

Madeline Uraneck Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Madeline Uraneck

Interviewer: Phyllis Noble

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Biographical Note

Madeline Uraneck served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Lesotho from 2007 to 2009 as a teacher trainer. She then joined Peace Corps staff from 2010 to 2012 and worked in D.C., Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Madeline Ura-neck

September 23, 2015
Madison, Wisconsin

By Phyllis Noble

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

NOBLE: [00:00:03] This is Phyllis Noble. Today is September 23rd, 2015. I'm interviewing Madeline Ura-neck, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Lesotho from 2007 to 2009. That was actually a three year span of time because Madeline extended for a third year. She worked as a teacher trainer in the education sector in Lesotho, and then Madeline went on to be Peace Corps staff in Washington, D.C. And also in Turkmenistan. And there's, so there's more to that story, too.

URANECK: [00:00:48] And Kyrgyzstan, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:00:49] And Kyrgyzstan. So let's go back to the very beginning. Let's talk about who you were before you joined the Peace Corps. Where, where were you born? Where did you grow up?

URANECK: [00:01:01] I grew up in Texas and Oklahoma, about ten years in Texas and seven years in Oklahoma. And my family is still back there. So I go

back to Oklahoma several times a year. And I went to school, uh, for two years at Grinnell College. So that's Midwest, Midwest, and Midwest.

NOBLE: [00:01:22] Yes. Yes.

URANECK: [00:01:22] And then during the Vietnam War protest years, I felt like nothing was happening in Iowa. So I transferred to Madison, where things were happening.

NOBLE: [00:01:32] This is during your undergraduate years?

URANECK: [00:01:34] Yeah, my undergraduate years. And then I've been in Wisconsin ever since.

NOBLE: [00:01:38] Ever since then. Wonderful. And you're not a kid fresh out of college now. You're in your, you don't have to say how old you are, but you're somewhere I would guess in your fifties.

URANECK: [00:01:49] Yeah, you're, you're, you're generous. A little older than that. But yeah, when I got to Peace Corps, when I got to Lesotho, they, they. Everyone always introduced me, the younger volunteers introduced me, "And this is the oldest volunteer in our country." I thought of myself, especially at that time as very young, and I thought of the 20 somethings as my peers so.

NOBLE: [00:02:12] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:02:13] But then, you know, in that country, to be that old, to be, you know, more than 45 years old for a woman was significant. So I did accept the label *nkhono*, or grandmother, with more grace.

NOBLE: [00:02:31] Very good. Let's go way back. Let's talk about your childhood. You, you were in Texas. You were in Oklahoma. Where did you go to high school?

URANECK: [00:02:39] I went to a high school that was the only high school in our town. The town was Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and it was divided up

between people who worked for Phillips Petroleum Company, Phillips 66, because it had its world headquarters there, and people whose dads didn't work for Phillips 66. So it was kind of a company town. And, um. And yeah, the one high school. It had a small number of students who were African Americans and none of whom were my friends. It was a very racist time that I look back on it. It was Bible Belt and virulently anti-Kennedy. Kennedy was president for some of those years and, um, and the high school didn't lower the flag on the day he was assassinated. So that kind of that kind of feeling.

NOBLE: [00:03:33] Oh, oh. Yeah.

URANECK: [00:03:33] You can, you can pick up the same the same feeling in the same town about Obama now. It's just one of those conservative pockets. So my father was adamant that all of his kids go out of state to, uh, to college.

NOBLE: [00:03:47] Well, let's hear about your father. Did he work for, was he one of the Phillips 66 employees?

URANECK: [00:03:51] He was a chemist.

NOBLE: [00:03:52] He was a chemist for the oil company.

URANECK: [00:03:54] And my mother was a stay at home mom most of the time. But she'd been college educated as a occupational therapist and she did like go back to school and get her LPN certification and would work part time in nursing, or she would bake lemon meringue pies for the local restaurant. She found ways, I don't think it was so much for income because we were middle, middle class, but I think it was, you know, just to keep herself intellectually stimulated.

NOBLE: [00:04:26] Sure, to contribute in some way, even if it's making lemon meringue pie.

URANECK: [00:04:30] Get out of the house.

NOBLE: [00:04:31] Yes. And so you referred to siblings you had?

URANECK: [00:04:35] I was the oldest of five and three were from my first mother. She died when I was four. And then my father remarried a year and a half later and had the two youngest kids. And we were all brought up, as you know, five siblings of equal, equal standing. Although I think the younger two were raised a little bit differently than the, than the older three of us, because they saw how we had become sort of war protesters and marching to the different drummers and didn't seem too concerned about, you know, going into a straight and narrow path. So my younger sister and brother did become respectively a dentist and a doctor. And, you know, I think were more pressured to conform. That might be it, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:05:25] So there were five kids and so that's a family of seven people.

URANECK: [00:05:29] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:05:29] Did you all fit into one car? Did you go places, did you take trips?

URANECK: [00:05:33] Yes, we did. And we took family vacations. We'd all fit into one car, but we didn't start camping until I was 14 years old. And then we did a couple of camping vacations. I remember really, really loving that. Before that, it was like some families travel to see some relatives and you stayed in a motel and it was just, you know, you couldn't afford it. So, you know, you would drive as far as you could to get to Nevada, you know, in one day and do one motel and everyone's sleeping in the same room and things like that. I don't really remember enjoying those so much, although we saw the Grand Canyon. And Mesa Verde. Yeah. A few, a few things in the West.

NOBLE: [00:06:20] Yeah, yeah. But not, you wouldn't have traveled internationally as a family?

URANECK: [00:06:25] No. Yeah, I did my first international trip to Mexico when I was 21 to go down and see Ivan Illich was the.

NOBLE: [00:06:34] Oh, yeah, in Cuernavaca.

URANECK: [00:06:37] Yeah, I did that for three months.

NOBLE: [00:06:39] Wonderful. But that was up the road a piece.

URANECK: [00:06:42] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:06:43] In, in high school, did you study languages? Did you study Spanish?

URANECK: [00:06:47] I studied French for two years and I studied Latin for two years later, when I worked for the Department of Public Instruction. Every single person in our division of curriculum had studied Latin, and I realized we were kind of a, that put us in. Maybe the word wasn't invented yet, but kind of made us nerds. But the Latin teacher was an excellent teacher, and I've always been thankful I've had Latin. French. I was very creative in French in the conversations like, how much can you talk without learning any new words, which I used all the way through Peace Corps, too. You know, how far can you travel on your limited vocabulary? And I pursued French a couple of years in college, but I didn't enjoy it. It was always a focus on the literary. Reading Camu and, you know, living out of your dictionary.

URANECK: [00:07:43] And yeah, I thought that language would be completely irrelevant to my life. As an undergraduate, I took a year of advanced calculus, which was the only way I could get out of one credit of French that I needed. So instead of one credit of French, I took ten credits of calculus, and I don't like math. It was just, I was adamant that I didn't want to take more French. And then, of course, in my later life, having seen what a ridiculous decision that was, I've gone back twice to study French. You know, at the same university, at much greater cost. And effort.

NOBLE: [00:08:23] We are not the beings that we were when we were 21 or 19.

URANECK: [00:08:28] And we don't have the wisdom. You know, I made so many foolish decisions like that. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:08:33] So when you, when you went to college, where, where did you go did you say? You went to Grinnell?

URANECK: [00:08:40] Grinnell is in Grinnell, Iowa.

NOBLE: [00:08:41] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:08:41] It's a little one of those little ivy covered, cornfields. Yeah, but I didn't thrive. It was a small, was a small school, and just things didn't connect. Now I see they even have a program where they send students to Lesotho. I don't think they did then but. And I didn't want to do a year abroad. I went, when I transferred to the university then, I thrived somehow.

NOBLE: [00:09:07] And you transferred to the University of Wisconsin.

URANECK: [00:09:10] Wisconsin.

NOBLE: [00:09:11] Madison, here?

URANECK: [00:09:11] Yes. Yeah. And I was in my, ready for my junior year. And I think my experience at Grinnell taught me that professors are people and they enjoy interacting with students. So when I had these lecture classes of 300, I would pay attention to when the professor had office hours and I would actually go to them. And the professor was always surprised to see an undergraduate and I would invite them home to dinner and they would always come. And yeah, I kind of knew how to use the system and I knew how to talk my way out of prerequisites, prerequisites. And, you know, I made a beeline for all the interesting courses. And by the time I was a senior, my second year, I was already a teaching assistant because I'd really impressed a couple of professors so much.

NOBLE: [00:10:00] So your major was education?

URANECK: [00:10:03] It was psychology.

NOBLE: [00:10:04] Psychology.

URANECK: [00:10:05] And I had done.

NOBLE: [00:10:06] Oh, so you were a teaching assistant in the psychology?

URANECK: [00:10:08] I was a teaching assistant.

NOBLE: [00:10:10] Yeah, okay, I was thinking practice teaching.

URANECK: [00:10:11] Yeah. No, I was a teaching assistant in a course for, an introductory course for behavioral disabilities because I spent two summers in college working for an NSF National Science Foundation summer program for high school students. I was a counselor there, and one of my Grinnell contacts had gotten me the job. And so I learned a lot about behavioral psychology. And when I, and I worked with some, um. It was called the Custer Center for the Retarded. Since then, it's changed its name for Custer Center for People with Behavioral Disabilities or something like that, in western Michigan, associated with Western Michigan University.

URANECK: [00:11:02] So anyway, I had those two summers, so I knew something and I talked to professors and they needed a TA and so there I was. I was a senior, but I was already a TA with a, a class of 300 undergraduates. And, you know, we followed a text. It wasn't, it wasn't anything too creative, but it was a good, it was a good experience.

NOBLE: [00:11:23] No kidding. So you get a bachelor's degree in psychology in UW Madison.

URANECK: [00:11:30] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:11:31] And did you go on to graduate school?

URANECK: [00:11:33] I did. I went right on to graduate school in educational policy studies. But then that trip to Mexico, I dropped out of graduate student school because somehow. You know, when you really read and believe Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich and at that time there were free schools. And, you know, you're questioning all the philosophy and.

NOBLE: [00:11:53] This is 1970, early seventies?

URANECK: [00:11:56] No, it was 19, probably from '68 through '70. My graduate program started, it was a Ford Foundation funded program for urban education to give people, especially half of our graduate students were African American, and to give people from urban backgrounds, which I wasn't, an early PhD. So it was kind of rush you through your, through your PhD program and get these people with innovative approaches to education out into the schools, especially the urban schools. And, um, so anyway, following that, but then I kind of tracked off to, um, to Mexico. And then to, there was kind of a back to the land movement after the bombing of the Sterling, uh, Sterling Hall and where a lot of activists and people who had been pro.

NOBLE: [00:12:55] Maybe you could explain to whoever's listening to this that Sterling Hall was a building here on campus at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. This was during, during the Vietnam War. It was a protest action gone wrong.

URANECK: [00:13:08] Right, yeah. Yeah, it was. And it was a very important event for affecting people like me who had been protesting and calling the police pigs and throwing things and, you know, really angry about the Vietnam War and all of the boys and all of our boyfriends were considering whether they should go to jail or go to Canada. They were, it was, the war was very present in our lives.

NOBLE: [00:13:36] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:13:37] But then when this building on my university campus was bombed by some activists.

NOBLE: [00:13:43] And someone died.

URANECK: [00:13:45] Yes. And someone died. Then suddenly everyone, me and my friends thought, you know, we're against the war, but we don't want to become killers ourselves.

NOBLE: [00:13:55] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:13:56] So it made us look, look at the whole protest movement. There were a lot of articles written and self analysis, and that's where the back to the land movement was born. You know, we should really get ourselves together before we go around, uh, you know, espousing to the rest of the world how they should live. And that was, you know, out of that, the Vietnam movement, the red power, Black power, women's power. There was a lot of impetus for another things where, you know, you're calling into question the hypocrisy of American domestic and foreign policy. And as, as part of that, I moved out to, uh, out to Ridgeway, Wisconsin, and lived with my boyfriend Eddie at the time, who became and still is a wonderful furniture maker. And, um, yeah. I went back to graduate school several times at kind of ten year intervals, but I never finished my degree. Yeah. So.

NOBLE: [00:15:02] And then that was followed by a period of a couple of decades when you were very busy in your adult life way before you decided to join the Peace Corps. And this interview focuses on Peace Corps. But tell us just very briefly, what are some of the things that you did between that time when you were doing back to the land living and joining the Peace Corps?

URANECK: [00:15:30] Yes. Well, interesting. Interesting. That brings up an interesting memory. I did always want to join the Peace Corps. In the seventh grade I wrote a paper when they said, what do you want to do with your life? I said, I want to join the Peace Corps. I didn't kind of realize then that it's only a two year commitment. It's not the rest of your life. But I had the Peace Corps on my horizon very, from the, from the, from the day it was created. I mean, I was, I was aware of that. And

because I probably wrote that essay in 1963, is that when the Peace Corps was created?

NOBLE: [00:16:07] '61 is when it started, yeah. It was still very new in '63.

URANECK: [00:16:12] I think I wrote the essay in '63. I think I was in ninth grade.

NOBLE: [00:16:16] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:16:17] Yeah. So, yeah. And I liked the idea of international travel and I did have a little mimeographed sheet that would come to me. It was very hard to get jobs in, uh. I had an education, I had an education degree as part of my undergraduate, and I remember there were 600 applicants for every teacher. There was a big glut of teachers and engineers. But I did get this little mimeographed thing that did have an opening. It was interesting, and I've always wondered if I could find the person who got this. It said Peace Corps Iran. Become a videographer of folk dances and folk traditions.

NOBLE: [00:16:59] Huh.

URANECK: [00:16:59] And so the year would have been like '71 or '72. And I think someone got that. And I think I did at least.

NOBLE: [00:17:06] You had applied for that?

URANECK: [00:17:07] I think I at least applied or submitted an inquiry, but I think I was either turned down for that, turned down for two other volunteer jobs that year. And I was thinking like, I can't even get a volunteer job. Of course, I didn't know what I know now about how hard you have to work and how persistent you have to be to get a job. But someone dropped me off at Folklore Village in Dodgeville, just up the road from me, and I worked there off and on for ten years for almost nothing. And I learned everything. I became kind of the assistant director or the assistant to my mentor, Jane Farwell, who I learned how to teach dancing and I learned how to work with live music and I learned how to instantly make a group of people feel comfortable.

NOBLE: [00:17:53] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:17:53] And I learned how to work with people, give them projects where they could be creative. And I cleaned the bunkhouses and the outhouses and swept floors and did dishes and gardened. And, you know, it was one of those very holistic experiences that is really kind of made me, even in Lesotho, when I was in the Peace Corps, everywhere I am, it makes me look for either the Folklore Village like community. Or else that makes me think that what this place really needs is a place where people can come of all ages, do something recreational on a Saturday night, be inexpensive, be a potluck, um, and do projects that use the foods and the flowers of the seasons. And, um, yeah, all of the things that Folklore Village was.

NOBLE: [00:18:46] Yeah. And is, isn't it still?

URANECK: [00:18:48] And is, yeah. And today, this many years later, even though I hadn't been there for about 20 years at all, I volunteered to be the, to head up their fundraising committee so they've got me by the toe and, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:19:04] And, and you did other things too, before you went into Lesotho?

URANECK: [00:19:10] Yes, I did. I, uh, I, I was a weaver when I was, weaver and crocheted hats when I was out in the country with my furniture, uh, furniture man. And then I, uh. Let's see. Crafts. Then as as a weaver I listened to Wisconsin Public Radio, uh, hours a day. And so one day I just marched in there and told the station manager that I wanted to work there. And he actually found a job for me in fundraising. And because I had fundraising experience at Folklore Village. And so I loved that. I transitioned and did some radio production. I still listen to Wisconsin Public Radio hours and hours every day. And what else did I do? Um.

NOBLE: [00:20:04] You went to Japan?

URANECK: [00:20:05] I taught English in Japan for three years. I studied Japanese at the university, it was the second language I. I had studied French, then Japanese.

NOBLE: [00:20:17] And when you say you studied Japanese at the university, you mean here in Madison, Wisconsin?

URANECK: [00:20:21] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:20:21] Okay.

URANECK: [00:20:21] For a year.

NOBLE: [00:20:22] Before you went to Japan.

URANECK: [00:20:23] For a year. And then I applied for a Fulbright to finish my PhD. But it's hilarious to think now, you know, the quality of people who are Fulbrighters. Anyway, it wasn't, one year wasn't enough for them to give them confidence that I'd be able to finish my PhD in, uh, in Japanese. I had already been to Sweden. I had a fellowship in 1977-'78 for the American Scandinavian Foundation and spent a year in Sweden studying music and dance with my then, uh, then husband. Not the furniture maker, the book writer. The author. Yeah, that was another wonderful year. But it gave me the idea that you could pick up a language very quickly, because Swedish, Swedish is so similar to English.

NOBLE: [00:21:11] Ah.

URANECK: [00:21:12] So I thought I could, you know, spend a year in Japan and learn to speak Japanese as well as I'd learned to speak Swedish in Sweden.

NOBLE: [00:21:21] And did that happen? Did you, were you able to converse in Japanese?

URANECK: [00:21:25] I got to kind of an intermediate level of more an informal street Japanese. Like later in my job when I worked at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for 16 years, I would meet many high-ranking superintendents and governors from Japan. And there's a kind of *keigo*, which is formal Japanese that you speak with people who are, who are your, you speak in the honorific form.

NOBLE: [00:21:57] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:21:58] And so even though I was quite conversational in the casual, you know, to talk with a housewife. And even though I'd been in Japan three years, I never dared use my Japanese in these formal situations because I knew enough to know that, you knew enough to know how little I knew, you know, that kind of thing.

NOBLE: [00:22:16] And you don't insult somebody by, um, demoting them in your way of speaking.

URANECK: [00:22:21] Not just them, but, you know, to insult the entire, um, entire event, you know, like, like just the wrong person as emcee, that sometimes you go to those kind of events. Yeah. But one time I did have an event and I had, I had, I think I had four translators and someone came up to me and I think it was a Japanese person who was on staff at the university and said, I've never been to a university event or I've never been to an event where the translator, the need for translation was adequately addressed. You know, like usually you have one overworked translator, but I had, you know, this person is important, they will have a translator. This person is important and they will have a translator. And when we switch languages, then those people will have, you know, English to Japanese versus Japanese to English.

NOBLE: [00:23:12] Right.

URANECK: [00:23:12] And yeah, so that kind of thing you learn when you, when you get into a society with language demands like Japanese.

NOBLE: [00:23:20] You learned so much in your life before you went to Peace Corps. And there's more.

URANECK: [00:23:24] I did.

NOBLE: [00:23:25] You talk about having worked for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for 16 years, and that's when I first met you.

URANECK: [00:23:32] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:23:35] International education consultant. Was that what it was?

URANECK: [00:23:39] It was. It was. I was the first person to have that job. They were starting to get some delegations coming from Germany and Japan and the people who were in charge of it, the social studies consultant and the foreign language consultant and the environmental education consultant knew that it was important, but they didn't want to be bothered with, I don't know, hosting them. And they felt very insecure, like, you know, just like the things that I just said about, you know, when a, when a delegation comes, how it should be handled. You know, they felt, they felt. I don't know which part of it was. They, they were insecure or they didn't want to be bothered. But anyway, they talked the superintendent into creating a new position. I was the first person to, um, to hold that position.

URANECK: [00:24:29] I had just come back from, I had just come back from Japan. I'd worked at Folklore Village. I had studied languages and I'd been to Sweden. And so I looked good on paper. I took an, I took a written exam in a state auditorium and I scored number one on the exam. And then I was hired. I was like the only consultant, curriculum consultant who didn't have a PhD. So I was a non-traditional hire. But for those 16 years it was just, it was just a job from heaven.

NOBLE: [00:25:06] Huh.

URANECK: [00:25:06] We just had nonstop, nonstop delegations coming and the path was totally clear for me to create things. So I saw all kinds of things

I could create. I could create an association of educators. I could create an association of Japanese teachers. I could present all around. You know, I could collaborate with these teachers who, who were coming. I could study education systems from different countries. And sometimes during those 16 years, I would just take off on my own. I went to West Africa because I was aware that I was the international education consultant, but I'd never been to a single African country.

NOBLE: [00:25:45] Ah.

URANECK: [00:25:45] You know, I heard that schools in Finland were really good. So I went to Finland to look at schools. Some of those things I just did, did on my own. Yeah, I did, did a lot of things. And we put out a teacher's guide to international curriculum, which now there are many, but at that time it was the first.

NOBLE: [00:26:03] Yeah, yeah.

URANECK: [00:26:03] And now several states, not many states, have a person in that position. But I was the first. And so I got some national attention because a lot of people thought that, oh, look what Wisconsin is doing. We should be doing that. So got invited here and there.

NOBLE: [00:26:18] And you were the perfect person to do that.

URANECK: [00:26:21] I was outgoing. And I was interested in every country and all of the, all of the things. So, yeah, I did, I did enjoy that job.

NOBLE: [00:26:29] So it was the dream. It was the job from heaven. It was the perfect job. And yet you left it to apply to the Peace Corps. How, what. What was going on there? How did you decide to, um, leave this very interesting job in Madison, Wisconsin, and throw your hat in the ring for the Peace Corps?

URANECK: [00:26:51] I was, I was in my cubicle one day. I was 59 years old, and I think I'd gotten my pin for working for the state for 15 years. And I said, like 15 years? Oh my God, I was going to work here for five years. I'm

kind of a lateral jumper. And I'd had all these wonderful work experiences. And I said, oh, I don't want to work here like for the rest of my life. I don't want to be like a retiree, like they were starting to have retirement seminars and things like that. And I said, I think I'm going to make a transition, a late in life jump from international education to international development.

NOBLE: [00:27:27] Ah.

URANECK: [00:27:27] So I went, I took a month off or talked to my superintendent into somehow that this was relevant. I went to the Monterrey School of International Studies for a month and did a certificate program in program development, international program development. And at that seminar I told one of the wonderful presenters that we had that I wanted to go into international development. I showed him my resume and I said, can I apply for these, all these great international development jobs based on this? And he said, no, you can't. He said, you've had international experience, but all of them have been in wealthy first world countries.

NOBLE: [00:28:09] Ah.

URANECK: [00:28:09] In Japan and in Sweden and in Germany and in France, you know, even China. He said, what's not here is any kind of experience in a more third world country that shows that you can tough it out.

NOBLE: [00:28:23] Ah.

URANECK: [00:28:23] And I said, well, how do I get that? And he said, well, you know, there's a number of volunteer projects, or you could do something like the Peace Corps, and you know, he might have said other things but I stopped listening. I went back, I applied for the Peace Corps. I didn't tell anyone at work. And it was the typical experience of the older volunteer having to go through all these, jump through all of these medical hoops, even though I was perfectly healthy. But it took a whole year, the application.

NOBLE: [00:28:51] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:28:51] And then it came through, I think in, uh, September. And I sent out an email to my colleagues in the Department of Public Instruction, and there was just a collective gasp. Because I was young for retirement, 59. In fact, I had no intentions of retiring. I thought it was 45 or 26 or something. In fact, when I went to check out with Human Resources, they handed me all these things and they said, you know, your pension will start coming now. And I went, what pension? And I, I thought, I'm so grateful for those people because I would have left that place without anything. I just sort of thought, well, this was the end of this job and now I'm going to go get this other job. So, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:29:37] When you applied to the Peace Corps, was there a question on the application about what part of the world you would most like to serve in?

URANECK: [00:29:46] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:29:46] Or was there another question saying, is there a part of the world that you would not want to go to?

URANECK: [00:29:51] There was the one about where did I want to go.

NOBLE: [00:29:55] And what did you say?

URANECK: [00:29:56] And I said, actually there were three choices. And I said West Africa, because in that year that I hadn't told anyone that I had applied, I took French the third time, you know, kind of like I left work every day or I came in late every day at 10:00. I'd already had my French class and then I would work until 6:00 or 7:00.

NOBLE: [00:30:20] Of course, there are many West African countries in which French is the lingua franca.

URANECK: [00:30:23] Right, right. So I said, I said, uh, West Africa, Central Africa, or anywhere Africa.

NOBLE: [00:30:35] Uh huh.

URANECK: [00:30:35] And somewhere in that year I got a call from them and they said, you know, with all of your education experience, we have the perfect job for you. We're going to put you in a teaching situation and you're going to train teachers to teach English as a big country and a lot of, a lot of teachers. And I said, will I be speaking French? And they laughed and said, no, you won't be speaking French. And I said, well, what language will I be speaking? And they said, well, there's two languages in this country. And to tell you one would give away the country, but the other one would be Russian. And I just kind of snapped. You know, I mean, I was just kind of like.

NOBLE: [00:31:14] That doesn't sound like Africa.

URANECK: [00:31:15] Yeah, I said, I said, you mean this is not Africa? And they said, no, this is not Africa. But the position is perfect for you, you know, and the plane is leaving in two months or something like that. And I said, I don't want it. And they said, they said, why not? And I said, because I want to go to Africa or something like that. And they said, like, you mean you really want to go to Africa? Now I know how Peace Corps works. So, I mean, it was moving from this guy's desk and he had his stack all ready to go and he had to give it over to this other guy's stack in a completely different world part. And then the plane wasn't leaving for a lot, you know, I had a longer wait.

NOBLE: [00:31:52] Of course.

URANECK: [00:31:52] But I was going to have, was going to have Africa. You know, they try to talk you out of it but yeah. Yeah, I wanted Africa. So then when I actually got Lesotho, I was disappointed. It was an English speaking country. English was the second language. And I really wanted to, you know, like master work in another language. I did not do that. I worked primarily in English.

NOBLE: [00:32:17] So, you get the letter of acceptance. It's now what year, 2000 something?

URANECK: [00:32:24] It was 2006.

NOBLE: [00:32:27] 2006. By now you're probably already 60.

URANECK: [00:32:30] I was, I think I was 59 when I, when I was accepted. I turn, I became 60 in December and I went to Peace Corps in, in November for my training.

NOBLE: [00:32:42] Okay.

URANECK: [00:32:42] So yeah, I was 59.

NOBLE: [00:32:42] So you had to, um. There was probably a big going away party or something, right?

URANECK: [00:32:49] Yeah. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:32:51] At the Department of Public Instruction?

URANECK: [00:32:53] Well, there was that, but I had one for friends where I gave away everything. Somehow even though since seventh grade, it never dawned on me that, you know, it's just two years. You know, you don't have to give away everything. I gave away my hose and shovels and volleyball set and things that I've been very sorry to be without when I, when I came back. But yeah, I had a huge party. It was as much as I'll ever do for, um, like a funeral. And everyone came, partly because I was leaving for something that sounded so exotic. And the other part was that I lived on this tiny cabin on the lake that everyone knew, and I'd had many parties and they knew that they were losing the place on the lake. You know, a friend who lived on the lake who would, you know, host them at any time.

NOBLE: [00:33:36] So you had, for many older adults, um, I can only say older because I'm older than you are.

URANECK: [00:33:45] We call them 50 plus.

NOBLE: [00:33:47] Okay. For people who join the Peace Corps when they're 50 plus, it's often very problematic because there's a house, there's a car, there are family, there, there are possessions that have to be somehow dealt with.

URANECK: [00:34:06] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:34:06] So you did that. You just gave it all away or you put some in storage. You sold the cabin on the lake? How did you?

URANECK: [00:34:14] I was, it was much easier for me. I was single, so I didn't have children. I was a lifetime renter, still am. So I didn't have a house. My friends were really good friends and they were rural friends. So I put my stuff, I thought I put my stuff in three barns, but when I came back, somehow I retrieved stuff from nine different p-places, so I must have done things, either I forgot or else the folding chairs, the collection of folding chairs migrated someone else, to someone's house. But anyway, yeah, I had. So I didn't pay any storage. And those were, those were really simple. Yeah. What was less simple was that as soon as I got there, I got a phone call that my brother had a brain tumor.

NOBLE: [00:35:01] As soon as you got to Lesotho?

URANECK: [00:35:03] I was still in training, uh huh.

NOBLE: [00:35:05] And you got a phone call saying your brother?

URANECK: [00:35:08] Had a brain tumor and.

NOBLE: [00:35:10] Oh.

URANECK: [00:35:11] And he said to me, it would mean a lot to me and it would mean a lot to all of us if you stayed where you were. You know, we know that this is a dream of yours and we're kind of living it.

NOBLE: [00:35:23] Stay in Lesotho?

URANECK: [00:35:24] Yeah. Living it through your eyes. And you're writing these wonderful letters. Yeah. But at his brain tumor progressed really fast, and at the six month mark, thanks to Peace Corps, they have a policy that you can either go home for immediate family members to see them for a last time or for their funeral.

NOBLE: [00:35:48] Uh huh.

URANECK: [00:35:48] Take your pick.

NOBLE: [00:35:49] What'd you pick?

URANECK: [00:35:50] Of course, picked to see him while he was still alive.

NOBLE: [00:35:52] Good, good.

URANECK: [00:35:53] So I did, I did make an unexpected trip home at that six month mark. And then I made an unplanned trip home for his memorial. They scheduled it at a time when I could come, so maybe about six months between those two.

NOBLE: [00:36:07] It makes being far away on a different continent awful.

URANECK: [00:36:10] Yeah. Yeah. It's difficult. It's very, it's very difficult. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:36:16] Your training, of course, was in country in Lesotho.

URANECK: [00:36:21] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:36:21] Can we talk a little bit about what you experienced in training? The training would have gone on in the capital city of Lesotho, which is?

URANECK: [00:36:31] Maseru.

NOBLE: [00:36:31] Maseru?

URANECK: [00:36:34] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:36:34] Where was, what sort of housing did they give you when you first arrived?

URANECK: [00:36:38] We had, um, we had a training center. I think they still have it. It was just a little one story. It was, looked like sort of like those old-fashioned motels where there are little rooms lined up in a, in a block. Another, another block for, um, classrooms, another block for the kitchen. So we just kind of stayed within this little triangle for not too long, maybe a couple of weeks, because you know training had gone that, you know, that the sooner you put the trainees with their family then, or at least in a training village. So we moved very quickly into a training village, which was a real Lesotho village.

NOBLE: [00:37:26] Before we go to the training village, what went on in those first three weeks? Were you doing, were you in classrooms studying language and culture and history of the country or what?

URANECK: [00:37:38] I'm almost thinking it was a first one week. It was pretty, pretty fast. And then we would come back there from time to time. Uh. Yeah. So it was, I remember the first thing. I'd been, you know, doing all these presentations and teacher trainings. And the first time we walked into the classroom, the trainers pulled out these flip charts. They were mostly native Basotho trainers. They had us divided up in the morning for languages and the afternoon for culture. And they pulled out these flip charts and I just smiled. I sat there and I went like, I can't believe that they haven't tapped into me. You know, I do this for a living. I train. And I enjoyed so much that all they expected me to do was just sort of sit and be a student and participant. And I would, I had no trouble participating in it. And I went like, these people are really good.

NOBLE: [00:38:32] Oh, good.

URANECK: [00:38:32] I was so impressed with the quality of training and, and, you know, just how well the curriculum had been worked over, what we should learn. We didn't learn very much irrelevant stuff.

NOBLE: [00:38:43] Okay.

URANECK: [00:38:43] Things, you know, they get a lot of feedback. They got a lot of feedback when I left, but they'd gotten feedback from previous people. What was useful to you? What was not useful to us? And so we just learned a lot.

NOBLE: [00:38:57] That's very good to hear. And you referred to the people who did the training as Basotho?

URANECK: [00:39:03] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:39:03] Yeah. Which is the name of the people who live in Lesotho?

URANECK: [00:39:07] Yeah, Lesotho is very mono ethnic. Most, there's about three tribes, but maybe 70, 80 percent Basotho people. So the country is Lesotho. The language is Sesotho. The people in the plural are Basotho. And every once in a while you're talking about just one of them and that person is Mosotho.

NOBLE: [00:39:28] Ah, uh huh. How interesting that the beginning of the word denotes whether it's plural or singular.

URANECK: [00:39:33] Yeah. Yeah. So. Yeah, so.

NOBLE: [00:39:36] So. And what, what were they teaching you there? You said there was very little that was irrelevant. So I would imagine they were teaching you a lot of language and culture.

URANECK: [00:39:47] Language. They had small language classes of four. They looked at me like I was elderly and like I wouldn't be able to accomplish much. And I was really incensed about that. And I, I felt like how much a teacher's expectation holds you back, because they would put me, just

the two of us, together with this Craig, who was really having trouble remembering how to say hello. And they didn't.

NOBLE: [00:40:16] And he was also an over 50 person?

URANECK: [00:40:19] He was over 30. He might have been 40, but he was. Because I was the oldest and because he was a person having trouble, they would, they paired. Oh, and because both of us were going to be assigned to the Lesotho College of Education. So we were kind of already in a little subset in some of our other classes. They would, they would put us together. And I just chafed under that.

NOBLE: [00:40:40] Was that slowing down your language acquisition?

URANECK: [00:40:42] Yeah. Yeah. And every once in a while I would insist on being with a fast track class and I would really do that. But every time they would call on me or they would skip over me, I just, I just felt like students feel when a teacher doesn't believe you can do it.

NOBLE: [00:40:57] Yeah. Yeah.

URANECK: [00:40:58] So I scored really high on my, my final language test and they were all just came around and hugged me and congratulated me. And they'd never had an older student who had done so well. And that, that annoyed me too. You know, because I was sort of like, what was I telling you? You know, kind of things. So I did, I did write a complaint about that that I know went all the way. I know it went all the way to Washington because I could track it later when I started working in Washington. You know, don't treat older people like they're, like they can't, can't learn. But older people are a language learning problem so. They have research that, that, and even my own. I struggled also. It was the first language I really struggled with in terms of memory so.

NOBLE: [00:41:44] So you have the sense that had you been studying Lesotho in your twenties, you might have, it might have been somewhat easier.

URANECK: [00:41:51] I think it would have been somewhat easier. But really my, my biggest obstacle was, was just that I really worked with teachers and the teachers all had English, and their English was a real second language. It wasn't like they were happy to speak it with me. It was like they did speak it with their students. You know, it was, it was a real in practice. They had no trouble whatsoever speaking English.

NOBLE: [00:42:18] So they are genuinely bilingual.

URANECK: [00:42:20] Genuine.

NOBLE: [00:42:21] English was not so much a foreign language as a second language.

URANECK: [00:42:22] Yeah. English was weaker than their Sesotho. But, but, yeah, the minute they saw a white person, they switched into English.

NOBLE: [00:42:30] So then the other part of your training happened in a small village.

URANECK: [00:42:34] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:42:35] And that village was? Was that Ha?

URANECK: [00:42:38] Ha Makebe, yeah. Ha means village. So, yeah, we were three villages, kind of walking distance from one another. But we didn't associate much. We were divided into three groups.

NOBLE: [00:42:52] Okay, and sent off into three different villages?

URANECK: [00:42:54] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:42:54] And in that little village you lived with a family?

URANECK: [00:42:57] I lived with, I lived. There was a little separate room. In Lesotho, there's a lot of rondavels, mud huts, or there's little cement block houses with, uh, what do you call this tin roofs?

NOBLE: [00:43:14] Corrugated tin roofs.

URANECK: [00:43:15] Hot in the summer and cold in the winter. And the rondavels, the mud houses are, are the reverse. But yeah, this was a, family had a house with a couple bedrooms, and then.

NOBLE: [00:43:28] And was it was a rondavel?

URANECK: [00:43:29] And it was, it was the cement block house.

NOBLE: [00:43:32] Uh huh.

URANECK: [00:43:32] And then it had a little separate bedroom to the side. And I think the older boy slept there until I came. And then for the month of training, then I would sleep, I slept there. And the older boys doubled up, slept on the floor someplace else.

NOBLE: [00:43:50] And did you have a door that you could close? Did you have privacy?

URANECK: [00:43:54] I did have privacy.

NOBLE: [00:43:54] Within that room. And when you ate your meals, you would eat with the family?

URANECK: [00:43:58] I would eat with the family or they would bring in my meals, bring in my meal. And Peace Corps had told them that we had to have protein and that we liked peanut butter and that we. So we ate much better, I ate much better than the family.

NOBLE: [00:44:13] Oh.

URANECK: [00:44:14] But then I kind of objected to that.

NOBLE: [00:44:17] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:44:17] You know, so that meant that I either had to share what I had, which I would tend to do. They would put down like a bowl of papa, which was cornmeal mush, for the three children. And they would sit down with me and then I would get this plate that had, you know, looked like out of a nutritionist's, you know, they had given them actual physical pictures of what to serve us. And they'd given the money to buy the extra food. But it wasn't extra food for.

NOBLE: [00:44:42] For the whole family.

URANECK: [00:44:44] Everyone. You know, so.

NOBLE: [00:44:45] That's awkward.

URANECK: [00:44:45] It was awkward. But anyway, the kids were fascinated by what I was eating and I was fascinated by what they were eating. So I would bring my tray in and then I would divide up the food so that the kids could, you know, taste whatever it was I was tasting, you know. And then I would sometimes buy a little extra so the mom could make, if she was going to make pudding for me, to make a little extra so she could make pudding for the kids. And I wasn't supposed to do that. But anyway, it was. I think Peace Corps volunteers cheat a lot on that sort of, that sort of, what do you call it? Generosity that might be mistaken. But anyway, it's hard not to share your food with the people.

NOBLE: [00:45:27] No kidding.

URANECK: [00:45:27] Around you.

NOBLE: [00:45:28] I think that's a real conundrum there where you want to be healthy, in order to be effective enough, to be healthy, and you have to get the nutrition that you need. On the other hand, you want to be part of a family.

URANECK: [00:45:39] Right.

NOBLE: [00:45:40] And don't want to have them look at you eating all this interesting stuff that they can't have it.

URANECK: [00:45:46] Right. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:45:47] It's a dilemma, I think.

URANECK: [00:45:48] And it got to be when I was a volunteer and I was out of training. I would go all the way to Maseru, a six hour bus ride, to go to one kind of an upscale grocery. There was only one in Maseru at that time, and it was where all the diplomatic families shopped and all the wealthy Basotho. And I could get things like a package of Oreo cookies or a jar of peanut butter or.

NOBLE: [00:46:13] A jar of olives?

URANECK: [00:46:15] Box wine, that was real, that was real contraband. And then I would take it in my backpack and I would unpack it, like secret it away. And when people came into my rondavel, I had a rondavel when I was in the village, I would always make sure that my cupboards were shut. And, you know, then I did eat and not share. And every once in a while I would have my family over, you know, for, or guests over for dinner and things like that. But it was just such a stark difference from very poor people that are eating a bowl of *papa* every day, three times a day, you know, to, to the kind of way I was eating with cheese and bread and, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:47:00] What's *papa*?

URANECK: [00:47:02] *Papa* is a cornmeal mush. It was the main staple of Lesotho and a 100 pound bag sold for about \$27. That would last a family some portion of a month.

NOBLE: [00:47:16] Yeah. I'm not sure we finished training. I'm itching to get into the village and what your work was as a Peace Corps volunteer. But how long, how long did the training last?

URANECK: [00:47:25] I think training was three, three months in all. And so we were a couple of weeks with, uh, with, at the center, and then we were a month with the family. And then we were back to the center during Christmas when all the men, the Basotho men, came home from the mines and they didn't, they didn't want us around. There tend to be a lot of drinking, some fights. The couples need a chance for some privacy.

NOBLE: [00:47:57] Yeah.

URANECK: [00:47:59] And families need to be families without the distraction. So they pulled us out and we were all like, oh, we want to do Christmas. We want to do Christmas, because we're thinking, you know, Christmas on our terms. But yeah. And then, then we went to visit another volunteer. I had a wonderful, wonderful experience visiting another volunteer for I think four days.

NOBLE: [00:48:21] Oh, a volunteer who had been there before you?

URANECK: [00:48:23] Right, who was ahead of us.

NOBLE: [00:48:24] Okay, yeah.

URANECK: [00:48:25] Someone who is in their second year. We were in the first year.

NOBLE: [00:48:29] Oh, that's exciting.

URANECK: [00:48:30] Yeah. And then I think we went back to the village for another, maybe it was three weeks that were left over by that time, of our three months.

NOBLE: [00:48:36] And by that time the men in the village had returned to South Africa to the mines?

URANECK: [00:48:40] They only got a week.

NOBLE: [00:48:41] Oh, my goodness.

URANECK: [00:48:42] A week's vacation in a year, and more than two days of that was just transportation, you know. So they really had about three or four days in the village with their family.

NOBLE: [00:48:52] It was right to pull you out, I think, because that family really needed to focus not on you, but the spotlight on the man who had returned.

URANECK: [00:49:00] Right, right. I would, I would have been a distraction. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:49:05] So at the end of training then, was there some sort of ceremony?

URANECK: [00:49:11] There was. There was a nice ceremony, and I've seen pictures of it since then. I think what I would want to add, though, is what it's like being the only 60 year old among 20 somethings.

NOBLE: [00:49:23] Yeah, yeah.

URANECK: [00:49:23] And that a lot of times I felt like I was supposed to be learning about the Lesotho culture, but I was learning as much about how 20 somethings lived and.

NOBLE: [00:49:34] Americans.

URANECK: [00:49:36] Yeah. And I lived in a house with, uh, let's see, who was? There were a couple, a young couple who kind of was an early couple in our group and have since married, a couple of librarians, and Sarah and Anne, who were kind of in their thirties. They felt old or maybe they were in their forties. They felt old, but they weren't 60. And then me and then. Oh, and Todd and Rachel also were an early couple, and they also got married and are still married so.

NOBLE: [00:50:06] When you say an early couple, you mean?

URANECK: [00:50:08] Paired off way back in Philadelphia, in that orientation.

NOBLE: [00:50:13] Oh, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

URANECK: [00:50:15] And knew they were meant for one another.

NOBLE: [00:50:17] But they met through Peace Corps?

URANECK: [00:50:19] Yeah, they met, yeah. We had several couples. Several pregnancies.

NOBLE: [00:50:23] And how many? How many people all together?

URANECK: [00:50:26] I think we were about 30.

NOBLE: [00:50:28] 30 people in your group. That's a relatively small group, I think.

URANECK: [00:50:30] Is it? Well, I mean, in Lesotho, all together then we were like 60 or 70.

NOBLE: [00:50:35] Uh huh.

URANECK: [00:50:35] And now I think they're up to 100.

NOBLE: [00:50:37] Uh huh. Uh huh.

URANECK: [00:50:38] Yeah. They had an intake, a health intake, and then a half year later, an education intake. And then they were like that.

NOBLE: [00:50:44] So you had some people who paired up during training and there were some other people who arrived as married couples?

URANECK: [00:50:52] No.

NOBLE: [00:50:52] No?

URANECK: [00:50:52] No, they, they met. We didn't have any married couples in our group. It was a really young group and I was kind of the, the. So Craig, who was assigned with me, and then the two woman, women, Anne Marie and Sarah, who were in their forties, we were kind of the older group. And then with these other two couples, they, we were kind of the nonconformists. But the other people, they would, at 4:00 they would say, do you guys want to get drunk tonight? And it was a serious question. And they'd all say yes. And then Jason would, you know, collect money from everyone. And then he and a couple of other people would go down to the liquor store and come back with, you know, each of them had bottles, you know, like not just a beer, but like whiskey, like hard stuff.

NOBLE: [00:51:43] Huh.

URANECK: [00:51:43] And then they would proceed to drink all, dance and have music and maybe start with, start with movies or something. And sometimes they'd have a theme, like dress up like a toga party or something. They're just kind of blowing off steam, and our Mosotho woman who was with us 24/7, it didn't bother her at all. She'd seen Peace Corps.

NOBLE: [00:52:09] Huh. Seen this before.

URANECK: [00:52:09] People blowing off steam before. And, you know, we were in our little compound and there were no Basotho watching us except for the guards. And I would always kind of bow out and go to bed early. And I'd get up in the morning like at 5:00 or 6:00. I would run in the early morning. And there would be bottles everywhere. And what was so embarrassing to me was not just the mess that people had left. Oh, and cigarettes, cigarette butts. But if you factored in how much cigarettes cost and how much liquor cost, that I knew that when the guards changed at six and an extra guard came that they would be seeing just this, it's just such a wasteful display of wealth. And so I cleaned up after every single party we had during training.

NOBLE: [00:52:57] Oh, oh, oh.

URANECK: [00:52:57] I would go around, clean up all the cigarettes and put all of the bottles. I mean, it didn't fool anyone, you know, I'm sure the guards knew that we'd drunk all that stuff or, you know, that they talked about it. But it just sort of seemed like to, both to do it and then to not clean up after yourself. And I also was conscious of, you know, just as a mother, an older woman, to the women who were always cleaning up after us, you know, like well couldn't we just? Just give me the broom, I'll sweep out our own room. You know, that kind of thing is what we older women would say. But the younger people, I'd just go like, oh my gosh, they're so young. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:53:36] Well, were you able to do anything about that? I mean, could you address this issue with the whole group or?

URANECK: [00:53:43] Not the drinking issue.

NOBLE: [00:53:44] Not your mission to do that?

URANECK: [00:53:45] Yeah. Yeah. And any time, I learned really fast that the minute I tried to give advice, and since I'm an oldest child, that's a really bad habit of mine, people just shut me off. So I really learned not to try to give advice or pretend I was wiser or more experienced and, uh.

NOBLE: [00:54:03] But you wouldn't be pretending.

URANECK: [00:54:05] Well, you know, sometimes I'd work in small groups with people and we were like writing curriculum or something like that, you know? And so I'd kind of want to say something like, this lesson doesn't have an object, you know? But yeah, we did, uh. It was more like when I quit giving advice to people and thinking of myself as wiser, I realized when it came to Basotho culture, we were really all on the same, on the same level. We were all equal. I was as ignorant as they were. I made as many mistakes as they did. I struggled as much with language, if not more so, than they did. And so there was a real humility before these 20 somethings. And then when I was like that, you know, I became more likable to them.

NOBLE: [00:54:54] Uh huh.

URANECK: [00:54:54] They didn't want a chaperone or an old lady or an auntie.

NOBLE: [00:54:58] Or a mom.

URANECK: [00:54:58] Or a mom with them, you know. But every once in a while, you know, when a young person would be walking with me and they would say, boy, I hope when I'm your age I'm, you know, doing fun things. And I'd always kind of look at them because at that moment I was just thinking of, they were 26 and I was 26. We were both 26. And every once in a while they would say something to remind me that they did really see me as an older lady. It was, it was great. Being around with 20 somethings was as much of a cultural challenge and as educational as it was being around Basotho.

NOBLE: [00:55:37] This is jumping way ahead, but have you maintained friendships with some of those 20 somethings?

URANECK: [00:55:42] Just the ones I've mentioned, the ones that I kind of formed a, a connection with there. Those six to eight people.

NOBLE: [00:55:50] Yeah. Yeah.

URANECK: [00:55:51] And the other people that I didn't really form close, I have them all on an email list and now I'm newsletter editor for the newsletter. So I find excuses to send them this and that that I think people might be interested in or might like to know. But I rarely get back any reply so. I don't think it was a negative feeling. It's just like I didn't come out with 30 close friends. I came out with, you know, about 6 to 8 close friends.

NOBLE: [00:56:22] Sounds just about right.

URANECK: [00:56:23] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:56:25] So your training is finished and now you move to the village that will be your home for two or maybe three years. Where, um, where was that?

URANECK: [00:56:36] That was in the south, southern part of Lesotho, in a, um, in the province called Quthing, Q-U-T-H-I-N-G. And there was, there's kind of a road, one road that goes around Lesotho. All of it is really close to the border of South Africa because it's in the middle of South Africa. But there's a lot of mountains in the middle, and this one road doesn't go all the way around Lesotho. It's more like a C shape.

NOBLE: [00:57:11] Uh huh.

URANECK: [00:57:12] So anyway, I was. That main road though will take you everywhere you want to go that, you know, busses and taxis go so on the. Most of the times Peace Corps could make it in, I don't know, 3 hours in their white vans. But when you pause to change and wait for until the bus filled up.

NOBLE: [00:57:32] Oh, when you're riding local transportation it would take way longer?

URANECK: [00:57:35] You know, it'd take six hours. Yeah, 6 hours.

NOBLE: [00:57:37] Six hours from the capital.

URANECK: [00:57:40] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:57:40] And what was the name of the village that you were in?

URANECK: [00:57:43] Uh, I was in Mount Moorosi, about 1,000 rondavels. It had a high school. It had a couple of churches high on hills that we would hike to one of them. And it had a preschool, had a little tiny main street with two Chinese groceries that competed with one another. And then the little stands of cabbages and apples. Did you need to take a break?

NOBLE: [00:58:15] No, I'm fine. Do you?

URANECK: [00:58:16] I do.

NOBLE: [00:58:17] Let's pause this. [tape break] Okay. We are back. We've taken a short break. Training is finished, you move into your village, which was called Mount Moorosi, and you're given a place to live. Did you have to find your own place to live, or was, uh, did Peace Corps take you to a? How did you arrive? Did Peace Corps drive you into your town in one of their Peace Corps vans?

URANECK: [00:58:56] I arrived in a white Peace Corps. What did they call those Jeep like looking things that all the international development people?

NOBLE: [00:59:08] Land Rovers?

URANECK: [00:59:08] Land Rovers, yeah. Four wheel drive and bounced off the main road. And I remember being so disappointed that I was living so close to the main road. I knew that it was because they thought I was older and that older people have to be near evacuation routes according to Peace Corps headquarters. Because my colleague, who was Craig, who was to be working with, also working with the Lesotho College of Education, he was far out with a waterfall and.

NOBLE: [00:59:41] Oh!

URANECK: [00:59:42] The whole, much more, much more remote setting.

NOBLE: [00:59:44] And you had thought that, you had imagined yourself in a remote place?

URANECK: [00:59:48] Oh, yeah, I asked to be as far away from, from towns as possible. It was clear that some people were going to have horses and ride into the mountains and have to haul their own water. And but I quickly learned within, within a couple of days that, you know, beyond the town, it was amazingly remote and that I could hike as much as I wanted. And I did have to haul my own water and I didn't have electricity.

And, yeah, I quickly quit complaining that, you know, that I needed to be more, more remote.

NOBLE: [01:00:23] Uh huh. So Peace Corps takes you there and they would have, uh, they would have already known where your house was going to be?

URANECK: [01:00:31] Yes. There was a woman and I was her third Peace Corps volunteer.

NOBLE: [01:00:36] Ah.

URANECK: [01:00:37] But they had been over a period of 20 years. So they didn't use her every year. But they thought we would be perfect because we were the same age and she was living alone and I would be a woman living alone. She had four children here and there, and she had been divorced a long time ago.

NOBLE: [01:00:54] And we're describing, uh?

URANECK: [01:00:57] This is Me Ma Bokong was her name. And you're named after, your name changes when you have your first son. So her first son was Bokong. So she became Me, or Madame, M-E was short for madame, probably from the old colonial times. Me Ma Bokong.

NOBLE: [01:01:17] Oh, so she's, she's the mother of.

URANECK: [01:01:20] Of Bokong, the oldest son, right.

NOBLE: [01:01:23] How interesting.

URANECK: [01:01:23] Yeah, and funny I never asked her what her name was before that, or if she told me I'd forgotten, forgotten it. Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:01:33] And you were to live with her in her home?

URANECK: [01:01:35] Yeah, but in Lesotho there, there are like a lot of African villages. There are compounds. And so in the compound that might be, ours was fenced off so that the chickens wouldn't get out. But in the fenced off compound, there was my rondavel, her rondavel. No, my rondavel, her cement house with the tin roof. The chicken coop. A double outhouse, one outhouse for me, and one outhouse for her, carpeted, which I liked a lot. A shed for throwing things like glass bottles. A garden. And, um, yeah, that was about it. And before I came, I don't know whether she had family members staying in the rondavel or whether it had been empty for a while. But I think the previous Peace Corps volunteers had also stayed in that.

NOBLE: [01:02:28] In that rondavel.

URANECK: [01:02:28] But they, maybe one was 20 years ago and one was ten years ago, and she would complain that they didn't keep in touch with her.

NOBLE: [01:02:35] Oh.

URANECK: [01:02:35] And she was, she's kind of a bossy, complaining lady. We were, in a way, a good kind of match since I was sort of bossy on my own, on my own terms.

NOBLE: [01:02:45] Not so complaining.

URANECK: [01:02:46] But I learned so much from her.

NOBLE: [01:02:50] Would you talk about your rondavel? I'm not, I don't have a real clear picture of what a rondavel looks like or how big it is or what it feels like to be inside.

URANECK: [01:03:01] Yeah. Uh, how many feet is it from here to there?

NOBLE: [01:03:08] To the wall?

URANECK: [01:03:09] Is that about nine feet? So maybe about.

NOBLE: [01:03:12] Nine or ten, yeah.

URANECK: [01:03:13] About nine feet radius, maybe 18 foot.

NOBLE: [01:03:17] Uh, radius or diameter?

URANECK: [01:03:19] Circumference. So it's round.

NOBLE: [01:03:21] Right, right.

URANECK: [01:03:21] Mud on the outside and straw roof and really beautiful cross beams to hold up the straw. And almost like maybe you would think a teepee or something would be. I would wake up in the morning and I would look up at the complex arrangement of cross beams. There are very few people now in Lesotho who to know how to build these traditional roofs. Yeah, and every once in a while they re-mud the outside if cracks, cracks develop and then.

NOBLE: [01:03:51] Do you have to put fresh straw up on top?

URANECK: [01:03:54] Uh, I think they did, but not in my time. They last a long time. So maybe 20 years or something and then you would re-straw it.

NOBLE: [01:04:00] Is there a window?

URANECK: [01:04:01] There were two windows.

NOBLE: [01:04:04] Glass?

URANECK: [01:04:04] One that faced the road, mm hmm, in glass, and one that faced Me Ma Bokong's house so I could kind of check on people. And there was a little stair step porch. And then there were four, because I was a Peace Corps volunteer, Peace Corps required them to put on iron bars. So my door had an iron bar and my windows had an iron bar. Really not very safe, you know, if there was a fire, you couldn't get out.

NOBLE: [01:04:29] Oh, you couldn't get out.

URANECK: [01:04:29] Couldn't get out the windows. But yeah, you could.

NOBLE: [01:04:32] And what was the door like?

URANECK: [01:04:34] It was a wooden door that was really broken down. And at one point, I, I asked my Me Ma Bokong to find a carpenter to fix it because it was locking inadvertently. One time I locked myself in and then I couldn't get out the bar windows. But anyway, so when he fixed it, I realized that I had the same carpentry skills that this man did. And I had no carpentry skills and he had no tools. And I at least had a little hammer and a measuring, measuring tape and a pencil. Three things that he borrowed from me. Anyway, it was a terrible repair, but at least I didn't lock myself in.

NOBLE: [01:05:13] So there would have been a wooden door with a wooden frame somehow.

URANECK: [01:05:16] Mm hmm, and a wooden frame. So that, and one of those handles that you pushed down on.

NOBLE: [01:05:21] Oh, yeah.

URANECK: [01:05:22] Yeah. And then when I got that opened, pulled it toward myself, then there was this iron gate, which usually I just left open. I would only close it and lock it if I was going to be away from the rondavel for some period of time.

NOBLE: [01:05:36] Yeah. Yeah. And what did you have inside furniture wise?

URANECK: [01:05:40] Okay, so there was.

NOBLE: [01:05:41] It's all one room, right?

URANECK: [01:05:42] Yeah. It's all one bed, but it's all one room. But what we learned in training was that it's kind of pie shaped and. And you should

respect the room. You should respect the rooms. Like you shouldn't throw your clothes over everything because your clothes go in your bedroom. So you put your little stack of clothes or, uh, I think this one had, what do you call those things that you hang clothes into?

NOBLE: [01:06:06] A wardrobe or something?

URANECK: [01:06:07] Yeah, a *garde-robe* or. That's French. Anyway, you know, a wooden closet had one of those things where my clothes were, and then my bed. And then on another side of the rondavel, all I had my kitchen, which was a little table with two pans for washing dishes. And then I had a little one burner or two burners for a stove, nothing to bake in. I learned to bake in a solar cooker, which another project, NGO project had given to my, to Me Ma Bokong. Learned how to cook bread in that.

NOBLE: [01:06:49] And for water you had to draw it?

URANECK: [01:06:51] And for water, water was the, it was hilarious. The women got water once a day and they carried it in a big, what is this, a ten gallon bucket on top of their heads.

NOBLE: [01:07:05] Oh, my gosh.

URANECK: [01:07:05] They learned how to do that when they were little girls. So little girls who were like three or four would carry little kind of one gallon bucket on top of their head and they would balance it perfectly, although you could put a handkerchief or something there. Anyway, I never learned to do it. And the women at the pump used to laugh at me trying. And I, first I couldn't carry a big one and then I couldn't, I went down to a little one and that still splashed all over my glasses and all over my head. And I would always have to have one hand up there balancing it.

NOBLE: [01:07:35] Sure.

URANECK: [01:07:35] And then sooner or later it would tip over anyway. They thought I was hilarious. They'd never met anyone, you know, who couldn't carry water on their head. It's sort of like, I don't know, like what

we would think of someone who doesn't know how to use a pencil or, you know, it's something very basic. But yeah, getting water was tough. It was uphill, excuse me, from the, from the, from the pump. And by my third year there, I wasn't above paying little girls a small amount of money to bring me my water.

NOBLE: [01:08:09] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:08:10] But I learned how to use, let's see. I used three gallons of water a week.

NOBLE: [01:08:15] Oh my goodness.

URANECK: [01:08:15] That included, I would use. You just use and use and reuse water. So first you might cook and then you might, your rice or your papa. And then you would take that water and you would put it in your, you would use it as, um, dishwater. And then you may or may not use it as clothes, for washing your clothes. And then you would water plants or your garden from that and you would brush your teeth in a teaspoon of water. You know, you just, I think a lot of Peace Corps people do that. But it was, it was, uh, you reflected a lot on water because it was a mountainous country. And the, the lowlands are higher than mountains in Nepal and the Himalayas, it's very. It's a very high country.

NOBLE: [01:09:07] Huh.

URANECK: [01:09:08] And it used to have so many water and be so rich in water that South Africa created a dam. And South Africa now takes all the water from the dam in South Africa.

NOBLE: [01:09:18] Oh.

URANECK: [01:09:18] And since then, a lot of the rivers have dried up and they don't have good agricultural practices anyway, more of a slash and burn kind of culture. So everywhere you were, you'd be thinking about water.

NOBLE: [01:09:32] Yeah, yeah.

URANECK: [01:09:32] In, in a larger, larger sense. Like you saw that there were the huge parts of the world that just have these amazing water shortages.

NOBLE: [01:09:43] And how carefully people conserve.

URANECK: [01:09:45] Yeah. Yeah. I wasn't the only one who conserved water. Yeah, you never really saw anyone like, or heard anyone, like throw out a bucket of water or.

NOBLE: [01:09:56] A long shower. You had your, um.

URANECK: [01:10:00] Bathe out of a bucket.

NOBLE: [01:10:01] Yeah, I want to call her your host mother, but she had a garden, so there must have been, she must have had to. So your leftover dishwater would go on that garden I suppose?

URANECK: [01:10:13] It would, yeah. But there was rain. You know, it wasn't completely dry.

NOBLE: [01:10:19] You were able to cook for yourself?

URANECK: [01:10:21] Yeah, I cooked for myself. Yeah. I learned both the traditional cooking and, uh, which was easy because there weren't very many things. I have a, we had a, Peace Corps gave us a cookbook of Basotho foods. There was only one dish that's really multiple ingredients. Most things are just very, very simple.

NOBLE: [01:10:44] You stayed healthy?

URANECK: [01:10:46] Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:10:47] The whole three years?

URANECK: [01:10:48] I lost 20 pounds. I walked miles and miles and miles in a week. I walked all the, I was assigned to 27 schools and I went out to

visit the teachers in these 27 schools. That'd take me a long time just to find the school. But to get there, I would be dropped off from the main road by a taxi, so-called taxi, one of those vans stuffed with.

NOBLE: [01:11:11] Sure, a collective.

URANECK: [01:11:12] 21 people instead of 16 people. And then they would all point and say over there, over there, just follow the path.

NOBLE: [01:11:19] And then you'd ask again.

URANECK: [01:11:20] I'd follow the path until the path diverged because it was a country of geese, ha, geese. Goats and sheep and cows. And there was, so there were trails, there were no fences, but there were animal trails everywhere. The little boys would, would take care of the, of the family animals, so that, in the mountains that just meant there were so many trails. So most of the time when I was supposed to be finding a school, to find the teacher, to help the teacher, to evaluate her. And these were all teachers enrolled in the college program. I would get lost. So I spent a lot of time lost in Lesotho.

NOBLE: [01:11:59] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:11:59] But nobody, there was no one who could have told me where the 27 schools were. And we didn't use GPS in Lesotho at that time. Maybe you could now. Maybe you could now.

NOBLE: [01:12:16] So to get from one school to another and then back to your house, it was walking. You'd, you'd do one school in a day or?

URANECK: [01:12:23] I would do two, about two schools in a week. I would, I would do, or maybe three schools in a week. I would do Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday were my visit school days. And if there were, if they were near one another, I would stay overnight and do the second one, you know. I didn't, I didn't always come home Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. I was actually I was often away Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.

NOBLE: [01:12:50] Uh huh, yeah.

URANECK: [01:12:50] My Me knew where I was, you know, if anyone asked. And she always knew who the principal was. So she would say, oh, give Me so-and-so my best regards, or give her this, you know, plum preserves that I've made or something like that.

NOBLE: [01:13:06] Oh, that's very helpful to have at least somebody knew where you were and would have some idea of how to get there.

URANECK: [01:13:11] Yeah, yeah.

NOBLE: [01:13:13] I'm assuming that these teachers that you visited on these outlying areas did not have telephones. So you could, how did you set up? Did they know you were coming?

URANECK: [01:13:24] Yeah, I got really good at using the taxi. Like the, like the, um. What am I going to say? What did they? Like the Pony Express. So the taxis would go from our taxi center to all these outlying towns. So I would go to the taxi center and I would say, what taxi is going to this village? And then the drivers never caught on that they could have asked me for like a dollar a letter or something like that. But I would say, would you give this letter to Me so-and-so and she's at the school teacher and do you know where the school is? Yeah, yeah, I know where the school was. So what they would do is they would pull up near the school and they would then ask one of the passengers, usually the youngest little boy, to run down and give this note to the teacher. And it usually worked.

NOBLE: [01:14:13] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:14:14] That, that usually worked. And if I came unannounced, well, that was. They weren't really happy about that. But that did happen sometimes.

NOBLE: [01:14:21] That was an ingenious way of letting them know.

URANECK: [01:14:24] Yeah, it was the way everyone else did things. Sometimes I would get notes, you know, like, I'm not going to be there that day, so don't visit me on Tuesday. And I would also see these teachers in the summer and in the, over the Christmas break and over the summer break, they had to be in Maseru at the college.

NOBLE: [01:14:43] Oh, yeah.

URANECK: [01:14:43] And I was supposed to be there as an instructor. So I would meet with them and then I would say, I would make up little, little schedules. And I say, I think I'm going to visit you the second week in March. Will that work out? And I'll try to send a taxi note.

NOBLE: [01:14:57] Oh, yeah, that's good. So you'd prepare them for that idea.

URANECK: [01:15:00] Yeah, so I would visit each of the 27 schools two or three times. Some of the ones more.

NOBLE: [01:15:06] And so let's talk about a visit. You'd arrive after having walked for hours and hours.

URANECK: [01:15:12] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [01:15:12] And you'd be I imagine you took along a little bit of something to munch on or a little water or something to drink, huh?

URANECK: [01:15:20] I was always dressed in my *seshoeshoe* [also spelled *shweshwe*], which is the traditional dress, cotton.

NOBLE: [01:15:25] *Seshoeshoe*?

URANECK: [01:15:27] *Seshoeshoe*, yeah, it's, um. It's left over from kind of colonial dresses. It's either, it's always one of three colors, red or brown or blue. And it's always hand-sewn and usually a skirt and a blouse. And then they do some beautiful white embroidery on it.

NOBLE: [01:15:49] Oh.

URANECK: [01:15:50] Yeah. I brought back seven of those dresses. I had them made for me because everyone has them made. You can't buy them anywhere.

NOBLE: [01:15:56] So you would wear this dress, which is a.

URANECK: [01:15:59] Right, *seshoeshoe*.

NOBLE: [01:16:00] Which is what they would wear to.

URANECK: [01:16:01] What the teachers would wear. And then I would wear my Nike hiking shoes. But the teachers would wear their high heels and they would walk to school in their.

NOBLE: [01:16:09] In their high heels?

URANECK: [01:16:10] In their high heels or in their flats or in their, um. Me Ma Bokong had, had, uh. [phone rings] Let me turn this phone off, sorry.

NOBLE: [01:16:21] Yeah, I'll pause this. I think we're back on again. We are. So we were talking about the shoes that teachers wore and that your host mother wore too.

URANECK: [01:16:33] To she wore her house slippers because her, her feet bothered her. And you can imagine her feet bothered her if she'd been wearing high heels to the, to her mountain school all these years. She walked two miles to school and two miles back and never complained about it.

NOBLE: [01:16:50] Ah. Image. And so. You'd go to a, you'd walk to the school in your Nike's. You'd get there and what do you find? What's the, the school is an elementary school?

URANECK: [01:17:06] Yeah, they were all elementary schools and I would change from my Nike's to my nice, my nice shoes and, uh, and my hair was in a handkerchief, you know, a kerchief.

NOBLE: [01:17:17] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:17:17] They wore it all different ways. And some of the schools had, were big and crowded and others of them barely had any students at all, depending on how close to the road they were. So if they were a village that was close to the road. In, uh, seven years before I got there, Lesotho had changed from a private elementary school to public elementary, universal elementary school, so the classrooms had gone from six children to 100 children. So they were trying to figure. So they just pulled teachers off the streets with no training.

URANECK: [01:17:54] And then the program that I worked for was called DTEP, Distance Teacher Education Program, that during the teacher's summer and Christmas breaks when they had a full month off, they would come to the Lesotho College of Education and they would do courses in social studies, mathematics, science, I think women's studies or developmental studies, developmental studies and education. And I taught English education and social studies. And those were huge lecture halls. And we taught from a text and.

NOBLE: [01:18:31] This is when they came into the capital city?

URANECK: [01:18:32] Yeah, right. And they just wanted to know what was going to be on the test. So it wasn't, wasn't an ideal situation, but it was the most education that they'd gotten since eighth grade. Most of them were eighth grade.

NOBLE: [01:18:43] Eight grade, yeah.

URANECK: [01:18:44] Eighth grade graduates.

NOBLE: [01:18:46] And in their schools they were, how many kids in a classroom? Or would that vary also?

URANECK: [01:18:52] That would vary. The biggest one that I, I have a picture of a class that had. More than one picture of a class, of a school that had 100

kids, but they had four teachers teaching simultaneously, you know, like maybe 25 kids.

NOBLE: [01:19:11] In separate rooms?

URANECK: [01:19:12] No, they were all in the same room. They were just, you know, these students would be facing east and these students would be facing west and these students would be facing. And the, you know, they're all trying, they're all focused on their teacher and trying to understand what she's saying. And sometimes the teachers would coordinate kind of a quiet activity, having the children read over here, of all these children are being lectured to. But sometimes all four teachers were lecturing at once and the students are trying to help one another, so they're a little bit noisy. They were really, there were essentially no discipline problems in school. The kids just loved going to school.

NOBLE: [01:19:49] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:19:49] And their idea of being educated was to be very quiet. They didn't always understand what the teacher was saying, especially since they didn't have a good program from transition from English to Sesotho.

NOBLE: [01:20:03] Uh huh.

URANECK: [01:20:03] So some of the children, especially the girls, were left behind almost immediately.

NOBLE: [01:20:08] The teachers were speaking English?

URANECK: [01:20:10] They did speak English. And sometimes I wondered, was it just because I was there? And if that was the case, I could tell immediately because the students weren't used to English being spoken.

NOBLE: [01:20:25] Uh huh.

URANECK: [01:20:25] But generally, you know, by at least fourth and fifth grade, they were, they were supposed to be teaching in English all the time.

And since kids helped one another, they, you know. They, they, it was an immersion, it was an immersion English program. Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:20:43] And what sort of materials would the teacher? Was there a chalkboard and chalk, were the textbooks?

URANECK: [01:20:48] There was, the teacher had a textbook. The kids either didn't have them or else they were a set of textbooks kept in the principal's office under lock and key, would only be taken out on special occasions and were at all costs supposed to be kept clean. That was more important than anyone would even use them. There were very few teachers that used textbooks, the classroom set, every day. They might use them once a week, and they might only use the science textbooks once a week. They wouldn't use all the textbooks once a week. And they had a chalkboard. But the chalkboards needed to be painted with a resurfacing, which costs like \$50. That would have been one of the best gifts for schools to get. That you take the chalk and it wouldn't stick to the board. It just slides off because it's so, so useless.

URANECK: [01:21:40] Yeah, the kids didn't have little things themselves. The kids were supposed to have a pencil and the teachers would frequently send them home to get their pencil if they forgot it. They were tired of hearing the kids forgot their pencil because the, the Department of Education issued them a pencil or two pencils and a notebook at the beginning of the school year, and they were told that they were responsible for their pencils. And there would be boxes of pencils locked up under the key, but they would still make the kid go home.

NOBLE: [01:22:13] Go home and get that pencil.

URANECK: [01:22:14] And they would miss, of course, the whole day of school, you know, because they, the kids walked miles to school. They, they really walked. Teachers walked. It's not quite like Nepal, like a walking country, but it's, there are just not roads or people can't afford motorized transportation to, to places.

NOBLE: [01:22:35] And the teachers were expected to teach their children some math?

URANECK: [01:22:39] There was a curriculum. There was a national curriculum.

NOBLE: [01:22:43] Yeah, yeah. And the social studies, maybe map reading?

URANECK: [01:22:47] No, no one knew what a map was, including the teachers. Yeah. What was social studies? Um, social studies was that people have different jobs. Some people are farmers, some people are, you know, they would talk about the jobs in the city or that there are cities and there are country people or. Yeah. And we get, we depend on animals for our food, we have. They would draw a map of Lesotho. Yeah. Yeah. It was, uh, it was not a, a thrilling curriculum. So I did really learn how inferior, you know, you might have a millennium challenge goal to have all children have eighth grade or six years of schooling. But that does not mean that sixth grade, a sixth grader in America does what a sixth grader in Lesotho does.

NOBLE: [01:23:38] Right.

URANECK: [01:23:38] Yeah. So seeing how inferior education was, and then the kids would be, might be a couple of years behind. And then high school, which started at eighth grade, was a fee based.

NOBLE: [01:23:53] And would it be a boarding school? To go to high school, did they have to spend a week someplace else?

URANECK: [01:23:58] Yeah. Some were boarding schools. The one up the hill from me was pretty much a boarding school. Some kids walked, but a lot of kids were there.

NOBLE: [01:24:05] So if it was fee based, only those who had money could send their children.

URANECK: [01:24:08] Right. And it's pretty, I've been paying \$416 a year for a couple of kids to go to school. But that, that's a chunk. You know, even

just for me, \$400 a year for a couple of kids and so on. It's almost imaginable, unimaginable, how kids. Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:24:29] What a sacrifice for them.

URANECK: [01:24:30] Yeah. So it was like, you know, really just such a small group of kids, less than 50 percent, maybe like 20 percent went to high school and then half of those didn't pass. The passing grade is like 20 percent or 30 percent. They were really low standards, but still kids didn't pass.

NOBLE: [01:24:52] I'm trying to imagine what, I'm trying to imagine being you and arriving at the school and walking in the classroom door. What on earth do you do? What? Um. You want to move the teacher a little bit in a new direction somehow. But the teacher has virtually nothing to work with.

URANECK: [01:25:16] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [01:25:17] What was your, how did you see your role and what did you do with your time in that during? You'd be there for a couple of hours and then you'd go away unless you were spending the night. What did you do?

URANECK: [01:25:28] Well, you're. You've kind of hit on it in that I didn't have an extensive exposure to the teacher, so my longest exposure would be when they came to campus.

NOBLE: [01:25:38] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:25:39] In Maseru. And we weren't able to do enough of what we wanted to do. We wanted to show the teachers how teaching can be done. But the way the curriculum was focused was just kind of questions and answers and, you know, the test was coming up next week. So they had to cram through their 12 chapters of social studies or something like that.

NOBLE: [01:25:59] So from the teachers' point of view, what the reason they were going into Maseru for your classes was to.

URANECK: [01:26:04] Get their degree.

NOBLE: [01:26:06] Do test prep.

URANECK: [01:26:06] Uh huh. They'd get their degree and then their salary would go up.

NOBLE: [01:26:09] Oh, yeah.

URANECK: [01:26:10] So they were very motivated, um, but we wanted to show them more techniques so we would have these kind of little education fairs and we would invite all of the, the, um, teachers, Peace Corps volunteers, to help us. But it was, it was, those were optional. And so they were so-so attended. Some of them were well attended and people were interested. They would attend something once, but that was cutting into their free time. And that was my big chance for, for making different points. And what I would try to do at that point was to teach, demonstrate the way I taught, instead of lecture to them, have them do pair work or, you know. And then say, now your kids won't be doing pair work about development studies, but they can do pair work about many things, like what's an example, what kind of pair work could you do?

NOBLE: [01:27:03] And then you have to get them.

URANECK: [01:27:06] But still, this is 100 people, you know, that you're, that you're, that you're working with. But anyway, yeah, so that was my biggest chance. When I came to see them, they were usually just really, really frightened because I was supposed to, quote, evaluate them.

NOBLE: [01:27:21] Mm hmm.

URANECK: [01:27:21] So to relax them, the first, the first time, I would just try to be a human being and I would really try to see what they were doing. You know, you can't really evaluate what you haven't yet seen. And then there was this funny thing that I would arrive in the evening or, you know,

in the late afternoon. School would be out. And they would fix me dinner and then I would sleep with them in the same bed.

NOBLE: [01:27:43] In their home? Oh, in the same bed?

URANECK: [01:27:44] Many, many, well, they had a rondavel too, right?

NOBLE: [01:27:47] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:27:48] Right, right. And I got bed bugs many times, including in my own house. And, um, yeah, and, and then we would bathe together. You know, we'd both need a bucket bath. After I walked through that dusty mountains, I needed it and they needed it. So we'd have seen one another naked, slept together. I'm eating her food, you know, so. You know, I'm not going to all of a sudden in the morning start being a hard ass evaluator. I did, I did see their Department of Education evaluators come in and they were just kind of the worst. Every teacher's nightmare kind of thing. So I would just try to sit in the back of the room and just observe, right?

NOBLE: [01:28:32] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:28:32] And then, and I had an evaluation form I was supposed to fill out, and then I would go over the teacher, with the teacher later, those things. And I would, it would be all positive. What I wanted to make her realize is that she's doing many things right. In fact, in all honesty, you know, when I thought of how I would teach those kids, I just, I just admired these teachers so much. A, for showing up and, B, for all of the things that they could do. So I really tried to pick out to them what were best teaching practices and that they were doing them.

NOBLE: [01:29:06] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:29:07] You know, kind of know your strengths. And then pretty soon they'd be just begging, well, tell me at least one thing I could do differently.

NOBLE: [01:29:14] Better, yeah.

URANECK: [01:29:14] And on a separate sheet, more like for myself, I would have pages of notes of things that she could or should be doing, but I would try to pick like a game or something. And then I would try to, um, like I would give her immediate feedback because it was usually lunch time and the kids would be coming back in. So then in the afternoon I would try to do the games and show, you know, show her how she could do those things.

NOBLE: [01:29:39] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:29:39] And usually we either didn't have time to prepare exactly, but after a while I started taking vocabulary cards in sets of 20 in my backpack. So I'd say, well, let's, let's do the vocabulary, you know. And I would just. Didn't always work out because sometimes my teacher was a sixth grade teacher and sometimes was a second grade teacher and didn't always know in advance. But would try to make suggestions for those kind of things. And they thought those things were fun. But, you know, those were drop in the bucket kind of, you know, you don't really change your whole teaching philosophy with a, um, you know, one visit.

NOBLE: [01:30:17] One visit. Right.

URANECK: [01:30:18] But, you know, the idea of beating children, you know. Or what to do with naughty children, that kind of thing. We would talk about how good teaching eliminates discipline problems or how to use the kids' energy and.

NOBLE: [01:30:32] Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

URANECK: [01:30:36] They were awesome though. I so admired my teachers and I think my admiration really, really showed. And yeah, so people really looked forward to my visits and if I skipped someone for some reason, they were really hurt and insulted and wanted to know when I was going to do my makeup visit and.

NOBLE: [01:31:00] I'm guessing that all this came from within yourself, that Peace Corps training didn't teach you how to use this approach of focusing on the positive and all that. I think you brought that with you.

URANECK: [01:31:11] Yeah, somewhat. Somewhat. Although my friend Craig, I think he also was very, very positive with his teachers. You know, we didn't want to go in and be, and be hard ass. And it was hard, you know, in this kind of factory, factory education system. And what they really learned is they learned a lot from one another when they came to the campus. They would say, you know, I hate teaching science. How do you do it?

NOBLE: [01:31:36] Oh, yeah, yeah.

URANECK: [01:31:36] And then someone would say, oh, I've got this really good lesson. I went to one science lesson and it was like how detergent keeps, gets your clothes clean. And this was kind of the before and the after.

NOBLE: [01:31:49] Uh huh.

URANECK: [01:31:49] You know, I just sort of. Things were so basic, you know, I never thought of that as, you know, like, well, it definitely is science.

NOBLE: [01:31:58] Yeah, right, right. In the laundry room. Did Peace Corps come up and visit you, or Peace Corps staff, to see how you were doing, find out what you needed, help you any?

URANECK: [01:32:10] They did, but they never. They were never willing to hike 3 hours to see me at one of my schools. So I can't remember whether they ever did that. They had to do it kind of when it was convenient for them. They had, they had to see several people on the road so they would see the couple down, you know, 20 miles down after me. So they would spend like a couple of hours with me and then a couple. So usually I remember when they happened to come, I would be in my rondavel and they would talk to Me Ma Bokong, and they would talk to me either separately or together. And I might sit down and tell them how things were going, but I don't think they really saw me at work that much.

NOBLE: [01:32:51] Did they ask you questions?

URANECK: [01:32:52] Yeah, they did.

NOBLE: [01:32:52] Did they offer to help with, uh, how could they have helped?

URANECK: [01:32:56] I think, you know, as much as, as much as they could help they did, you know.

NOBLE: [01:33:02] Was it, was there any, was there ever discussion of Peace Corps somehow procuring funds to get that chalkboard, paint the blackboard?

URANECK: [01:33:13] No.

NOBLE: [01:33:13] Or chalk or notebooks or pencils or? It wasn't providing materials?

URANECK: [01:33:18] No, no. I don't think I ever suggested it. It was, that, those were the responsibilities of the Department of Education, not Peace Corps.

NOBLE: [01:33:26] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:33:27] What we, what we did institute, and I don't know whether it's still, um, still continued or not, but we wanted to see. We thought instead of just one of us in the classroom, wouldn't it be fun to have all of us there and all the teachers in the school there? So we would, we would establish, let's say we decided we would go. There were six of us that were working with elementary school and we decided that we would. I would visit Jason's school and we would all be at Jason's school that day, and that I was going to teach vocabulary games and Jessica was going to teach science experiments and so-and-so was going to teach, talk about just generally philosophy, discipline, you know, kind of thing.

URANECK: [01:34:17] And so we would, among the six of us or four of us, however many we would turn out to be, we would give those four workshops and we would get the principal to give all the teachers either the full day off or a half a day off, right? And Peace Corps didn't really like this. They didn't really like us going away from our site. They never liked us going away from our site. But, but this was our, what do you call it? Our professional. And we worked really hard at it, you know, to make it really good for their teachers, and the teachers that were lucky enough to have this day felt very, very lucky. But it took, it took a bit of planning and preparation. And then we all had to travel to Jason's school and we all would stay overnight and we would all kind of figure out how to chip in for meals or cooking.

NOBLE: [01:35:08] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:35:09] Yeah, we did that. We probably did that in 4 to 6 places, and that was good.

NOBLE: [01:35:13] Sounds wonderful. So. So you're in contact with other Peace Corps volunteers and that sort of setting. For the, I get the sense that for the most part, you are quite alone in your site up there.

URANECK: [01:35:29] I had a wonderful volunteer named Sarah. She was probably still in her twenties, maybe upper twenties, who was up the hill at the high school, who taught English at the high school. And I would go up there every time my computer needed charging, because it would run on batteries for 2 hours and I would do all the writing I could for 2 hours, and then I would go up and charge it. And then while I was up there, I could.

NOBLE: [01:35:54] Because she had electricity?

URANECK: [01:35:55] She had electricity and somehow.

NOBLE: [01:35:56] And you didn't.

URANECK: [01:35:57] How did she? It seemed like I, no, I wouldn't answer my email until I was back in, uh, at headquarters in Maseru that had computer, computers we could use. Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:36:09] How often did you get into Maseru?

URANECK: [01:36:12] Oh, maybe once every six weeks or something like that.

NOBLE: [01:36:15] Oh wow, that's a long space in between.

URANECK: [01:36:17] Yeah, but I went to Sarah's a couple of times a week and then she was Catholic and across the ravine from me was a Catholic church. I never would have gone to it if it hadn't been for Sarah, just because I haven't been raised with any kind of religion. And, um, but she really wanted to go to service. And there's a really long service that lasted from 10:00 until 1:00.

NOBLE: [01:36:41] Oh!

URANECK: [01:36:41] And then there was sort of the short service from 8:00 to 9:00, although sometimes it would be 8:00 to 9:30. So we would go, we established a tradition of going to church and then we would fix ourself a really nice Sunday dinner. That was nice.

NOBLE: [01:36:58] That's good. That keeps you sane.

URANECK: [01:37:00] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:37:00] So she was, she was great.

NOBLE: [01:37:02] Did you have any way to, um, listen to music or did you have books to read or things just to maintain your own sanity when you had time alone?

URANECK: [01:37:14] I think I was the only volunteer that came without a music system. They were having the MP3 players had just come out. Everyone had one of those and they had tons of music and they had headphones.

But I just didn't get into the MP3 players. I didn't lug a cassette tape. I didn't have solar powered speakers or players or. But I read, yeah, I read like 150 books during my time there.

NOBLE: [01:37:40] How did you get the books?

URANECK: [01:37:41] We had a wonderful library at the Peace Corps office.

NOBLE: [01:37:45] Okay.

URANECK: [01:37:45] So you could just go to Maseru and you would come back with six books.

NOBLE: [01:37:49] And you'd bring back the six books that you read before.

URANECK: [01:37:52] Yeah. Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:37:54] That sounds terrific. And your health throughout these, wait a second. You extended for a third year?

URANECK: [01:38:03] Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:38:04] How was that? How did that come about?

URANECK: [01:38:06] Yeah, well, we haven't talked about HIV at all.

NOBLE: [01:38:09] Okay, let's talk about that.

URANECK: [01:38:10] Uh.

URANECK: [01:38:13] Lesotho is one of the countries in southern Africa, the others being Swaziland and South Africa, so that little cluster of the toe of Africa has an HIV pandemic. That was known before I went. And I read about the myths that people have about how HIV is spread. But I thought that by the time I got there, people would have been working with this. Those myths were, they were such ridiculous myths that the white people were bringing HIV and infecting you. And condoms contained worms and the

worms would infect you with HIV. And that, you know, sleeping with a virgin would protect you from HIV. All those things that were, there were dozens of them. And anyway, I was, so I was surprised to find them really prevalent.

NOBLE: [01:39:04] Mm hmm.

URANECK: [01:39:05] And condom use was especially, um, controversial. Neither men nor women wanted to use them. And so I did early on some. I was kind of shocked to find out that my teachers had never had an HIV test. And so when I asked them why they hadn't had, that was starting to be some good research. And there were just so many reasons that I totally hadn't expected. Like I asked my husband if he'd use a condom and he slugged me in the stomach and in the face. That's why I have all these black and blue bruises.

NOBLE: [01:39:44] Oh.

URANECK: [01:39:44] And I said, well, why did he, why was he angry? And he said because I'm his wife. I'm his. He can have intercourse with me without using a condom. He uses a condom with his mistress or with his girlfriend, you know. So anyway, these, these stories just around the table, which all the women had and, and they were really worthy stories of The Moth radio episodes, or they were, they were good stories that helped me understand how big the mountain was. That these white people coming in with brochures and talking about how it's transmitted and stuff like that, you know, we weren't really getting close.

URANECK: [01:40:23] And my teachers, the main thing, the main reason they were afraid of taking an HIV test was that they all just assumed that they were HIV positive.

NOBLE: [01:40:33] Uh huh.

URANECK: [01:40:33] And if they were HIV positive, they didn't want to know.

NOBLE: [01:40:36] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:40:36] And because as soon as they knew, neighbors discriminated against them. Parents didn't want their teachers, their students to be their teacher. No one would play with their children. It would get around. No one would sleep with them anymore. They would lose their love life. Their husband would leave them. Uh, you know, the fact that the husband had given them AIDS in the first place was irrelevant. But yeah, it was still a totally, totally taboo subject.

URANECK: [01:41:06] And so our Peace Corps doctor, a wonderful man, Dr. Johnson, told us, and the education volunteers were working on science and social studies and stuff. He says, if you aren't devoting your time in Lesotho to HIV AIDS prevention, you're wasting your time here. This is no time to be, you know, doing vocabulary games and this kind of thing. You should be, you should be on the front lines. So all of us started working more with life skills, both for teachers, because teachers were supposed to be teaching it and they weren't. And teachers are supposed to be telling students how AIDS is transmitted, HIV is transmitted, and they weren't. And so we had to start focusing more on that. And the teachers were really interested.

NOBLE: [01:41:54] So getting the teachers to, to understand what, what's a myth and what's fact.

URANECK: [01:41:59] Right.

NOBLE: [01:42:00] Would be really critical.

URANECK: [01:42:01] Right, right. We had to sort of a game like which of these are true and which of these are false.

NOBLE: [01:42:05] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:42:05] True false games and things like that. And they would be really controversial, like people would take us on and say, you have that in the false column and that's true. And we'd say, no, that's not true.

NOBLE: [01:42:18] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:42:18] You know, sometimes my own science, you know, I'm not a master's in public health. You know, what, you really had to know your facts of life, you know, for an adult, at an adult level, not a child level. They would ask a lot of questions.

NOBLE: [01:42:32] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:42:33] But then I did go to seven funerals. Not all of them were teachers who died of AIDS, but all of them were teachers. Plus the little orphan behind, behind me who also died of AIDS.

NOBLE: [01:42:46] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:42:46] So I, yeah, I was getting into it, and all of us in my cohort were affected by funerals that we went to. We went to, to funerals. And they were very emotional. The Basotho allowed themselves to be emotional only at a funeral. Other than that, it was stiff upper lip and God wanted him to go.

NOBLE: [01:43:11] God's will.

URANECK: [01:43:12] Yeah, it's God's will so. How are we doing?

NOBLE: [01:43:15] We've got about 20 minutes.

URANECK: [01:43:20] Okay.

NOBLE: [01:43:20] I do want to talk with you about, um, why you chose to stay a third year. I want to talk with you about your, your work as Peace Corps staff after your three years as a volunteer ended. And I'm wondering if you want to talk a little bit about the very difficult situation of taking care of the orphaned child.

URANECK: [01:43:44] Yeah. All those are. The orphaned child, the orphaned child is kind of a 20 minute story just by herself. But yeah, my.

NOBLE: [01:43:53] Let's go beyond 20 minutes.

URANECK: [01:43:55] My Me wanted me to become active in the lives of these two little girls who are orphans who lived behind me. And maybe because I don't have children, or maybe because they were young girls, my heart really went out to them.

NOBLE: [01:44:10] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:44:10] And one of them was running around with the taxi drivers and was going not only to Maseru but all the way to Johannesburg, and somehow wasn't pregnant.

NOBLE: [01:44:23] She was working in the sex trade?

URANECK: [01:44:26] Uh, more like sex in the back seat in exchange for a cell phone, or sex in the backseat. It was more like she called these people her boyfriends, you know, they would kind of pass her around. And so she was a little bit over my head.

NOBLE: [01:44:42] And she was how old?

URANECK: [01:44:43] She was maybe 16. But her sister, who was 14, was smaller and sweeter. And both of them had had parents who had had AIDS and had been out of school for three or four years caring for their parents full time. First their father died and then their mother died. The father had worked in the mines. And so one of my biggest accomplishments was getting the younger one who was gently into school.

NOBLE: [01:45:10] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:45:10] We had to find a school uniform for her, and then I had to talk to the teacher and then they put her in the sixth grade. But the last time she'd been in school, she was second grade, so she didn't have those skills. So every week they would demote her and I would try to tutor her. And, you know, it was, it was a lot of fun. So she would come to my

house after school for tutoring every day, and all the other children would come. I would kind of have, uh, Me Lerato, I was Me Lerato.

NOBLE: [01:45:38] Oh, explain that name.

URANECK: [01:45:40] Oh, Me Lerato means love. It was a common name.

NOBLE: [01:45:43] It was the name that your villagers gave to you?

URANECK: [01:45:46] Yes, yes. So. So it was, it was a common name. Yeah. They, the names were like love or hope or courage for the boys, or intelligence for the boys, obedient for the girls. Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:46:00] And these two sisters who, who did they live with?

URANECK: [01:46:04] They lived alone.

NOBLE: [01:46:05] Alone?

URANECK: [01:46:05] They had a grandmother who had some younger children. So they were the grandmothers' daughters' children. And the grandmother had, the son had also died of AIDS. So she also had his children who were younger. And the grandmother would come around sometimes and wanting to know, how could I buy a pair of shoes for this kid, or could I buy some pants for this kid? And yeah.

NOBLE: [01:46:30] Yeah. Did you, if somebody asked, somebody was desperately poor, asked you if you could buy them a pair of shoes?

URANECK: [01:46:37] I did. I did. Yeah. Sometimes, you know, we weren't supposed to do that. That's not sustainable practice. But I remember this lady came. She was, she was. I didn't even know who brought her, but someone brought her who I didn't even know who it was. And this lady just said, you know, I'm, I'm sore, I need to get to the hospital. It cost 30 rand, which would have been like \$5, you know, to go to the hospital. Could you please give me 30 rand? And I did, really reluctantly. You know, if you're going to give money, you should give it generously and

with a good heart. But I gave it reluctantly. And then I just sat there and I went like, now there'll be a line of them. People will come.

NOBLE: [01:47:18] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:47:19] Everyone needs to go, you know. And no one ever came again.

NOBLE: [01:47:24] Oh.

URANECK: [01:47:24] The whole time I was there. And then I've always been so glad I helped this woman get to the hospital. How many \$5 have I wasted on a cup of coffee and a, and a bagel? I'm so happy that, you know, they were almost cried. You know, they were just so happy that money had fallen out of the sky.

NOBLE: [01:47:42] You made it possible to get help. So back to Dently.

URANECK: [01:47:45] Yeah. So Dently died in the end. And she died at the same time my brother died.

NOBLE: [01:47:52] Oh.

URANECK: [01:47:52] And, um, she. Yeah, I. It was very hard. You. Transportation to the hospital is so important because the relatives have to take care of the people in the hospital. They don't have like hospital food. If you don't bring food, your person in the hospital won't eat. And if you don't bathe them, they won't get bathed. And if you don't turn them, they won't get turned. The hospital is kind of in name only, has like one nurse per 100 patients. And all of the patients should have been in the hospital long before they were.

NOBLE: [01:48:25] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:48:26] So a hospital was a place to go to die. So when I took Dently to the hospital, everyone thought that I was taking her to die. And I brought her home from the hospital after some months because

everyone told me if she's going to die, you should bring her home so she can die in her grandmother's arms and not in this horrible hospital. So, yeah. I've written a whole long story about that. It's very, it's very painful. And I was, I was doing things like going all the way to Maseru to get her blood. And because there was no blood in the hospital, um, that I know that Peace Corps would have, you know, just told me out and out I couldn't do.

URANECK: [01:49:14] But on the other hand, when I really needed advice for the medic, for her medical situation, I would go to our Peace Corps doctor who would give me off the record advice about what I should do, especially I ran into a problem with trying to get blood. And he helped me get blood. Yeah. So it was, that's a whole nother chapter of, uh, of Peace Corps experience, this young woman who died. And at the same time, my brother was going through these operations for his brain that were, one operation was \$350,000. And the other operation was \$250,000, which we know because he was caught without health insurance and so paid for all of that.

NOBLE: [01:49:55] Oh.

URANECK: [01:49:56] Himself. And Dently also died and she had nothing, you know. When I had to go and teach at the college and she was in the hospital and I knew that no one would be able to, to, you know, to feed her, I would ask some of my other Peace Corps volunteer people, would you please come and bring her some yogurt or some pudding?

NOBLE: [01:50:18] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:50:18] And so I had enlisted six volunteers, you know, trying to keep Dently alive and her family. And, yeah, it was, it was a big effort, but it was, you know, it was just seeing a child go downhill.

NOBLE: [01:50:30] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:50:30] Yeah. She, her AIDS was already too far. She was fourth stage AIDS by the time she, by the time she got there.

NOBLE: [01:50:38] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:50:39] Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:50:41] I'm reminded that I did read that story and that you wrote public letters maybe once a month from Lesotho that we then got to read because you'd put them up online.

URANECK: [01:50:56] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [01:50:57] And I'm hoping that you can give those, that you'd consider giving those public letters to the JFK Library.

URANECK: [01:51:04] Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:51:04] Perhaps at some point, I'll try to make that happen. They're beautifully written.

URANECK: [01:51:09] Yeah. They're all on the web now, so actually you could just put up a link to them.

NOBLE: [01:51:15] Okay.

URANECK: [01:51:15] There are 20 letters.

NOBLE: [01:51:17] Yeah. So you stayed an extra year?

URANECK: [01:51:21] I did. I think it was actually an extra nine or ten months. But I had, I was trying to build a school. And my country director said, don't build a building. He says, that's just so non-sustainable. You know, you're teaching teachers, keep focusing on that. And I tried the PCPP, is the Peace Corps program, Peace Corps Partnership Program, and I tried to write a grant, and, um. It was in its early days and I didn't read one of the instructions well enough. So anyway, after I rewrote that grant about three times, I gave up on that project.

NOBLE: [01:52:02] Oh, sorry.

URANECK: [01:52:02] And instead I raised money for chair, for desks, and I got, raised money enough for 100 desks and had them built locally and gave them to three schools, three of the most remote schools that didn't have any desks at all. Yeah. And I think some of my other schools were really jealous about that. And my Me was always jealous of anything I gave to anyone that her kids didn't get, whether it was time or money or anything. She was always shaking her head about what I shouldn't be doing, but what she thought I should be doing was just giving everything to her family and her school and her friends. And so, yeah, that's where our two different cultures got in the way a little bit. So you wanted to know something about leaving Peace Corps and working?

NOBLE: [01:52:54] Yeah, yeah.

URANECK: [01:52:56] Well, as I mentioned, I was so impressed with Peace Corps training. I saw this is an organization that has a lot of experience with training. I would like to work for Peace Corps. And unfortunately, Lesotho didn't have this position called Director of Programing and Training, but someone, maybe my country director said, why don't you apply to be director of programing and training? So without even knowing what one was, I applied for it and Peace Corps considered me. And what they do is they take some applicants and they send them off to the country directors and the country directors pick the person they want. Nobody picked me. And then Peace Corps said, well, why don't you come here and work in headquarters for a while?

NOBLE: [01:53:42] In Washington?

URANECK: [01:53:42] In Washington. And they had a division called OPAT, which is Overseas Programing and Training. And they said, you have a background in teaching English. We're going to roll out an English curriculum for all of the countries, and we're going to, we're going to make these Peace Corps people start teaching English better. And so anyway, I worked with another person on that program who is really well respected all over the nation. He had all of the credentials. And I did

more of the Peace Corps part of it, you know, setting up Peace Corps, I don't know. Headquarters was a lot of paperwork, and teaching English wasn't really my focus. I didn't really want to be doing that as a next career move. I mean, this was just a perfect opportunity if you wanted to be an expert in teaching English, to have this on your resume. But I was going more for that international development thing.

NOBLE: [01:54:41] Yes.

URANECK: [01:54:42] So I applied again for the director of programing and training and someone said, you know, just be patient. Eventually there will be, there will be an opening in Africa. And in retrospect, I do wish I had waited, but I took the first one that came along, which was Turkmenistan.

NOBLE: [01:55:01] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:55:02] And, uh, and so I went off to a country that was completely non-African, completely I had no background in Central Asia history, language, you know, everything I'm reading, you're reading, but State Department people do that too. They get these huge fact sheets and they cram like, like crazy. And then I went to a country that was within my two years of being there would be phased out, that the.

NOBLE: [01:55:33] The Peace Corps would be phased out?

URANECK: [01:55:34] Peace Corps was no longer welcome there.

NOBLE: [01:55:36] Uh huh.

URANECK: [01:55:37] Our theory was that it was because it was the Arab Spring and the government, which was very repressive and totalitarian, didn't want to have an uprising. And so the fact that there were people, very, very popular Americans, out in villages working with youth really frightened them.

NOBLE: [01:55:58] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:55:58] They had many rules that applied to all the people in the, in their, their country, but applied to us too, that n more than five people can meet, can assemble at a time.

NOBLE: [01:56:09] Oh.

URANECK: [01:56:10] So if five Peace Corps people, volunteers, came from their site to meet in town to have a beer or a cup of coffee and a sixth person came, then he was supposed to sit over.

NOBLE: [01:56:23] Someplace else.

URANECK: [01:56:23] At someplace else because five foreigners are so conspicuous in town that someone would report it to the police, right? So anyway, it was very. I hadn't been accustomed to that kind of, that kind of totalitarian government with curfews and everything either. But it was, it was very interesting. And so one year I lived in a rondavel, and less than a year later I lived in a five story luxury apartment across from the American Embassy compound.

NOBLE: [01:57:02] As Peace Corps staff.

URANECK: [01:57:04] As Peace Corps staff. So yeah, of the two experiences being a volunteer and being a staff, I really loved being a volunteer. It had so much freedom. And every night I would just think so hard. Like, I have all this education, I have all these contacts, I have fundraising experience, I'm in this village. Like, what if people said, you know, Madeline Uraneck, you can eliminate poverty, go to it! You know, we'll give you seven years or 15 years or, you know, you're educated, do it. Use every bit of education you have or, you know, use it to improve this one school or something like that.

URANECK: [01:57:46] And I went like, God, these are such a worthy things to think about. You know, no paper that I ever wrote in college, you know, gave you the big questions. You know, how does poverty develop? How do you get rid of it? How do you create good education in a, in a country

where, you know, you have a blank slate, where you just have 100 kids in a room and no books?

NOBLE: [01:58:11] And lots of myths.

URANECK: [01:58:13] And I loved, I loved being challenged in that way. So I thought, you know, maybe international development is a good, a good field for me. Being Peace Corps staff with the volunteers, however, you really see the Peace Corps' strength, which is to say it gives volunteers a very realistic experience of what it's like to, to work in development in a third world country. Then it sends them back to the United States, where they go to graduate school or join the State Department, for the rest of their lives, carry a more realistic view of what it takes to make change.

NOBLE: [01:58:51] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:58:52] And I'm really sorry that, you know, international development and a lot of these people who go into government don't have a comparable, this experience or comparable experience. So we do have people making unrealistic policies, and then that would lead us to a whole, you know, how the United States approaches international aid, a whole separate, a whole separate thing. But you you get into those, those kind of discussions.

URANECK: [01:59:20] And so Peace Corps in Turkmenistan was winding down. We actually had when I arrived more staff than we had volunteers because the government would refuse to give visas for the incoming group. So the group that was there at 90 kept getting smaller, smaller, smaller. And when I was there, during the time I was there, two cohort groups' visas were denied. They were never denied. They were, we love Peace Corps. We'll be very happy to do this. Yes, this will. We have this, we're working on these visas, any time now.

NOBLE: [01:59:54] Yeah.

URANECK: [01:59:55] Meanwhile, Peace Corps, Washington would actually have real people and real names. And then once again, you know, they would

either drop out, they couldn't wait or they'd be reassigned to other country. So Turkmenistan was causing Peace Corps staff all of this problems of, yes, it was on, now it was delayed. Now it's delayed more. Okay, we'd better start a whole new visa process. And yeah, so I think it happened one more time and then, and then they closed it.

NOBLE: [02:00:26] Uh huh.

URANECK: [02:00:27] So. And I went off to Kyrgyzstan. They were short, they were short of staff. Their DPT had left early, so I filled in.

NOBLE: [02:00:39] DPT was?

URANECK: [02:00:39] The director of programing and training, the same job that I had working with all the volunteers, working with all the native trainers.

NOBLE: [02:00:47] Yeah.

URANECK: [02:00:47] To make sure that they were doing the training. They had some really creative things going on. They had some, a fantastic country director. It was really different than Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan was kind of in a low and, you know, I came in and tried to be really positive. But Kyrgyzstan was just 90 miles an hour, you know, and they wanted me to be as good as their last DPT, which I was trying to catch up to speed or something like that. They could have hired me and I could have stayed, but they didn't hire me. Then I went back to, uh, I went back to Turkmenistan.

NOBLE: [02:01:24] Oh, wait a minute. You were in Kyrgyzstan for how long?

URANECK: [02:01:26] Three months.

NOBLE: [02:01:27] Three months.

URANECK: [02:01:27] What do they call that? They call that, um, I don't know. Like you're a substitute teacher.

NOBLE: [02:01:32] Yeah. Okay.

URANECK: [02:01:34] Yeah. But anyway, it was fabulous. I had a, I loved everything about Kyrgyzstan. I loved the, the people. The ethnic groups were really different. I was able to do some sightseeing Peace Corps style. I had an amazing staff. I really liked the volunteers, and I just had a great experience. It was like mountains, but you could actually climb them. And it was, it was more like being in Paris after being in, you know, Maseru. It was, it was much more. It was more like the San Francisco of Central Asia.

NOBLE: [02:02:08] Huh.

URANECK: [02:02:08] Just met amazing people. Loved, loved every bit of it. I would have stayed, but I just didn't. I didn't, I don't think I got enough. I don't think I got a say in it. I think some decisions were made. I don't know. They wanted Joe instead or, you know, sometimes you don't know why you weren't chosen for something or another, but that was that. And then I came back to Turkmenistan, and then I decided to leave. I had an opportunity to, to, uh. Let's see, Turkmenistan. I had an opportunity to travel in Iran.

NOBLE: [02:02:42] Ah.

URANECK: [02:02:42] And Iran bordered Turkmenistan. I could see it. It was 15 miles from my kitchen window.

NOBLE: [02:02:48] Oh, wow.

URANECK: [02:02:49] But I was not allowed on my Peace Corps contract or U.S. government contract to travel to Iran because we, it was one of the countries in the front of the passport that you can't travel to.

NOBLE: [02:03:02] As a, as an employee of the U.S. government?

URANECK: [02:03:05] Right. Right. And, you know, they were kidnapping.

NOBLE: [02:03:08] But ordinary people could go?

URANECK: [02:03:09] Well, actually, it's very, it's very difficult for Americans, Canadians, and Brits to go and you can't get a visa from the U.S. I got my visa from the Turkish Embassy. I applied for a visa to go. Is that how it worked? Yeah. Anyway, it was, it was tricky. It took some time and I just, at that time we were in the Iraq war, pulling out of Afghanistan, and people were talking about nuke Iran. And I'd always wanted to go to Iran, that was another story. And I went like, I think the window is going to be shut.

NOBLE: [02:03:47] Yeah.

URANECK: [02:03:47] Like it was shut for Afghanistan. I've always wanted to go to Afghanistan. Some countries you just cannot go to, I don't want to go to during war. And so I took the plunge and I took this trip to Iran, which is a wonderful story. Um. But to do that, I had to leave Peace Corps.

NOBLE: [02:04:09] Yeah.

URANECK: [02:04:09] And Peace Corps has this ridiculous rule that if you're in Peace Corps as staff for four years, then you have to be out of Peace Corps staff for four years.

NOBLE: [02:04:19] Oh, yeah.

URANECK: [02:04:19] So I'd been in for, I don't know, two and a half years, so I was going to have to be out for two and a half years. So I came back to Wisconsin and then Wisconsin has just kind of taken over. I started writing and I'm really enjoying that, so I'm going to pursue that for a little bit. But I do think that DPT is one of the most incredible jobs. I've had so many incredible jobs, and it's just as good as, uh, my job was at the Department of Public Instruction. It doesn't have the freedom to create everything new, but it does have this amazing opportunity to see the world because, you know, you're, you're doing this. And then all the DPTs meet in Mongolia and then they have to have another conference in Thailand and then they have to go back to Washington, D.C. And that

might all happen in one year or a space of two years. And then you use your vacation you, whenever you change countries, you're in a completely different configuration of countries.

NOBLE: [02:05:17] Yes.

URANECK: [02:05:17] So when you're in Turkmenistan, then all of a sudden you realize you could see, you could visit Tajikistan, you know, which is right there.

NOBLE: [02:05:25] Yes. So do you think you might, um, get back into that?

URANECK: [02:05:29] You know, I would love to. The thing is, is that in an international development field, writing books, which is what I'm doing now, working on two books, doesn't position me in international relations, that the books aren't about international relations. So I don't know whether I would be competitive enough. In all fairness, I think, I think I could do the job. But they're always younger, more energetic, blah, blah, blah. So I'll, I'll. I would, I would consider it. And I do see the job openings come by and I do have a couple of friends that I envy so much, who were my colleagues at the time, but now they've done all those conferences and they've been reassigned to all those countries. And my next country would have been Uganda.

NOBLE: [02:06:15] Oh.

URANECK: [02:06:16] Yeah, I, every time I hear the word Uganda, I kind of go, oh my God, I could, I could be there. I could have known that. But I don't know there's, that's part of living. It's like, be where you are, be fully where you are. And if you're going to spend time regretting what you're not doing, it means you're not fully where you are.

NOBLE: [02:06:38] So there you go.

URANECK: [02:06:39] I've been trying to be fully where I am.

NOBLE: [02:06:41] And you're in a beautiful place. Do you have any last thoughts about Peace Corps?

URANECK: [02:06:47] I loved the Peace Corps. I'm a great poster child for older people going into Peace Corps. I think going in with as much experience as I had was good for Peace Corps and good for carrying out what I carry out. So I do talk to a lot of people who are older and advise them definitely to consider doing that. From Peace Corps' point of view, I see, I see our problems. We're much more opinionated and, uh, slower language learners, and some people insist on giving young people advice. Don't catch on to, you know, that kind of relationship. But, but in general, I just think it's a wonderful, wonderful thing to do with your life at any time and certainly when you're older.

NOBLE: [02:07:39] Thank you, Madeline.

URANECK: [02:07:41] You are so welcome, Phyllis. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]