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Interview with Fred Gregory

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Transcript of interview with Fred Gregory

War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends

November 2, 2017

Cherice Bock: The following recording is an interview of Fred Gregory for the Project War and Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940-1975. You will also hear the voice of Ralph Beebe, one of the researchers for this project, and I am Cherice Bock, the other researcher. The interview took place at Friendsview Retirement Community in Newberg, OR on November 2, 2017.

Ralph Beebe: Hi, Fred. What year were you born?

Fred Gregory: I was born in July 1944.

Ralph: Okay. And when you registered for the draft, what did you register as?

Fred: I registered in McMinnville, Oregon, Yamhill County, as a conscientious objector.

Ralph: And when were you drafted?

Fred: In June of 1966.

Ralph: What happened after you were drafted? Did you meet with a draft board, or...?

Fred: Well, maybe I'll go back to, to when I registered.

Ralph: Okay.

Fred: Because I expected to be challenged about my conscientious objector status, because the draft board was in McMinnville, and they were older guys—I think there were three or four of them in the room. I think they all said they were veterans. And they said, "So why do you—let's see you're a conscientious—you're wanting to be a conscientious objector. Your dad's a Friends minister. You live in Newberg. No problem, you've got it."

Ralph: Wow.

Fred: So, I didn't have to defend myself, and—and I actually felt a little bit bad about that, because I slid into the conscientious objector category without having to convince anybody, whereas I had some friends who I worked with in Vietnam who were conscientious objectors, who were actually facing jail time because their draft boards didn't accept their religious conviction testimony.

Ralph: Well, so you appeared before the draft board...

Fred: So I appeared before the draft board, went through college... That, of course, that was the height of the Vietnam War, from '62 to sixty—or it was the beginning of the Vietnam War, really, and President Johnson had canceled all graduate school deferments. So I wanted to go to graduate school, but I couldn't. And that was before the lottery, and the draft board and the Selective Service System, so everybody—everybody was called up.

And so I got my notice to appear for my draft physical in Portland, Oregon. I can't remember where it was. It was in some big building where there were, like, 50 or 60 of us in that particular cohort of people coming through. And we all stood there in our whitey-tighties and had some guy come by and look at us and say, "Yeah, you're fit," and not.

And then I began the process—by that time I had, I had already made arrangements with Jon [Newkirk] and Jerry [Sandoz] to work with the Mennonite Central Committee in Vietnam. And so I sent that in with a description of what we were doing, and MCC sent a note saying that yes, we were going to be doing service for two years. And I sent that in, and that was accepted as alternate service for the two-year service period that we were required to do.

Ralph: Let's go back one step, then. How did you decide whether you were just going into the military and register 1-A, or register 1-O, or 1-A-O?

Fred: Well, being raised in a Friends pastor's home helps you sort of understand that that's just normal for (in my case) for being a Friend, and I had studied war and peace in college, in classes, and of course we had talked about it a lot. And, and before Arthur [Roberts] gave us the challenge, which I'll talk about later, to go to Vietnam, I was pretty discouraged about options, because I did not want to drive a Goodwill truck. I did not want to sort Goodwill clothes. I did not want to be a hospital orderly. I wanted to do something that I thought was significant, and not just put in time for two years. I had been student body president my senior year at the University—at the College, and so the admissions department asked the draft board if I could work for the college for two years in the admissions department, being a recruiter, and that was denied. They said, "If you want to—you can do it if you want to mow the lawn, but you can't do it if you want to recruit students." So, that option was taken away.

Ralph: This was George Fox.

Fred: This was George Fox, yes.

Ralph: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Fred: So, so then, so I went through a very short period of time where I thought, "Well, is this really what I want to do?" Because—and then, as a 22-year-old, you

believe that there's not much you can't do. And so, I thought, "Well, maybe I want to be an aviator," so I actually gave some thought to being a pilot of a jet fighter, which is totally opposite of what I'd been thinking about, of course. Because I kept, in my mind, wanting to do something significant (and probably not recognizing it), but something thrilling, something that has an adventure attached to it. But then, that quickly went away when I really thought about it, and went ahead with going with the Mennonite Central Committee in Vietnam.

Ralph: OK. Well, so then, did you register then as—obviously not 1-A, but the difference is between 1-O or 1-A-O?

Fred: No, I did—I did not register as 1-A-O, I, I, I was straight conscientious objector.

Ralph: Straight conscientious objector.

Fred: Yeah.

Ralph: Yeah. Okay. Well, I'd like to hear about what your Quaker and Christian faith—you already mentioned that, but expand on that a little bit. How, how did your faith, or how did your relationship with the Friends church, and your personal faith—

Fred: Right. Well I was, I was taken by early Friends' testimony of peace, and quite frankly, that Friends and Brethren and Mennonites had persuaded the US government to allow alternate service, which not every country does.

Ralph: Yeah.

Frank: And so, that, that was interesting to me, and, and then, of course, I, I began to embrace the Christ-teaching of peace in my own life, which I got both from my Quaker roots, and I've often said, "Hillary Clinton's not all wrong: it does take a village to raise a child, and the yearly meeting raised me," because my dad was superintendent. And we had people in our house—I bet two or three times a month—for dinner who were seeing Dad about something and they'd come to our house for dinner and I'd listen to conversations. And so, so the whole notion of the yearly meeting and its stand on peace...

Eldon Helm was a very strong mentor of mine, Pete Snow was another one—and these men really encouraged me to do this.

My dad did, also. My dad was on the board of World Relief Commission of the National Association of Evangelicals. On that board was the head of the Mennonite Central Committee, and now I can't recall his name, but Dad and he were friends, because obviously, coming from traditional peace churches and on the NAE's board, they were unique compared to the other denominations represented. And, and so, when Arthur—after Arthur gave the challenge to us, I, I talked to my dad about it,

and he said, "Well, let me talk to the MCC guy, and see if there—because I know that they've got work in Vietnam, to see if that might be an option for you." So he talked to him. The word came back that they would accept our applications if we'd apply to MCC. And so we did. And so that's how we got to the Mennonite Central Committee.

Ralph: Expand a little on what you said about Arthur's, because that's very important.

Fred: Arthur's challenge to the, to the entire student body is really the key cornerstone for the trajectory that my life ultimately took. In a winter chapel, I had—I can't remember a thing he said except: "For those of you who are conscientious objectors, if you want to put your money where your mouth is, go to Vietnam and do your alternate service there in the middle of a war and be as—an action for peace."

Well, that grabbed my attention, and I thought, "Ooh, that could be interesting!" And I was naive as can be. I have, you know, who's been to war when you're growing up in Portland and Newberg and graduated from George Fox—or getting ready to graduate from George Fox? I, I had no concept about what that might mean, but Arthur said, "Do it!"

So, the three of us, then, talked. John [Newkirk] and Jerry [Sandoz] and I were friends, and, and we began talking to each other, and... Because none of us wanted to do it by ourselves. We wanted somebody to go with us. And so, we all agreed to do it, and we all applied to the Mennonite Central Committee to go.

So, Arthur—Arthur's challenge to us was key, and Arthur, from that time forward, we didn't really talk about it all that much when we were in college, that it was Arthur. When we were in Vietnam and when we came home from Vietnam, it was all about Arthur.

And so, Arthur became another one of those mentors of mine, especially when I came back to live in Newberg after having been gone for 40 years. I would see Arthur often, and we'd just sit and talk, which is fabulous. It was wonderful. And, even when they went downstairs to the Health Center, I'd, you know, we had wonderful conversations down there. So Arthur became a, a significant person in my life. Not only the idea part, but the mentoring part.

Ralph: Talk a little bit more about these choices. Again, of course, the military was one choice. The 1-O is that you wouldn't even go into the military at all.

Fred: Right.

Ralph: Explain that just a little further and how you decided.

Fred: Well, there were—there were four main categories that you were put into. One was 1-A, which was being drafted into the military—at that time it was the army. There was 1-A-O, which would mean that you were drafted and you were going into the military as a medic, and you would not be required to carry an arm—firearm. And I had friends do that. Steve Guile, Earl Guile's son, did that, and nearly lost his life in Vietnam. Eventually, he died as a result of his wounds, years later. But, then there was 1-O, which was a conscientious objector, and that's what Jon and Jerry and I were registered as. Then there was the 1-F, for people who didn't pass the physical, and I had a few of those folks that were friends of mine, that didn't qualify. They passed—they didn't pass the physical so they were eliminated from being required to do two years of service. So, those were the—those were the basic options.

Ralph: Yeah.

Fred: And then later, if you recall, maybe just a few years later (I actually don't know the date), but they began having a lottery and—have you heard about the lottery? And so, on January first, or sometime along the way, they would pull out birth dates—365, out of a bin and—one, two, three, four, five—and so, if you were number 300 on the lottery list, if you were the three hundredth name called, you probably didn't have to go. If you were number ten, you sure—you for sure had to go. And then in the middle there, depending upon what the requirements of the military were, it depended upon how deep they went into the lottery draft numbers. So that, that was different. When I was doing it, everybody went—or everybody was drafted.

Ralph: Yeah, was drafted, yeah. If they met the physical qualifications.

Fred: Yeah, if they met the physical qualifications. And then, I think there maybe were some other deferments. I think some schoolteachers got deferred, and I think medical doctors, maybe, got deferred, although I'm not sure about that.

Ralph: Yes.

Cherice: So, are you trying—are you asking more about his choice between non-combatant and conscientious objector, of why you chose straight conscientious objector?

Fred: So I, I thought, I thought, you know, why would I want to support the military? (Which essentially a medic does.) And so, I thought, "If I'm going to be a conscientious objector, I need to be a conscientious objector." And of course, there have been wonderful heroic stories since—told from World War II and Vietnam—of non-combatant medics doing heroic things in the middle of war, and I think that they played a great role. But for me, it was, "I'm either all-in—I don't want to be halfway in." And I felt like being a medic was kind of halfway in. So I wanted to be the "full meal deal."

Ralph: Yeah.

Fred: Yeah.

Ralph: And, and the military, once you had—had this qualification, that was permanent.

Fred: Yes.

Ralph: Yeah.

Fred: Yeah.

Ralph: So there would be no changes, unless you change.

Fred: Right. There—I think, I know of two or three cases where people appealed after the fact, and some got it and some didn't, but there was, there was, there was a recourse if you wanted to change your mind, but it was difficult if you originally registered as a 1-A and wanted to go to a 1-O. That, that became problematic. And we all know Bruce...

Cherice: Murphy?

Fred: Murphy, and his story, which was the ultimate, most difficult kind of a switch, but I also had a couple friends from California Yearly Meeting that came to college that made the switch also. And now, one of them, it was accepted, and the other one was rejected, so they had to go.

Ralph: I, I would like to hear a little more about what you actually did in Vietnam. Because here we are with this challenge by Arthur. Tell us a little more about that challenge, which I think was—it influenced you to action to go to Vietnam.

Fred: Well, it was the—it was the deciding influencer in my life. So, when...

So the three of us were accepted into the Mennonite Central Community Program. It was called the Pax program—I was a "Pax-man," a peace man—and so they had a special program within MCC for people doing alternate service. And they were accepted by the Selective Service as an organization that would administer those kind of programs.

So, we went to orientation in Pennsylvania, at the MCC headquarters—Akron, Pennsylvania. That was a two-week process. And there, for the first time in my life (I was really naive about a lot of things, because I really hadn't had any experiences outside of the yearly meeting and George Fox). And there I met Methodists and Presbyterians and Lutherans, as well as Mennonites (and we were the only Friends)

who were followers of Jesus who also wanted to do alternate service, and just do some—and for some, they, they were older people who didn't need to do alternate service, but they just wanted to serve in Vietnam as a, as a testimony.

And so then we, we went to—we flew to Vietnam. Interestingly enough, we stopped in Seattle, for some reason. (Back in—back in '62, planes didn't fly halfway around the world without stopping.) And so we, so we flew from Philadelphia to Seattle, and I think we had a layover of a couple of hours, and my brother and some friends were there, so that was kind of a fun thing. Then we went on.

Interestingly enough, I was seated next to a guy who was a contractor. He worked for a contracting company in Vietnam. So, from Seattle on, he was on his way to Vietnam also. And he smoked—chain-smoked—the whole way to Hong Kong. (And you know, those were the days—I worked in a bowling alley in high school, I mean in college here, and so the air was blue and I didn't think a thing about it.) And so I was sitting next to this guy, and then, besides that, he was drinking whiskey as fast as he could. And by the time we got there, I don't know how he made it out of the airplane. But—and he was telling me all the horrors of being in Vietnam. [laughs] He hated being in Vietnam, but he loved the money, so he was willing to go and do that. And he drank his way into oblivion to, to manage that. And he wasn't alone. There were a lot of people in that same kind of a boat, who found ways to cover up the deep emotional pain of being there, and the physical fear, through alcohol and drugs. But, so that was, that was, that was, that was one early introduction to Vietnam that I had—not particularly positive.

We stopped in Hong Kong, and there, for the first time, I set my feet on what would be called a “developing world” ground. In Hong Kong, back in those days, was—they had the, the, the Walled City, it was called, and it was Chinese, and just built houses on top of each other all the way up the side of the mountain, and we went into there with, we were met by some MCC people that were working in Hong Kong, and I saw poverty and circumstances like I've never even thought about. And so that, that was interesting. We also went to the apartment rooftop schools and listened to kids recite their lessons, which is the way it is often done in Asia (used to be). And, and this was the—back far enough in history that there were even a few rickshaws. The big, the Chinese guy would hold onto the thing and big wheels and you would ride in the back of it instead of being in a taxi. They—they're long gone. But that, I remember clearly, a few of those. And so Hong Kong, while it was a bustling city even then, was my first introduction to a non-American culture. And, and I was fascinated by it—perplexed by it, but fascinated by it.

And then we went to Vietnam, and from there it was a three-hour flight or so, four-hour maybe, I don't know. And then the thing I remember about that, we were on Air Vietnam, and it was an old French Caravelle jet, which was built in the '50s, and my window had a crack in it. And I remember that clearly. And then we got there, and the pilot said, “Now we're approaching Saigon, and make sure you're buckled up, because this will be a fast descent.” And so we got there and we went down like

this [hand pointed at steep angle] and landed, because they couldn't come in on the low, slow, because they'd get shot out of the sky. And then we landed and we taxied, and then we taxied by bunker after bunker after bunker filled with fighter jets and military equipment and stuff. And then we came through.

And then we spent two months in language school in Saigon, and John and Jerry and I lived together with, with the other, with the fourth guy in our cohort. Everybody else were—from the Mennonite side—were women, and Gail Preheim was his name, and he was a graduate of Goshen College in Indiana. And we became great friends through that process. So the four of us were, we lived together with a Mennonite guy who was doing contract work, and I'm not really quite sure who he was working for. It was a little bit sketchy. But he was a real storyteller. Ernie was his name. And we lived maybe, that was probably four or five blocks away from where the language school was, so we'd walk back and forth every day. So that was, those were the first two months of my time in Saigon. We did lots of field trips around town. Saw my first dead body from the war on the streets in Saigon during that time.

And I was still pretty enam—even though, as a conscientious objector—I still was pretty enamored by the safety net that the military provided us, and talked about that. That later changed dramatically, over time, but, that perspective, but that was an interesting evolution of my thinking and understanding.

Ralph: What, what do you mean, it changed?

Fred: Well, I can't, I... I was sort of proud of what they were doing, inside. I later became hateful of what they were doing. So, I mean, it was a night and day difference. And whereas, hateful is too strong a word, but I was not...I was a great skeptic of what the military was doing, because I saw all the damage that they were doing to so many people every day.

Ralph: Did you ever...did you ever feel really in danger, physically?

Fred: Yeah, lots of times. I also—I'll get to that just a minute—but I also, when I got up to my site where I began working, which was in the northern part of South Vietnam, if you remember geography, the Demilitarized Zone was at the 17th parallel, and the next big city below that was Huei, where Jerry worked. The next big city below that was Danang, and it was on the coast, and it was a major military base. It was where the—all the planes took off for North Vietnam, a major port where supplies came in. And then I lived south of that, 60 or 70 miles, I suppose, maybe 80 miles, in a place called Quang Ngai.

And so, that was a place that the French had never controlled, and so the Viet Minh had controlled Quang Ngai. So there was a lot of anti-American sentiment there. I remember going into homes of displaced people that had been moved because of the search-and-destroy philosophy of the American military, and you'd see pictures of

Ho Chi Minh on the wall. [cough] But, you knew you had to play both sides, and that was, that was, that—that became really clear to me not very far into this: that the Vietnamese had to please the Americans and the South Vietnamese during the day, and please the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front military at night. And so, as is always the case now in war, the non-combatants are the ones who pay the big price for war.

And, and so in my assignment, then, in Quang Ngai, I lived with a group of—there was a married couple, two older guys, and then there was an MCC guy, Earl Martin, Pat Hostetter, and Therin McConnell, and so there—she was a nurse. And Pat Hostetter, whose father was, like, the MC—Mennonite radio preacher from Harrisonburg, Virginia. And Earl was a deeply committed Mennonite anti-Vietnam War activist. So, that was, that was my living environment. And we became very close, obviously. So Quang Ngai was—in fact, you tell, you talked to South Vietnamese and, and I learned to speak Vietnamese with a Quang Ngai twang. It's kind of like coming from Arkansas, you know, that—that's the way people viewed people from Quang Nai: that they were kind of hicks. But that's where I spent 18 months of my time in Vietnam. And so I learned how to speak Quang Ngai Vietnamese. And I had...

So I was running a feeding program. I, I was asked to start a feeding program for children in the—we called them refugees, but they weren't refugees. They were internally displaced people. And so, I ran a feeding program using USAID flour and corn soybean milk—CSM it's called, it's a high protein, highly nutritious, sort of oat kind of a meal, oatmeal kind of a looking thing that tastes terrible, but is nutritious. [laughs] And we added raisins to it eventually. People liked that better with raisins that we got. But, so, so, I ran this feeding program for children and in three refu—in three internally displaced camps near the town. So I'd get up at 4 o'clock every morning and go to the, to the baker in town, and, and pick up bags and bags and bags—big bags full of French bread. The Vietnamese know how to make bread like the French do. It's just, it's fabulously good. And so I'd take bread and milk to the internally displaced people. The kids would eat.

But then I began to—it was in one of the camps that—it had been a complete village that had moved from—because of the search-and-destroy methodology that the military was using, an entire village had moved, which had been a Catholic village. And the priest was there. And that's the first Catholic I had ever gotten to know in my life, and I was skeptical to begin with, and then we became fast friends. We became really, really good friends, and more so than the—the Protestant pastor was a raving militant. The priest, not so much, but that's where his sentiments were because his life was being changed because of the war, and he knew that if the North took over, his life would be dramatically changed. And so, but, we became good friends, and I began to understand the bigger picture. There was a school there, but there wasn't a schoolteacher, and so the kids weren't going to school, they weren't doing anything.

So I, a few months in, I got a horrible case of hepatitis, and got really sick and had to go to the, a Mennonite hospital. I spent six weeks there, recovering. And during that time, I wrote a proposal to our organization, called Vietnam Christian Service.

So, so let me back up just for a moment. So, the MCC, Church World Service of the National Council of Churches, and Lutheran World Relief of the Lutherans, formed one organization in Vietnam called Vietnam Christian Service, and that's who we worked for. And so, so there was a broad breadth of theological perspectives.

Ralph: And how long were you there?

Fred: I was in Quang Ngai for about 18 months, went up just before Thanksgiving of 1966, and, and left in the—I guess it was about 15 months I was there. I left in February or March of '68.

Ralph: And who was responsible for you leaving?

Fred: Leaving?

Ralph: I mean, who was the boss? Who said, "Come home"?

Fred: Oh, well, so, so I was in Vietnam a total of 27 months. But I was in Quang Ngai about 15 months. And, and they were, wanted to—they asked if I would be willing to transfer up into the mountains to work with the Indigenous Montagnard population, because the group that had been there had been driven out because of insecurity, but they wanted to reopen that site. So there was one other guy there, a Lutheran, who had been in the Peace Corps for, he had [been] twice, and they wouldn't allow him to go again because—so he got drafted.

He's the guy that was facing prison. He said, "I won't go away to Canada, but I can't kill people because of my faith in Christ."

So the judge said, "Do you have anything to say?" before he was being sentenced to prison.

And he said, he said, "I'm not afraid to go to Vietnam—don't get me wrong. I'd be happy to go to Vietnam, but I just won't go as military."

And the judge said, "You find a way to be in Vietnam within one week—seven days—or you're going to prison."

So he scrambled, and found out that Lutheran World Relief had a program there, so anyway, we ended up together. He was an agriculturist. That's where I learned how to grow rice and take care of chickens and pigs. Yeah. And so, so I went up there until again, we were driven out—that time, by the American military. I was. My, my

buddy decided, he said, "I'll die before I'll have those guys tell me what to do." But, our town had been overrun.

This is one of the times that I thought I was going to die. And our—we lived in a, in a fairly substantial house. It had been a French hunting lodge, and just the two of us guys lived in it on the edge of town that went down to the rice paddies then up into the mountains. And so, the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front Army had come through, used our backyard, because we were on the side of the hill, there was a big rock wall, and they used that rock wall to plan—to do their attack against the American military, which was just up the hill a quarter of a mile. And so we were in the crossfire, our house. Bullets were coming through. I, I saw the fire coming from the mortars in our backyard, going over our house, going up there, and I thought we were going to be dead, because everybody knew that we lived there. I mean, it was no secret. But they never came into our house, the North Vietnamese. And there were bodies all over the place two days later when everything quit.

And the American military guy said, "Why are you still alive? You should be dead." He said, "You're working with the enemy, and I want you to know that the first chance I get, I'm going to kill you."

Ralph: Wow.

Fred: So, I said, "Okay, if my own, if my own countrymen are going to kill me, I'll disappear from here."

Ralph: One last question. What was it like to come home after all that?

Fred: You know, I feel—I've given a lot of thought to that recently, because I, I faced (perhaps) death half-a-dozen or eight times, that I knew about—and I'm sure I didn't—I was in some dicey places that I didn't understand that I was at risk. And so, by the time I was getting near the end—and, and after I left the highlands, I went back to, to Saigon. I arrived there about 10:30 at night. I'd hitch-hiked on airplanes and helicopters to get there, and we went to the guest house—I went to the guest house and I had...this is, this is—

(All of my worldly possessions were in a duffel bag about this long and about this big. And there's something pretty freeing about that, that I need a full garage now to take care of all the stuff that I don't use all the time, to take care of what I've got. But, and then had I started a program, buying handcrafts from people who had leprosy who lived in our village, and I became very close with those, with that community of people, and learned to quickly overcome my fear leprosy, and to work with them a lot. So, I, I bought rings and bracelets and bangles and knives and pipes and crossbows. And, and I would take them to Saigon and somebody else would sell them at the USO.)

But, so I had this huge, big bag of stuff. So I show up at the house. The door was locked. I knock on the door and a woman comes to the door, one of our fellow volunteers, and she says, "Oh, my, we thought you were dead! We're here praying for you!" There was a prayer meeting for us, because they hadn't heard from us, because we've been under attack, and we hadn't had any way to communicate. So that was, that was a, an interesting moment for me to sort of come into that environment. But by, so by this time now, my emotions were beginning to get a little frayed, and at night I could hear the war going on, and in my mind it was getting closer and closer and closer and closer.

So, when I left, finally, in December of 1968, it was good for me to leave. And so, when I got home, I didn't have the cultural shock that lots of people talk about, and I've never quite figured that out. And later in life, as I've gone back and forth from war zone to America, and war zone to America, I've always somehow been able to, to make that adjustment.

But, when I came home from Vietnam, it—I was anxious to drive at night, because we never could do that in Vietnam, because that was dangerous. I couldn't go to a war movie for five or six years because that was too close. So I had some of those. But, I think of some of my friends who have PTSD, and while I experienced some frailness, I don't think I actually got deep in the PTSD, because I've always made the adjustment.

And I think—being a psychology major, I've tried to think about this—and I think I've been able to compartmentalize. So, I did this here, shut that down and came home, and everything was okay over here. And that, I think it served me well. I...there may be some professional who would disagree with that. But I, I've been able to, to work in lots of war zones since then.

And, and Vietnam was—changed the whole direction of my life. I mean, that's, that's the end of that story; that's the beginning of my life story, really, because I wanted to teach in college and work in student life, kinds of things, and I went to graduate school at the University of Oregon—you remember when we were down there? And about one quarter (I think they run quarters there), about one or two quarters into the master's program, it became real clear to me that that wasn't going to hold my attention anymore. So I finished my master's degree and started working in community development ever since then.

Ralph: Well, thank you, Fred. Appreciate it. Very good.

Fred: Yeah.

Ralph: Good. Thank you.

Cherice: Yeah, thanks so much for sharing your experiences.

Fred: Yeah.

Cherice: Um, I guess, for the purposes of the recording who—people don't know the rest of your life, can you say a little bit more about what you've done since then, in community development?

Fred: Sure. So, after Vietnam, I went to graduate school.

Then, then I went to work in North Portland at Piedmont Friends Church, and ran a program called Friends for Kids, and it was basically working with street kids and kids from dysfunctional families, and mostly their moms. I did that for two years.

Then I was recruited to go to Bangladesh—that was right after their war of independence—by the World Relief Commission, and so I went there for, for two years and had a wonderful—I mean, it was tough. It was... Bangladesh was, if you have any sense about Calcutta, India, and the intensity that it is, we would go to Calcutta to get a break. [laughs]

And so, there again, I made a lifelong friend, a Bangladeshi man, and he and I became partners in a wonderful thing. We started a program called Christian Service Society, which exists today, with 600 employees throughout the whole country doing community development at the grassroots level, agricultural development, health care, microcredit, small business development, and so that's, you know, that puts a smile on my face every time I think about it. And I've been back to see them a few times and it's, that's wonderful.

Then I came back and worked for four years at Reedwood. We had a baby that we adopted, Krista, in Bangladesh, and she needed to live in the US for two years before she could become a citizen, so did that.

Then I went to World Concern, where I was for 12 years, and I was head of their international programs for a while, then war stuff began taking a higher profile, so I was made director of relief, and so we worked in Somalia and other—in Beirut during war times. And then I became president the last eight years that I was there.

And from there I went to work for a major league baseball player, who had been a donor to World Concern, and he wanted to start a program in the Dominican Republic with women. He, he wanted to, first of all, just give food away the kids. I said, "No, no, Dave you can't do that. We need to figure out a way to prevent that from happening, not just take care of it when it happens." He said, "Oh, okay!" He had never thought about this stuff. And so, we started a microcredit program, and that's another—which is continuing today. I looked at their website a week or so ago, and they've made, I believe—it was a staggering number since 1995 when we started: about \$60 million dollars' worth of loans. It's bigger than ever. And you know, I helped start that thing, I founded it! And so that's, that's another place that gives me great—a big smile on my face, when I think about it.

Because lots of people do the kind of work that I've done, and at the end of the day, they're burned out and sorry, maybe, that they did it. Not for me. I—my life has been fabulous. I've had some personal tragedy along the way, but in terms of what I did with my career and what I thought was following Christ, who used my abilities, I could—

By the way, I never could have been engineered this if I would have tried. It happened outside of me, and for whatever reason, I, I—probably because my family and the yearly meeting, I kept saying “yes” to opportunities and going through doors that I had no idea of what was on the other side. And I used to really love going into war zones, flying into someplace, not knowing anybody, not—flying in and figuring out what to do when I got there. Now, that blows my mind today. I'd never want to do that. But I, you know, when you're 30 years old, there's not much you can't do, in your mind. And so, that, that was my life.

And then I transitioned more into long-term development kinds of things, to helping moms (in particular) and families gain economic self-reliance.

And then, from there, I was a Peace Corps country director in Uzbekistan and Bangladesh, and from there I went back to work for Mercy Corps. I had worked for them for a couple of years in between—in the middle of my World Concern days. And I was country director in Azerbaijan, Afghanistan—this was now 2006. Then I did a, a mentoring thing in Guatemala with a young country director.

Then I went to China and lived on the North Korean border, where we, ninety—85% of our budget dealt with working with women who were being trafficked out of North Vietnam, but it was illegal. And so we had a microcredit program and we worked with a school of nursing in a cooperative agreement with Johns Hopkins University to increase their training capacity. So that was, that was a wonderful, that was, I loved being in China and doing that program.

And then from there I... I was single during that period of time, from 2002–2008, and I was tired, living out of a suitcase. And so, and then I did a quick deal: I did a one-year interim thing with a little organization called Peace Trees, Vietnam, and we were a demining organization, except the mines are mostly gone from Vietnam now, but it's unexploded bombs, of which there are hundreds of thousands of tons left in the ground today.

Ralph: Wow.

Fred: And so, and most of that was up north toward the DMZ, so that was really kind of a bookend for me, from my first Vietnam experience to this, and that program is continuing on very nicely and doing really good work. But I lived in Newberg, my office was in Seattle, but we worked in Vietnam, so I got tired of doing that.

And so, Robin [Baker] then said, “You know, when you get tired living out of suitcases, talk to me. Maybe there’s something you can do here.” So, that was, that was almost nine years ago, so I’ve been here since then.

Cherice: Great, thank you!

Ralph: Thank you.

Fred: Yep. Good!