yeah, yeah. So tell me about your work in your village.

EBONE: [00:24:43] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:24:44] Your half health, half youth job.

EBONE: [00:24:46] Yes. And so my counterpart worked for the Secoge, which is the, uh, it's an acronym, but it's the children's group, the national children's organization. And youth is defined as anyone under the age of 35. So that was our target audience, was anyone under the age of 35.

HAYNES: [00:25:11] So you had some youth who were older than you?

EBONE: [00:25:13] Yeah. Yeah, I was 24 probably when I was in the Peace Corps. Yeah, but it was fine. We worked closely with our group of peer mentors, which were actual youth, like 14 to 18 year olds that we had recruited from the schools. And we had one to two volunteers from each of the middle schools. And then like we retained some of them as they went to high school as well. And then we would do like education kind of with them. So like definitely one day we set, we set out and we like talked all about STIs and we talked, another day we talked about malaria. One time we talked about health myths. And then with this group of youth, so we would like definitely spread education to them so that they could then tell their peers about that.

EBONE: [00:26:05] But then also we would put on these things called, um, *sensaciones*, which I've never really found a good English translation for, but it's kind of like, kind of like a talent show. Sort of. But with, like we would like sneak in health messages. So we would like make up like a little drama, like a little play that we would act out. But also we would have people reciting poetry and dance groups doing, because they did the like matching dance groups, like their own choreography sort of things. And they were fantastic.

HAYNES: [00:26:47] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:26:47] So we would invite groups of them and we would invite singers and we'd have just a bunch of people perform back to back. And then like somewhere in the middle, our youth volunteers would act out a play. That was something. So like one time we definitely did it about there's like this myth that green mangos, eating green mangos causes malaria.

HAYNES: [00:27:12] Huh.

EBONE: [00:27:12] So we did a play about that. I acted in the plays as well. So I like had lines, so the youth groups would give me lines that I would have to do. I was almost always cast as the doctor. They had a white coat from



somewhere and they would make me put on the white coat and like recite my lines. It was very fun. Yeah. And those things like don't start until 11:30 p.m. or midnight and they go for hours.

HAYNES: [00:27:43] How did you do it?

EBONE: [00:27:45] I mean, like that's the only time that it's actually not absurdly hot, so it's kind of nice. I was very tired. But the nice thing with it being so hot is like siesta time is like a real thing. Like you really don't do anything from 3:00 to 5:00 or 2:00 to 4:00, whatever. People just take naps. Although I didn't, I never mastered the ability to take a nap in the hot of the day because it's so hot. So I didn't really understand how anyone slept. But like, we would just, like, sit under the tree and like, drink tea and chat.

HAYNES: [00:28:21] Mm hmm.

EBONE: [00:28:23] Yeah. So it was fine. It wasn't like too taxing. In general, I would. So I did that. Like, I tried to keep a, keep a somewhat of a schedule to appease my upbringing in American society and my thinking about activity. So I would go Monday to Thursday around 9 a.m., I would go to our Secoges' office, the youth group's office, and usually meet my counterpart there. And we would do some planning. Or like and the youth mentors might meet us in the afternoon, definitely not every day. And like also I just like ran errands with my counterpart. Like we would like need to go talk to someone or like maybe we had to talk to the mayor, I don't know. And so I would just kind of like do whatever he did or I would be like, I'm not going to do it today. I'm going to go, I'm going to go talk to these other people or whatever, talk to market ladies.

EBONE: [00:29:19] And then on Fridays I would go to the health center and I met. When I first got there, I met this spitfire of a woman. She was awesome. I thought she was the doctor for a long time, which I thought was awesome because there really aren't that many female doctors. But she was great. Her name was Madame Ture and she was so independent. She didn't have a husband. She was a nurse. But I thought she was the doctor because the doctor was away for the first couple of weeks that I was there. She like ran the office. She drove a motorcycle by herself. So, yeah,

it was so cool. She was like, yeah, I got my friend to teach me how to drive a motorcycle. Now I have a motorcycle and like, it's just like she was like definitely like an independent lady. And finally, when the doctor did come around and he was kind of this like grumpy Man, I was like, man, I really wish she was the doctor. She was like, always she had, like, these fun wigs. And so you like come in and we would like chat, like maybe go get some tea before we started the day.

EBONE: [00:30:16] And then we would come into the office and she would like take off her regular, her like *panya* clothing, the like local clothing, and like put on her doctor coat, her nurse coat. And she'd also always take off her hair too, which I thought was so funny. Yeah, because she had these like crazy, like curly red, red and black 'fros. And so she would just she would take them off and then we'd get to work. I really enjoyed her company. And then when the doctor did come around, and like the afternoons were kind of slow sometimes. So we'd just sort of be sitting and sweating in the office, like waiting for people to come or like, I don't know what we were doing. And then me and the doctor would start chatting and the doctor would inevitably somehow always bring up, like, why don't you have a husband? Why are you married? Why are you here? Like, what are you doing? And I got pretty smart with my responses. And I would be like, because I don't want one. And Madame Ture would be in the bathroom. She'd be like, yeah, because she doesn't want one! It was great. She was my own little personal, like, independent woman cheerleader.

HAYNES: [00:31:22] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:31:23] It was awesome. I really liked her a lot. I liked the doctor well enough too, but I really liked that nurse, so I would do that on Fridays. And then I feel like we usually left early on Fridays anyway too, just like walk around in the market and like go sit with people or buy something or, I don't know.

HAYNES: [00:31:48] Make friends.

EBONE: [00:31:48] Yeah, right. Or like hang out with children. Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:31:53] Cool.

EBONE: [00:31:53] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:31:55] Did you get to travel any while you were in country?

EBONE: [00:31:58] I did not. I, um, so ultimately I spent ten months in country because of evacuation. And during those ten months, I didn't really travel outside of the country nor really outside of my region. I was able to go visit some other volunteers that were nearby. I, um, on Sundays I would go, it's like a 30 minute taxi ride to the next village over where there was another volunteer and it was called Saréboido. And I would go visit Vera in Saréboido specifically on Sundays because I got into this funny situation where I met this English-speaking man. So I was stoked. He was Nigerian and he had a barber shop like really close to my house. So I would go hang out at his barber shop a lot. And every time I would go he would turn the, whatever TV channel was on, to like the BBC because it was in English.

EBONE: [00:32:59] And no one protested, but they would have been watching like music videos or something. But whenever I came, he was like, oh great, English speaker's here. Let's turn on the English news channel, which was awesome because I didn't. Then I got to see the news sometimes. And so he was. One time he was asking me about my religion. And I was like, yeah, well, I grew up Catholic, but I'm not really Catholic anymore. He was like, oh, there's Catholic Church. I'll come with you to church on Sunday. And I was like, oh, great. So we went to church the following Sunday. And after the service then he was like, great, now I want to take you to my church. And I was like, cool. And it was like an Episcopalian, but an African Episcopalian church. And then the pastor there was Tanzanian, and he also spoke English. And then the Tanzanian pastor was very concerned for my soul after that.

HAYNES: [00:34:02] Oh.

EBONE: [00:34:02] So he always wanted me to come to service. And when. And then he like was also like translating during the service too, because he was speaking in French to the regular parishioners.

HAYNES: [00:34:13] So it was just you he was translating for?

EBONE: [00:34:14] And then for me, he would be like, and to our American sister, we welcome her.

HAYNES: [00:34:18] Woah.

EBONE: [00:34:19] And I was like, okay. I really don't want to be singled out. I also don't want to be at church right now. I don't want to go to church. And so the Nigerian barber then wanted me to come to church every week, and the Tanzanian pastor wanted me to come to church every week. And so I started going to the market and in Saréboido every Sunday so that I didn't have to go to church. And I just always said that, oh, I'm sorry, I have to do work with my other volunteer on Sunday in Saréboido. And they're like, on Sunday? You have to work on Sunday? And I'm like, yes, I have to work. She really needs my help. It's always just so I didn't have to run into the pastor and have him say, sister, we missed you. Yeah, yeah. It was good. Then I had a standing, a standing lunch date with my friend in the other village.

EBONE: [00:35:15] And it was true, her market on Sunday was very cool because it was at the intersection of Senegal, The Gambia. No, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea. So people from the other two countries would come in and have market stalls. So it was cool. Like there was always way cooler fabric at that market. So I was busy doing my work on Sundays in the market, the Sunday market, buying fabric.

HAYNES: [00:35:48] Did you have any side projects you really liked?

EBONE: [00:35:50] I was working on actually something that I thought was pretty interesting. So there was, there was a computer skills cafe that was opening up. No electricity in my village. There was just generator power. And so there was this little cafe. So my counterpart that worked for the

youth organization was supremely motivated, um, was very excited to have me. I think had been requesting for a couple of years and just hadn't gotten a volunteer. And so he was super jazzed and we got along really well together. And he had wanted to open a cyber cafe, and I was going to work on it with him. And then this other cafe was opening at the same time. They had gotten a grant or something. I actually don't know how they were funded, but they had gotten a bunch of computers.

EBONE: [00:36:44] So then I was going to work with them and do some like word processing classes or like PowerPoint or like even just like typing skills. So I was going to work with them, but still my counterpart wanted it to be a, um, like a money generating project for the youth organization.

HAYNES: [00:37:04] Oh.

EBONE: [00:37:04] So what we were hoping to do was to open another cyber café more in the center of town, make it solar powered. We talked to the mayor and there had been a fire. We had a library. It was a French organization had come and built a library in our city a long time ago, which I also spent a lot of time there because there was I would get like children's books in French so I could practice.

HAYNES: [00:37:34] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:37:35] So I spent a lot of time at the library, but right next to the library there was like this burned-out space because there had been a fire. And we had talked to the mayor and the mayor was going to give us that space so that we could have this computer cafe. And then I could do English classes there because everybody always wanted to learn English, so I was going to do English classes there. Guinea is a Muslim country and Ramadan had come around. And you can't do anything in Ramadan because everyone's so tired, because they're not eating and it's really hot too, so fine. So that that project kind of got put on hold. But me and my counterpart brought up a grant that we submitted to the small grants Peace Corps thing. And I had been talking to this random man I found online who had started a solar powered cyber cafe in Chad a couple of

years prior. And I just reached out to him to like talk to him about solar power stuff.

EBONE: [00:38:38] So I was kind of working with him, but I didn't get very far into the project. But the mayor was going to give us the space. That was going to be what I was going to focus a lot of my energy on. During Ramadan, I was also working with the chair of the Department of Education, who's a friend, and I was going to do English classes at our youth center for adults in the evening. But again, I was waiting to launch until after Ramadan finished. Unfortunately, during my whole service, Ebola was, um, growing, lingering in the back of all our minds. And it actually ended up that three days after the end of Ramadan, we got the call that we were being evacuated. So we had like, I felt like I had built up a lot of energy around my projects during Ramadan, like a lot of thinking and a lot of talking and then just didn't get to put anything into practice because I was evacuated.

HAYNES: [00:39:47] Yeah. Was it a quick evacuation process or did they?

EBONE: [00:39:50] Super quick.

HAYNES: [00:39:51] Was there anything before you just left?

EBONE: [00:39:53] Not really.

HAYNES: [00:39:54] Oh.

EBONE: [00:39:54] So I got a text message from my, I got a confusing text message from my regional director. I can remember I was sitting at my counterpart's house eating my favorite sauce on the floor of his room. And I got this, like funny message that had a lot of acronyms in it, because Peace Corps loves acronyms.

HAYNES: [00:40:16] Mm hmm.

EBONE: [00:40:16] And I like misunderstood it, or I didn't want to believe it. Because it said like all PCVs and PCTs are to be evacuated, like look for further information or something. But for months and months prior to this,

like, people have been asking, volunteers have been asking like, are we being evacuated or are we in danger of being evacuated? Like, what are we doing? Ebola is growing. Like what? And the message we kept repeatedly hearing was, no. You're staying, like stay in place. It's fine. Don't worry about it. So it was kind of weird to get this out of the blue message. And for some reason, like my brain saw PCVs, which would be Peace Corps volunteers. And PCT would be Peace Corps trainees. But I didn't put it together and I think I didn't want to.

HAYNES: [00:41:06] Yeah. There was just no, you had no idea that this was even a possibility?

EBONE: [00:41:12] No.

HAYNES: [00:41:12] And you just got a text message saying, you're out.

EBONE: [00:41:14] Yeah. And so then I got a call from him later. His name was Sise. Sise called me because I was in the, there were five volunteers in my little region and I was like the one in the biggest city center village kind of thing. So whenever Sise came to the region, he would come to my house first and then sort of base out of my house, because the other ones were harder to get to, which was totally fine. So like Sise called me and was like, did you get my text? And I was like, yeah. Or he said something like, he said something like, okay, I'm coming to get you tomorrow. And I was like, what? And he was like, yeah, in the text, like, you're being evacuated. And we're evacuating the Boké region first. So that was my region. And you're the farthest away and I'm coming to get you first and I'll like pick up the others on the way.

EBONE: [00:42:12] Uh, so I had. I want to say it was, I wanted to say he said tomorrow. It might have been the day after tomorrow. It was a very short amount of time. It was like the afternoon. And so I like cried, unsurprisingly, with my counterpart. I had this very emotional afternoon with him.

HAYNES: [00:42:34] You were still with him when you got that phone call?

EBONE: [00:42:36] I think so.

HAYNES: [00:42:38] Okay.

EBONE: [00:42:38] I think I was, yeah. I really liked his parents were really nice and I like his family was like a second family to mine. So I was over there a lot too. Yeah, I think I was. And then I told him and I was emotional. He was emotional. And then I actually didn't cry again until I got back to the U.S. It was like I couldn't. I couldn't. I don't know. I don't know. The like, it was too much. I couldn't figure it out. So, so I was, I told him and then I went back to my house and I started to pack my things, which was so weird. It was also supposed to be a temporary evacuation.

HAYNES: [00:43:25] Oh.

EBONE: [00:43:25] So they were thinking that Ebola was going to blow over, which was wrong.

HAYNES: [00:43:31] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:43:31] But they were thinking that it had just hit like a hot point. And so there were like too many cases and it was unsafe, but they were just taking us home on a temporary one month administrative leave.

HAYNES: [00:43:42] Okay.

EBONE: [00:43:43] So they were going to fly all of us home for one month and then theoretically send us all back.

HAYNES: [00:43:50] So let me interrupt you really quick.

EBONE: [00:43:52] Yeah.

HAYNES: [00:43:54] What was going on as far as Ebola in the country up to that point?



EBONE: [00:43:59] Sure. So, I mean, I know a lot of this in retrospect. I don't know what I knew at that time. We definitely knew about Ebola. I would say I probably heard that Ebola was in the country probably in February sometime. And we had gotten there in November, December. And it turns out that the first case, the initial case of Ebola was in December.

HAYNES: [00:44:23] Okay.

EBONE: [00:44:23] So like right when my group arrived in country, there was the first case, but they hadn't figured out it was Ebola. They were like, oh, a lot of people are dying, okay. Like, but hadn't like, they don't have the facilities to test for that. So they had sent samples away to somewhere in Europe. So the first time I believe that I knew that it was confirmed was sometime in late February. And evacuation happened in August.

HAYNES: [00:44:49] Okay.

EBONE: [00:44:51] So there had been definite spread. There had been lots of people who had died. None in my region. So it started in the southern part of the country, in the forested region, which actually there are no volunteers in the forest region, but it's really close to another region of the country. So it first was localized to the forest region and then moved up into Haute [Upper] Guinea, which is like the inner part of the country. And the volunteers in Haute Guinea had already been consolidated to the regional capital once for some amount of time, meaning that the volunteers had been instructed to leave their village and go to the regional office and stay there for like a week or something like before they were cleared to go back. And I knew, I know that some people came into the capital.

EBONE: [00:45:49] But it was like slowly spreading throughout the country. And then it hit Conakry, the capital, the biggest.

HAYNES: [00:45:59] Mm hmm.

EBONE: [00:45:59] I'm pretty sure that that happened before we were evacuated. I'm pretty sure it was in the capital and in the slums of the capital, which,

uh, one of the big things with Ebola is someone who actively has it or like is going to die from it soon, they're highly, highly, highly contagious. It's transmitted by bodily fluid. They suspect that it can be transmitted with something as simple as sweat. But I don't know that that's been actually proven. But contact with blood or bodily fluids, and it has a 21 day incubation period. So I could get it, be transmitting it and not show signs for three weeks. Although you're much more likely to transmit it when you're more sick. So it was definitely very nerve wracking and scary.

EBONE: [00:46:58] I was really far away from the epicenter, but people in my village, like had family members that were dying, had friends that had contracted it. And like there were agencies coming in, flooding in, like Médecins Sans Frontières [Doctors Without Borders]. They came in real quickly and started setting up Ebola treatment units and people were trying to respond to the outbreak. Um. There's some, there's very low health literacy. There's very bad infrastructure, and there's distrust of foreigners. It was kind of like the perfect storm to let it get wild, um, and then it crossed borders. So then it left Guinea and it went to Liberia.

HAYNES: [00:47:46] Uh huh.

EBONE: [00:47:46] And that definitely, that was springtime, I think. And that is like when it ramped up for sure. And the Western community, like America and Europe were really freaking out about it. I know that some of my Peace Corps volunteer family members were like calling Peace Corps headquarters like, what are you doing? Bring my daughter or son home or like and kind of harassing people. My family was not doing that, although my brother called me at some point and asked me. He's just like, didn't have a good picture of what was going on. He was like, can you stay in your house? Can you wear a mask everywhere you go? Can you wear gloves? And I was like, no, I can't do any of those things. That is absolutely not what I'm going to do. I mean, speaking from a place of concern, of course, but um. Yeah.

EBONE: [00:48:43] I felt relatively safe in my community. I also felt safe, given my understanding of how germs work and like that. I wasn't going to touch any dead bodies or.

HAYNES: [00:48:59] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:49:00] Not have any like close sick contacts, but that's not a given for the people of Guinea. So it had been ramping up, the number of confirmed cases, the number of deaths, like over months. And our country director really tried, was really advocating to keep us there. Not because he wasn't worried about our safety or didn't concern himself about our safety, but because he really does believe in the power of the Peace Corps volunteer and like what a, what a vessel for like getting into these communities that don't trust foreigners. If you want to spread messages, you've got about 100 Americans placed all over the country that would love to spread your message for you.

HAYNES: [00:49:53] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:49:55] The response effort took a while to get organized and coordinated. And I don't believe the Peace Corps network was ever tapped by any of the aid organizations to spread their messaging. I tried to do my own, like I heard these funny myths going around. There was this one this one really pervasive myth that was, um, if you didn't want to get Ebola, all you needed to do was drink Nescafé powdered coffee and eat a whole raw onion. And that was protection against Ebola, which to me, I was like, okay, that's ridiculous. And also, here's an opportunity where I can really make a difference.

HAYNES: [00:50:44] Yeah, a teachable moment.

EBONE: [00:50:45] Let me let me organize. Let me invite the important people of my community to come and like I'm going to, I'm going to spread some truth. So I talked to my counterpart who was all in. He was like, yes, this is a great idea. Let's go to the mayor. So we went to the mayor. I was like, Mayor, this is what I want to do. Like, this is really important. It's very time sensitive. What do you think? And he was like, cool, I'm with you. I'll come. And I was like, great, when should we have it? And he was like, I don't know, when do you want to have it? Which was a mistake. I should not have let him let me decide because it's a, Guinea is a yes culture. And so

like I was like, great. I think that May 15th, I don't know what actual day it was, May 15th would be a great day to have it. He was like, perfect, May 15th. And I was like, cool, we have a date. Actually I really should have pushed him and made him give me the date and give me the time.

EBONE: [00:51:41] Because May 15th rolled around, I was at the youth center, had all the chairs lined up, had all my peer mentors there, had everyone there, and no one showed up. And I told everyone, like May 15th, the day the mayor's coming. I got the, I got the juice, because you have to have the juice.

HAYNES: [00:51:58] Yes, yes.

EBONE: [00:51:58] To pass out for your honored guests. And no one came. And like, also, people run late. So I was like, all right. I'll wait an hour. But an hour, two hours. And then I ran into the building manager and he was like, oh, the Secretary of Agriculture is here. They're doing a farm tour today. Didn't you know? And I was like, Mayor! You knew. You knew May 15th was the Secretary of Agriculture was coming. You could have just told me, but because it's yes culture, when I said, how about May 15th, you didn't want to disappoint me.

HAYNES: [00:52:36] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:52:36] So he said yes. So I swallowed my pride a little bit or whatever, swallowed my hurt. And went back to the mayor and was like, Mayor, this is still really important. When can we have it? Also, we needed to time it right, because Ramadan was starting. So I needed to time it before Ramadan because we couldn't do it during Ramadan, whatever. We picked a date, maybe like another week or two in advance. But I already had all the things, so it wasn't, didn't take much.

HAYNES: [00:53:06] He picked the date?

EBONE: [00:53:07] He picked the date.

HAYNES: [00:53:09] Okay.

EBONE: [00:53:09] He picked the date. I got confirmation he was going to be there. We told everyone again, the mayor told everyone again. Date comes around, time comes around. Maybe no one was there. But like a half an hour later, people sort of showed up and the mayor showed up. And I was like, yes, it's going to happen. We're on stage. The mayor's like right next to me. And he was like, thank you so much everyone, for coming to this very important spread of information. Our like treasured American is here, blah, blah. And then he was like, looks like not everyone that we invited is here. And then says, since it's very important information, do you guys, let me be democratic here, do you guys think we should reschedule so everyone can be here to get this very important information? And I'm like, I'm definitely standing on stage shaking my head.

HAYNES: [00:54:02] No.

EBONE: [00:54:02] And everyone in the audience is like, yes, it's very important information. We should wait until we have a time for everyone to come.

HAYNES: [00:54:12] No!

EBONE: [00:54:14] No! This is stupid. I have eight of you. I want to talk to eight of you. I don't care if there was supposed to be 16. I want to get the message to eight of you. So we didn't, we didn't do any messaging that day. And then Ramadan started shortly after that, and I was like, okay, I guess it's going to, I guess it's going to wait until after Ramadan. And then three days after Ramadan, I left.

HAYNES: [00:54:39] Oh my gosh. So you were, we left when you were packing?

EBONE: [00:54:43] Yeah. Okay, so I was packing. So I went back to my.

HAYNES: [00:54:46] For a month?

EBONE: [00:54:46] Yeah, I was packing, thinking, thinking that I was just going to be gone for a month. And I really believed that. Some other volunteers didn't. Some of the other volunteers were like, no, we're going home and

we're not coming back. But I couldn't hear it. I couldn't. And I was like, no, we're coming back. Coming back. So I like just packed out my backpack. I had a suitcase or something that I left behind with like, I left a bunch of stuff behind and I didn't know. And I packed my stuff. And then the next morning I did the hardest thing of my whole Peace Corps experience, and I'm willing to bet my whole life. I walked around my, um. This still makes me really sad. Um, walked around my compound and I like checked my route through my village. And I talked to, like I tried to talk to every person that I had met, and told them that I was going home.

EBONE: [00:55:46] And I told them that I would be back. And I kept saying that I would be back. And I, I had a couple of people say, no, you're not coming back. And I was like, what are you talking about? I'm coming back. Like, this is my home. Like, I told you I was going to be here for two years.

HAYNES: [00:56:01] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:56:02] I am. I'm coming back to see you. I'm coming back. I'd like to. I'm a part of this community. You've like welcomed me in. I'm not, I'm not leaving you guys behind. And a couple of people were like, no, you're not coming back. And I couldn't hear that. I couldn't. I was like, no, I'm coming. I'm coming back. I'll be here. Yeah, I walked all around the village and I told everyone that I had to go. And I think I, I think my, my regional director got there that night, Sise did. And then put my stuff in the car. Maybe we stayed, stayed the night. And then the next morning we went and picked up the other four that were in my region, who all had to do very similar things.

EBONE: [00:56:53] I like talked to people that day that I had never talked to before and I had like very, I can remember this, this old woman in the old market that was close to my house. She had such a striking face. She was wearing this like bright pink, I don't know, shawl or top or something. And she had like, she was probably only like 60, but because the life is so hard, like her face was just like wrinkle after wrinkle, and she had these really kind, sparkly eyes. And I know she couldn't speak French. And so someone was like translating for her. And I remember that she, um, she,

like took my hand and said something like, we love you. Like, you're our daughter. And I never met her before, ever.

HAYNES: [00:57:42] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:57:42] She just, like, knew me because I stood out.

HAYNES: [00:57:47] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:57:48] I really loved that community and that community, most of them really loved me. Yeah. Yeah. And then I left. I think I was on a plane 36 hours later. Right, like we drove down country the next day. And then I think I went to the airport the following day. I took this terrible flight from Guinea to Europe to Atlanta to Missouri. I remember calling my mom right after I figured out I was being evacuated and telling her I was coming home and like trying to give her the details of like when I was going to land. And I, this is like not so related to Peace Corps, but my mom was just being very mom-like and very weird. And she was like, oh, I have to work. And I was like, what?

HAYNES: [00:58:47] Take off.

EBONE: [00:58:49] I'm coming home from Africa before I'm supposed to. And I'm in a very fragile state. Can you please just come to the airport? And on the phone, she didn't tell me she was coming, but then she, like, had rearranged her schedule so that she could come meet me there. So my mom and dad came and picked me up from the airport, but I was a wreck. I got really sick on the plane from something. Maybe the food, maybe just heart sickness.

HAYNES: [00:59:16] Yeah.

EBONE: [00:59:17] And when I got, when I landed in Saint Louis and they picked me up, I was like, I didn't really talk to them. I was very tired. I might have been vomiting, I can't remember. And then I went home and I slept for like 24 hours straight.

HAYNES: [00:59:33] Wow.

EBONE: [00:59:34] Yeah. And my parents didn't really know how to talk to me about it. Like, what I was doing was already so far out of the realm of what they could imagine. And they, like, kind of were like tiptoeing around, like, didn't ask me any questions. My sister was critical, having, she's like had some experience traveling, so she sort of coached my parents in how to talk to me and also was like my big ear and listened. And it was hard. So we were all back in the U.S. And one month quickly turned into a two month administrative leave, and then the deadline started to roll around and then they extended. And this is largely because of our country director. They extended Guinea to be a three month administrative leave. For Sierra Leone and Liberia, they cut them off after two months and they were like, look, you're not going back.

EBONE: [01:00:32] But for Guinea, I really do, I think it was Doug who was like, no, I need my volunteers back. Like they're needed here, like we really need them. So we were extended an extra third month, but admin leave is just like you're at your home. And you're not supposed to work because you're technically still a Peace Corps volunteer.

HAYNES: [01:00:52] Yeah.

EBONE: [01:00:53] And at the end of that, we were terminated. Given our close of service. But we didn't have, we didn't have a close of service ceremony. Like it was very, you know, like I was all alone at my house when I found out I wasn't going back to Guinea.

HAYNES: [01:01:07] Yeah.

EBONE: [01:01:08] And I had told all those people I was coming back. And then those people, those doubters who were like, they're not coming back. They really came back to me and I was like, I guess I'm not.

HAYNES: [01:01:17] Yeah.

EBONE: [01:01:19] It was a very sad time.



HAYNES: [01:01:20] And then what happened?

EBONE: [01:01:22] So then I just, like, had to make plans and like move on with my life. And so I was living in Missouri with my parents. And while I was in the Peace Corps, shortly before I left, I had been considering the idea of going to nursing school. Had two very significant conversations with two nurses that I love very much. One of them was a fellow Peace Corps volunteer, and had these long, like life quest conversations, what should I do? And ended both of those conversations with like both of them saying, Laur, I think you would make a great nurse and you should. And ironically enough, the Peace Corps volunteer who was in country with me was like, and we have tons of time to think about it. Which of course, we did not. So.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[Note: This interview is incomplete due to technical difficulties.]