

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Peace Corps/Foreign Mission Project

Peace Corps Experience

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DENNIS A. DE SANTIS

Interviewed

by

JOSEPH G. ROCHETTE

on

November 19, 1984

DENNIS ALLAN DE SANTIS

Dennis A. De Santis was born on July 7, 1949 in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Victor L. and Mary Prescipsky De Santis. He graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School, continuing his education at Youngstown State University where he received a B.A. in History (1973) and a M.B.A. (1983). Mr. De Santis is currently a member of the Society for International Development, Association of M.B.A. Executives, National Historical Society, and the National Association of Returned Volunteers.

Mr. De Santis served as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer in Swaziland from 1974 to 1976. There he worked as a secondary education teacher in a small northern village. Before returning home he served as a trainer for the Peace Corps training program in-country. This experience stimulated his interest in overseas development work. De Santis later worked on an educational development project in Iran and is currently considering a return to overseas work.

He is presently living in Youngstown, Ohio with his wife, Loretta, who he married in 1977. He is employed as an instructor at Youngstown State University. Mr. De Santis is a member of the Holy Trinity Church and his hobbies include photography, chess, and woodworking.

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INTERVIEWEE: DENNIS A. DE SANTIS

INTERVIEWER: Joseph G. Rochette

SUBJECT: Peace Corps/Volunteer lifestyle, application, training, problems, motivations, educational system in Swaziland

DATE: November 19, 1984

R: This is an interview with Dennis De Santis for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Peace Corps/Foreign Mission Project by Joe Rochette, at Youngstown State University, on November 19, 1984, at 11:17 a.m.

Just to start out, if you could give me a background of any history of where you were born, went to school, and all that.

D: My name is Dennis De Santis. I am from Youngstown, Ohio. I went to Youngstown State University and graduated in 1973 with a Bachelor of Arts in history and went back and got a teaching certificate the following year. For two years after that, I taught junior high in the public school system of Youngstown and then went to the Peace Corps as a secondary teacher in Swaziland.

R: What stimulated your interest in Peace Corps?

D: There is a number of factors that are involved in it. One, of course, is the sense of adventure. Africa represented a mysterious, exciting trip, something that I wanted to do. I wanted to travel and see it, so that a sense of adventure was one part of it.

A sense of the altruistic was another reason, working for a purpose or a mission. Trying to make a contribution was a part of it. Even John Kennedy was a part of

it. When he was elected in 1960, I was just entering junior high school and he made a big impact on me. The Peace Corps was started at that time and it was a very attractive kind of thing. The phrase "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country" really hit me and I think a lot of volunteers experienced same feeling. Those are the two major reasons.

R: What was for you, what was involved in the application process?

D: The application process was really long and tedious procedure. It took about a year and a half from my original application. I think I sent in a card that I got in the hallways, you know, "Join the Peace Corps" on campus and I think I sent in that card for information. I think that is how the process started.

After that, I got a long application form, completed the application form, and made several phone calls about that application. Then a woman came out to interview me in my apartment. It took about two hours but it was basically a kind of survey and not an interview in a sense of evaluating me for the Peace Corps, but kind of a general survey--my religious background, ethnic background and all kind of socioeconomic and political viewpoints. I never knew what happened with the results of that survey. No one seemed to know what happened to the results of that survey.

I seemed to be lost in the application process for a time, then I eventually got a packet requesting my fingerprints and security clearance stuff. About two months before my departure date, I got word that I was going to Swaziland as a secondary education teacher.

R: What was your first impression when you saw that?

D: My first impression was where is Swaziland? It is such a small country; a little over 7,000 square miles only 500,000 or 600,000 people in the country. Unless one is involved in international affairs or African history or has some reason to know of Swaziland, very few people know of it. I was like everyone else and had no idea what was there. The Peace Corps sent some state department summaries and some information about Swaziland and I was able to find a few things in the library about Swaziland. I started learning about it as best as I could.

What was interesting is that, I guess it was the beginning of the Peace Corps connection that has remained a strong thread in my life ever since then; I got a phone call clear out of the blue from a woman who lived in

Boardman, Ohio whose son happened to be a Peace Corps volunteer in Swaziland at that particular time. That Swaziland connection and that Peace Corps connection are still very strong and people from Swaziland crop up in my life in the strangest places, at the strangest times.

R: As far as preparation is concerned, before you went overseas, did your group get together in the States first and then. . .

D: We met at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel in Philadelphia, which was a really nice, old hotel. We were two or three people to a room and there was a Swaziland group that included twenty or thirty secondary teachers, another ten or so rural development people or agricultural people, maybe twenty or thirty agricultural people as well. There was a big group of people going to Swaziland.

Then we also were with people going to Ethiopia and to Iran. This was in 1974 and, of course, there aren't any Peace Corps programs left in Ethiopia or Iran, but at that time, those three countries were staged in Peace Corps parliaments at the Ben Franklin Hotel. We had two or three days there just kind of going over very, very general kinds of things about the country and what would happen once we got there and that sort of thing.

On Halloween night in 1974, just celebrated the 10th anniversary, we left all on one chartered plane for Rome, where we were going to get different flights. We had a tremendous party all the way over, it was one of the best parties I ever attended--flying across the Atlantic on our way to these exotic countries.

In Rome, we had a couple hours layover and the group that was going to Iran branched off from there. We went on another plane to Athens had a lucky break in that we arrived too late for our connecting flight to Nairobi so we got a free twenty-four hours in Athens. Everybody immediately ran out and got drunk and saw the city. It was kind of a fly now pay later kind of program. After that stint there in Athens, we flew to Nairobi, refueled, and flew to Johannesburg, South Africa and then had a short connecting flight to Swaziland on Swazi Air. At that time, they had one airplane.

R: What were your first impressions on your first day?

D: Of Swaziland?

R: Yes.

D: I can remember. . . It's distinct as if it happened last week. Landing at the airport, it was warm and sunny, getting out of the plane and seeing that the landscape looks a little like the American south at first glance because the earth is kind of red and clayish. There is a distinct aroma that arises from the earth in that part of Africa that permeates everything. Each new visitor can smell that aroma and that was my first impression was that it smelled really different. People later told me that I smelled that way when I got back to the States.

I remember seeing as we drove from the airport, which is a semi-modern facility, small facility built as we would build it here in the States, seeing women walking in their traditional dress with black umbrellas to keep the sun off them and going past the mud and grass thatch huts, then getting into the second city of Swaziland, Manzini, where our training was staged. This is a town of about 30,000. The African market there was the first thing, just the sense of adventure and at the same time saying, "Well, there are trees and grass and people are walking on their feet and in a lot of ways, it looks just like America." As we later found, the western culture there is like a coat of white wash, is the analogy we used, while on the surface it looks like the same. Underneath that it is a very thin veneer and underneath that it is very, very different than here.

Those were my first impressions: Some very sharp, tactile kind of responses and an underlying point of view that it's really not that different. I didn't really know what to expect and then I found out that it really wasn't that different; the sun shines and life goes on and trees are there and grass and houses, pretty much the same thing.

R: With the training, how was that set up and what was involved?

D: We broke into groups. The teachers went to Manzini, the agricultural people went up to Mbabane, the capital city, which was about thirty miles away. Also it's a town of about 20,000 or 30,000 people. These are the two largest cities in Swaziland.

After a couple of days of kind of settling in and getting used to the money and the cultural differences that strike you immediately. . . The training program consisted of a couple of different areas. One was called the urban live-in in which two volunteers were assigned to a Swazi family that lived in the city. The family that I went to was an official in the ministry

of education. He spoke English very well. They had a western style house with the Swazi-British cultural differences from Americanism. Also, the climatic differences that effect, it is a semi-tropical country. The housing would be different than the substantial type of housing that we have in this climate. We were there for a week or so, then we went back to . . . Our base was a catholic boarding school in Manzini. We each had like a dormitory living there.

No. I'm sorry. The first step was a volunteer live-in, visit with a volunteer in a rural area. That was fun; that was really good because we got out in the countryside right away and we saw what was in store for us. Then we came back and lived with the Swazi family in the city. Then we underwent language training and some teacher training and cultural training at the William Pitcher Teacher Training College in Swaziland.

Then we went on a rural live-in which was the best part of the whole training. We spent three weeks living with a Swazi family out in the bush. We were taken in as sons and daughters of the family, one volunteer to a family. Over an area of a couple square miles there were eight or ten of us so we were able to walk to each other and visit each other every couple days or so to maintain that contact. That was like plunging into a cold lake, being totally immersed in the Swazi culture. It helped us considerably, I think, as we went on to teach in the secondary schools there because we understood where our students lived. The purpose of this was to build an attachment to the family and to have a family there in Swaziland that we could go to and visit and remain in contact with and that worked out very well.

R: As far as the training was concerned, who were the people who were in charge of it? Were they volunteers?

D: The people who were in charge of the training program were former Peace Corps volunteers that have been traveling around parts of Africa doing training. The volunteers that were in charge of our program had been in Liberia five years previously as volunteers and they have been doing training programs off and on for the Peace Corps ever since. There was one in-country Peace Corps staff that was also involved in the program. Then there were Swazis hired on to do language training and cultural training programs.

R: You mentioned the Peace Corps staff. How in Swaziland was that set up as far as the director?

D: We had a program director, an assistant director, and then a staff member for each of the areas that volun-

teers were involved in. So there was a staff assistant for education; there was a staff assistant for agriculture and there was one for community development type programs in which there were very few in Swaziland. It was almost a fifty-fifty split between education and agricultural volunteers, just the smaller component was community development. The rest of the positions were Peace Corps staff, was staffed by Swazis. We had a Swazi nurse, Swazi drivers, Swazi typists, and support staff, it was all Swazi.

R: In your opinion, how. . . I'll just mention one more deficiency.

D: There is a different measure of efficiency, that is for certain. The Swazi nurse, for example, was efficient enough in administering regular series of shots, but I found that she was very lax in entering them into our world health book. That required some duplication and some problems for me later on in that I didn't have an accurate record of my shots.

The Swazi driver is a character I will never forget. His name was Austin and he drove the Peace Corps van, into things more often than around them (Laughter) just kind of a carefree existence behind the wheel of that van.

R: This might be a little bit off the subject. I don't know why it popped into my mind. What about how Peace Corps and volunteers were looked at by, for example, like the U.S.A.I.D. community and the sort of embassy community?

D: There was a rather small American expatriate community there other than Peace Corps volunteers. There wasn't an embassy there; there was just a council. So there were only two or three American staffers there. There was a small A.I.D. station there and for the most part, the A.I.D. officers and the people at the council were kind of bemused by volunteers. I think they got a lot of their information indirectly from volunteers. It was on a very informal, casual basis. We could go into the consulate there at any time. Every time I was in the capital, I would stop in just to say hello.

I remember that on one occasion we had to go up to the storeroom with one of the officers there; I saw a picture of Nixon there and I asked him if I could have it. He mailed it to me a couple of days later and I put it up in my place. It was kind of reminiscent of the Watergate times; this was in 1974-1975.

Things were very casual and very informal. They looked upon Peace Corps volunteers as doing a good job, but

kind of individuals and living out in the bush. Most of these other people had pretty comfortable living arrangements. Most of the volunteers had adequate amenities at best. Several had very, very primitive kind of situations and one or two had very comfortable western style apartments.

R: What was it like, not so much the first day in the country, but now at your site?

D: The first day at the site, I was assigned to what is a large secondary school in Swaziland in the northern part of the country, about 600 students, the Highbelt. I was assigned there with one other volunteer. We hitchhiked up to our site carrying what baggage we had as such and the blanket and the flashlight the Peace Corps gave us.

We arrived into the town which reminded me very much of a western town, a few Swazis walking around in traditional dress, a post office, a bank, a general store, a gas station, one hotel on the edge of town, a couple of rooms, and one little cafe. That was basically it. A South African mine office there to recruit workers, those were about all the structures in the town, two or three blocks long, dirt road all the way from the capital, cattle walking down the middle of the road.

We got a lift in the back of a truck and dropped us off in town and kind of stood there not knowing what to do next. A British expatriate was the assistant headmaster at the school. He happened to be in town. He approached us and said, "You must be the new teachers at the school." We said, "Yes," and he offered us the back of his pick-up truck and drove us to the school which was about a mile from the town. I was amazed at how we had just arrived and within an hour, everybody knew who we were. If not by name, they knew we were the new teachers at the school. It was immediate upon arriving into town.

The school was very attractive, whitewashed buildings around a courtyard, very nice grounds, flowering plants all over, very scenic and very pleasant. The climate there is simply beautiful. It's very nice looking buildings. Of course, there was no place for us to stay and it was during school break, so we spent the next ten days living in a classroom with a sleeping bag thrown on the floor. There was a hostel there for students, it held about fifty students and the kitchen staff and they would make us one meal a day. Otherwise, we were living pretty much on peanut butter sandwiches.

R: What about your impressions of the educational system

there?

D: It is a British educational system, a British style, straight from Britain. A student would start school and go to grade one, grade two, equivalent to our first and second grade. Then they would enter standard one through standard six, I think, which would be the equivalent of eighth grade, then enter form one through form four.

At each break, from grade to standard and from standard to form, they would be required to take a test and this test was straight from London, sent back to London to be scored. If the student passed the test then they could go on, if they didn't pass then they were dropped from school.

At the end of form four there was a test called the O-level exam which was a standard British test that was administered uniformly to all former British colonies and protectorates, of which Swaziland was a protectorate, graded in London and then marked. A student could retake the test for different subjects. There were five or six different subject areas and if they passed that, they could go on and take an A-level test, which would be equivalent to one year in college, freshman year of college.

The benefits to this, is that anyone passing an O-level has a standard education that is creditable throughout the British empire. Whether it is from India or Indonesia or anywhere, this test is pretty much the same.

It is extensive. There are five years of geography a student has to take, much more intensive than here in the United States. There are history requirements for European history, American history as well as the indigenous country. There are math and science requirements, English literature requirements. They read books like Thomas Hardy and things that were very difficult for Swazi students to relate to and understand.

The criticism of this system was: Is it effectively preparing students for a life in Swaziland when only five or ten percent of the students pass at the end of form four? What good is it doing for the country? Are we educating only that four or five percent who then, more than likely, would go to America or to England to further their studies or perhaps enter the teacher training college in Swaziland.

The big analogy was that perhaps the bushmen in nearby Botswana, Kalahari Desert were the most adept at educating the young because they taught survival in the

desert and the bushmen know how to survive in the desert. What they learned from their families and parents was very important to them, while what the Swazis were learning in reading in Thomas Hardy may not have much relevance or significance in their lives. So that was the big question in the educational system there. In order for Swaziland to develop, they do need students getting a higher education getting a standard, recognizable, world class education, but then again at the same time they needed craftsmen and tradesmen and other things as well. At that point the educational system was not meeting those needs.

R: Was there a feeling, call it aura, of still British colonialism?

D: Yes, very much. Swaziland was never a colony. They were a protectorate and they had a high commissioner administering things at Swaziland. Swaziland went independent in 1967 under the rule of King Sabuza II, the lion of Swaziland. He died only a few years ago. He was the longest reigning monarch in history. He had been king since 1921 in Swaziland, Oxford educated, but very much of a traditionalist.

At the same time there was a kind of British culture that permeated through Swaziland and most of the expatriates and so-called white Swazis, which represented two percent of the Swazi population, most of them had British roots; some were of the Afrikaans decent, the mixture of the Dutch and French that migrated from South Africa, which bordered Swaziland. Also, there were some Portuguese.

The Portuguese influence was felt in that there were several Portuguese restaurants and quite a few Portuguese in the country from Mozambique, which also bordered Swaziland and at that time was undergoing a socialists revolution, so more and more Portuguese were coming into Swaziland.

The Portuguese were basically mechanics in Swaziland, mechanics and tool and dye workers. All the British were mostly all teachers and administrators and just kink of wealthy people living in nice mansions in the bush, agriculturists. But even if one went out into the bush of Swaziland, the Swazi people, by nature, are very hospitable and polite. A kind of veneer that covers this is that one will be served tea on a tray in a teapot with cups, chipped and mismatched as they may be; in the bush the idea was copied from the British.

R: From your standpoint, do you think the people in the bush viewed Peace Corps volunteers different from what you just described, the British?

D: Yes. Peace Corps volunteers were viewed very differently. The Swazis would recognize the Peace Corps, I can't think of the name they used to call us, but it translated into someone with a pack on their back. They said "Peace Corps volunteer has long hair, blue jeans, and wears a pack on their back." That is a Peace Corps volunteer.

Other things that typify Peace Corps volunteers were that they hitchhiked all around the country or they rode the bus and you would never find another white person on a bus. If you saw a white on a bus, nine times out of ten they were a Peace Corps volunteer or they a world traveler type of person. The Swazis respected this and also anybody who made any kind of an attempt to speak the language, was also more than likely a Peace Corps volunteer because the South Africans who came to Swaziland did so mostly to play because South Africa is a very conservative and kind of restrictive country. They would spill into Swaziland on Easter holidays and things like this and go to the casinos and go to the bars and things. So volunteers were regarded differently and just the fact that we would be out in the bush and visiting or staying with Swazis in their crawls, in their small villages, marked us as Peace Corps volunteers.

One time a Swazi told me, "I don't understand something. French are from France, Germans are from Germany, but what country are the Peace Corps volunteers from?" "America." "Oh, America. Is that far away?" "America is very far away." "Is it farther away than Pretoria?" Or another common question was, "How many days by bus to get to America?" Figuring that America was 12,000 miles away and the bus would go 100 miles in a day, I responded "Well, America is four months away by bus." "Wow! Four months."

R: How about getting back to school. What do you remember just about the actual teaching, discipline problems and things like that?

D: There were no discipline problems to speak of. The students if anything were overly polite. I was referred to as sir and sir only. Swazi culture thinks it is very disrespectful for in a situation like a student to teacher for the student to look the teacher in the eye. They would look down on the ground. Students would sometimes approach me on their hands and knees which is Swazi custom for a child to approach an adult male. That was somewhat difficult to work around. Many students though were more used to being in school and they didn't do that.

But then, the problem that existed was the rooms had a cement slab floor, cinder block walls, very small classroom, with forty-five, fifty students in it. There were never enough desks let alone books, papers, tablets, and chalk and that sort of thing. What got on my nerves the most, was the constant noise of the shuffle of the metal desks on the concrete floor. Just having that number of students there would be the normal amount of talking and the shuffling in and out. The seemingly chaoticness, the chaos that the school was constantly in to the orderly western mind of keeping desks nice and straight and the way we had been schooled just didn't exist there. Desks could never be kept in a straight row and it was pointless to even attempt it. It was something I didn't attempt to do.

But as just as a way of underlining what was going on, if I gave the people in the front horizontal row papers to pass back, they would never seem to pass them directly back, but kind of just meander through the room. Little things like this made a big difference in adjusting.

It was also dark in there. While it is a subtropical country during the wintertime, the nights would get chilly and mornings, if no sun was coming into the room it would be cold in there, the dampness rising through the cement would make it chilly. Summertime were very hot. These were the type of problems.

Also, talking about electricity to students who don't have electricity and all of the things that go along with having electricity, it makes it very difficult for them to understand a lot of the western concepts that their education was based on. So it was very difficult for these students to get a grasp of what was going on. Also, all the classes were conducted in English, which was one of the official languages of Swaziland, the other is very closely related to Zulu. The students had to take Zulu. They spoke Zulu back and forth to themselves, but would speak English in class and to their instructors.

R: Were there any kind of extracurricular things?

D: Yes. They had an intramural kind of sports program. Another volunteer and I put together or revitalized the intramural sports program and eventually expanded it to playing other regional schools having track meets. It was fun and the students really liked it. Everybody liked it.

There were a couple of people attempts by a British expatriate at forming a science club. From time to time, there were other school clubs and things, a

geography club at one time. None of them very strong, but they attracted a few students. For the students who lived in the hostel and lived on the grounds there were a little more. Most of the passes that came about came from these hostel students. Those that finished the forms passed the O-level exam, most of them had lived in the hostel.

R: How would you describe a typical day for you?

D: On a typical work day I would get up probably about 6:00 in the morning. I never had an alarm clock or anything; I've never been noted as an early riser, but somehow. . . Well, I guess when you go to bed at 9:00 at night. I would get up at 6:00. I had a radio that was able to tune into a South African station. Their stations, their media is nothing like ours in America. The best I could summarize it would be if you picture America in 1940, that is what you would find in South Africa in terms of advertising in their media, in their social structure, in their social awareness. I would get that 1940's radio station, which was enough for me, they would eventually get around to telling the time on there and then I would know it would be about time to leave for school.

The house that I lived in the longest period of time was two miles away from the school. It was a mile west of town; the school was a mile east of town. I would then walk on some paths to get to town, walk through the town and then down another path to get to the school. It took about a half hour, forty minutes to walk that distance, rain or shine, dust or mud, dark or blue.

That turned out to be very good because when I went back to Swaziland five years later to visit, everybody knew me. Even people that I had not known personally who worked in the shops would say, "Oh, you've come back to see us. How glad we are that you're back. It was really good because everybody recognized me and knew me. I was known far and wide throughout the region. I think a lot of that was because I had walked so many times back and forth through the town.

Then I would go to school. Some terms were very, very busy; other terms were not so busy. The busiest term I had: I had seven classes with five different preparations involved. Classes were either forty-five minutes or a double session of ninety minutes. We would have a tea break at 10:30 in which we would have tea and little sandwiches with the crust cut off, served us cheese sandwiched basically. Then we would have a little lunch in the hostel which would be like a bowl of soup and a slice of bread and maybe a vegetable.

Then classes would get out about 3:00 or 3:30. Sometimes I would hang around at school for a while and then I would walk home.

When I got home by the time I made something to eat. . . I used to keep a garden. I had some Portuguese friends who would drop by, some Swazi friends, a lot of drinking and socializing and an awful lot of reading, studying, letter writing, diary writing. I really got a good self education in Swaziland just by living in a remote part of the country, then to bed when it got dark.

R: You brought up the idea of being alone and times when there is nothing to do, that whole idea, being frustrated. How did you deal with that?

D: There were some very tough days for me there. I think the feeling that best summarizes it is that my house was on a hill that looked down into a valley. Especially on weekends, which could be just endless if there was no one around and it was kind of isolated from even the townspeople there, I would spend days on end, or if there was a school break, without speaking a word to anyone, without seeing anybody, without having any of the things we rely on here in the States like television, radio, and tape players. I had this radio, but stations didn't broadcast all day long. They would only broadcast for a few hours a day.

I was very frustrated from time to time in teaching there because of the lack of supplies, because of the difficulty. As I said before, only four or five percent of the students eventually passed the exams. Having forty students in class, doing five preparations for each day, it was just very frustrating.

Going to the bank, post office, store, and sometimes simply getting the pay from the Peace Corps, which was mailed out to the banks supposedly on the 1st of the month. . . Sometimes we wouldn't actually get the money until the 14th. So anywhere from the 1st to the 14th, you didn't know if you had any money or not. It was a very small sum to begin with. Get the feeling, that just what the hell am I doing here? I'm wasting my life away. The world is passing me by and I'm sitting here not doing much of anything. I'm not making any kind of contribution to Swaziland. I've been here a year and not one of my students has passed any exam.

It just gets very, very frustrating. I always described it as, if I were to chart my emotions there, I would say that the peaks were higher than any peak I've had and the lows were lower than any low I've had

previous to that. I would deal with this by eventually coming around and saying, "Look, what I get out of this experience is entirely dependent upon myself." There were several volunteers in the country who were absolutely miserable for most of their stay in the country. This negativeness permeated everything they did.

For the most part, I would say that my experience there was very positive while I experienced these lows. I would fight to pull myself out of these depressed stages by doing anything, finding any new activity and learning to entertain myself, just going out and chopping down the weeds around my house. Just like the character in Doonesbury that works on a tan, working on a tan became something to do, while I was chopping down the weeds. I would read three or four books at a time.

Eventually, a bout of depression would last a couple days or a week. I would pull myself out of it and look forward to the next school break in which I could do some traveling, the countless number of times that very, very stimulating or adventurous things happened. I would be in the throws of the depression or sheer boredom and be sitting out in front of my house there and suddenly three or four Swazis would appear out of the grass in their traditional warrior outfits, very exotic looking. They were doing a dance for some occasion and I would sit there with my mouth open and would say, "Oh my God, this is Africa." That was enough to snap me out of it a lot of the times. Just seeing that kind of thing and meeting people from witch doctors to prime ministers and mercenaries, riding a land rover through the bush, those sorts of experiences really made it deep.

I think that afterwards I made more of a contribution than I felt while I was there, especially when I returned. I think almost every volunteer in Swaziland had adopted a student or two or a family or two that they kind of looked after and acted as a coach or a guide towards getting the student in school or keeping in school or arranging medical assistance or giving clothing or money or in some way outside of their regular job. The three goals of the Peace Corps, of course, are to provide assistance to the host country, help the people learn about American and for Americans to learn about overseas. I guess those three goals were pretty well met in retrospect.

R: We talked about when you first came. What do you remember about maybe the last month or so?

D: The last month or so in Swaziland?

R: Yes.

D: The last month or so I was doing a Peace Corps training program in Swaziland. Getting near the end of my initial two year stay there, I just got kind of. . . The Peace Corps staff was going around interviewing volunteers about what they felt the Peace Corps program needed. That kind of grew into taking over as project director for the training program.

That was a big break for me because I suddenly ended up having the use of a Volkswagon beetle and arranging family visits for the new volunteers and visiting them up on their rural visits. While I had gotten to most parts of the country during my two years there, I was much more mobile now and also moved to Manzini. Manzini is a remote little town, about 30,000. Like I said, it is the second largest city in Swaziland much more happening there, so I was able to go all around the country and, of course, get involved on the kind of administrative level with the Peace Corps.

Also, it was kind of a switch for me into kind of a managerial role rather than a teaching role. It is something that I pursued later on. I was very, very busy also, very upbeat, very positive, looking forward to the next step in life. Those were very positive times.

Overall, Swaziland is a wonderful, wonderful country to be in. I felt as a Swazi; I felt that I was a Swazi and people treated me as a Swazi. By that time I knew many, many people in the country because it is so small. It is almost like a county operates here. I knew most of the people in the educational system and so many volunteers and so many expatriates and so many Swazis that I felt very, very much at home there. Even King Sabuza said that anyone who is in Swaziland and is living in Swaziland is a Swazi and they should be treated as a Swazi. Things were really wonderful for me there at the end.

R: A lot of people think that the Peace Corps experience ends when you come home. I just wondered what kind of things did you go through? I mean when you came home a lot of people think once you are home everything is fine now.

D: I don't know who you mean when you say a lot of people think Peace Corps is. Do you think volunteers think it is?

R: No. Let me word that, family, friends who maybe have not traveled the world.

D: I've told students now that have asked me, that are

serious about joining the Peace Corps, what it is like. I tell them that every volunteer has a different experience and every country is a different experience, but one thing that is for certain, Peace Corps will alter the course of your life. It certainly has altered the course of my life.

I don't know of any Peace Corps volunteer who stayed for the two years, finished their program that doesn't speak glowingly of that experience and doesn't establish almost instant repour with any other former Peace Corps volunteer from whatever part of the world they happened to be in. Any other world traveler having a much easier time relating to foreign nationals of any where that we meet in America, of having a vastly different perspective of America through, you see it through the eyes of a foreigner.

I think one becomes a patriot by living overseas because when you compare our economic system and government and everything about our country, not to say that it is perfect, but by comparison the opportunities presented for the average person here are so much more greater than the average person has overseas.

When I returned to the States, I had somewhat of a difficult time because I really hadn't expected to return so suddenly. My plan while I was in Swaziland was to travel throughout Africa and take my time coming back. I traveled considerably as a volunteer through southern and eastern Africa, but I wanted to go to west Africa and to, northern Africa. This training program, I thought I would have another opportunity at a training program and that would get me back to Africa after a short stay in Washington.

As it turned out things didn't work out that way and I ended up staying in Washington for eight or nine months, during which time I was looking for another job. I found a short, kind of intermediate stop gap job that kept me busy a couple of days a week in Washington. At first, I just hated it. Here was a person that would spend months at a time without ever stepping on pavement or seeing fifteen or twenty moving vehicles a week, suddenly living in metropolitan, downtown D.C. in the district, in kind of a residential hotel down there.

It was a big shock, a big change. It is difficult to articulate the feeling of sitting in a coffee shop and having the person next to you become totally just angry and irate and yell at a waitress because their spoon happens to have a water spot on it, and walking into a supermarket and seeing the fixation of America on cleanliness, sanitation, and convenience as compared

to life overseas, especially the life of a Peace Corps volunteer. So it was difficult to adjust to, but I think volunteers as a whole are flexible and they make an adjustment.

What also was a shock was that going overseas one expects to be shocked and if you see something that you don't understand, that is fine. That's all part of the game; "I don't understand that. I'm here in Swaziland, why should I understand that?" You come back to the States and things change so rapidly here. There are so many personalities and products and attention grabbers that two years away, quite a bit happens and things change. Not to understand something here sends a shiver down your spine because you say, "Hey, I'm an American. I grew up here. I should understand what is going on." It gets a little hairy there for a while, but then depending on the person, too. I burned all my bridges when I went to Swaziland and I think that was a mistake.

Coming back and simply not having a job and a place to live, any kind of firm plan about what you want to do next, not much money, anyone in that situation would be a little anxious. But, eventually you get readapted and the sooner you start working and meeting other people and getting back into the mainstream of things, the easier the adaptation is. For me though, I didn't make much of an effort because my mind was focused entirely on being overseas again. I eventually got a job and went to Iran to teach there in a training program there.

R: So would you say even too today that things you went through as a Peace Corps volunteer still shape . . .

D: The things I went through as a Peace Corps volunteer still shape my life now. As I said before, it is my 10th anniversary from when I left for the Peace Corps. It is shaped to the point that now I am involved in nailing down a job to take me overseas again.

As a matter of fact, Swaziland is one of the possibilities that exist at this point for another contract, but on a higher level beyond teaching in the secondary schools, more manpower development for the Swaziland government. These are on the I.D. contracts through the various consulting firms in Washington. There are a couple of different things that I am working on now, but my intent is to be overseas again. Now that I have been back in the States, married, have a house, got an education, so I am ready to go back overseas again.

I have a number of foreign friends that I have met through the university. I have a strong interest in

international affairs; I tend to seek out former Peace Corps volunteers and associate with them. Many of my friends and companions, sometimes I find it very difficult to relate to people who haven't had some kind of international experience or cross-cultural experience. It is getting easier, but at first it was very difficult.

R: I would like to thank you for sharing your experiences. Is there anything that you would like to add or say?

D: Just that I am glad to have the opportunity to do it. Peace Corps is starting a new direction now in development education, they're calling it. They are making a strong push towards educating Americans about the development process, more of the idea of bringing the world home to America. This was one of the goals of Peace Corps. Now after twenty-five years of Peace Corps, and 50,000 Peace Corps volunteers, we are becoming a more cohesive force. I think this development education is a good thing and hope that it works out for us.

R: Okay. Thanks a lot.

D: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW