

Interview with Jon and Jeanne Berg

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, June 19, 2007. My name is Mark DePue. I am the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I am here at the residence of Jon and Jeanne Berg, who just so happen to be also my pastor and his wife at Atonement Lutheran Church, but we are here not to talk about that, but to talk about their early lives, how they met, and especially about their life in Cameroon, which is ultimately this. The second session which will be on their missionary work in Senegal, is why I wanted to do these interviews in the first place. So, without further ado, Jon, Jeanne, good day.

Jeanne: Hello.

Jon: Hello.

DePue: What I'm going to start with Jon is a little bit about your background. So if you tell me about your parents and their background and where you were born. Let's start with that.

Jon: Well, I was born in Coulee Dam, Washington, where my dad was working on the construction of Coulee Dam. They built the dam and now he was working in the part where they hooked up the power houses and were building the power houses. He was a mechanical engineer, graduated from South Dakota State University. My parents both grew up in South Dakota; actually not too far from each other. He was from Howard and she was from Hetland. So that's where they met and they ended up out in Washington State, because that's where he had a job.

DePue: And, when were you born?

Jon: Nineteen fifty.

DePue: Why did they head back to South Dakota then after that?

Jon: Most people don't, by the way; they get out of there and they don't go back, but my folks did. My mom couldn't stand being that far away from her family. She came from a family with eight kids and she didn't like not living somewhere near them, so my dad started looking for work in South Dakota and got a job with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. For several years they lived in Aberdeen and then he got a job with an architectural firm in Sioux Falls, so they moved to Sioux Falls. They moved back to South Dakota to be closer to my mother's family.

DePue: Were they both originally from the Sioux Falls area?

Jon: Well, they were both from small towns, both about 70 miles from Sioux Falls, one pretty much due north and the other one more northwest.

DePue: Okay. Where did they meet then?

Jon: They met when they were 14 years old at Bible camp, in the finest Lutheran tradition.

DePue: Well, that's appropriate.

Jon: And at that point I think they decided they would some day marry.

DePue: Well, my son right now is at Bible camp (Jon laughs), so you just don't know about these things.

Jon: They were both Lutherans and Norwegians. My mom went to Augustana for, I think one year, maybe two, but then they got married and she quit college, because he graduated a couple of years before her. When they got married she was, I don't know, I think he was about 22 and maybe she was 20 or 21.

DePue: Had some siblings.

Jon: Did I?

DePue: Yes.

Jon: I'm the oldest of five. The next is my brother, who is a year and a half younger, and then my sisters, three sisters, the youngest of which is nine years younger than I am.

DePue: Okay. And they all live around South Dakota except you?

Jon: Nobody lives in (both laugh). My parents live in South Dakota. Two of them live in Minneapolis, because if you amount to something in Sioux Falls, then you move to Minneapolis. That's what we do.

DePue: Well, why don't you describe a little bit about what life was like growing up in Sioux Falls in a fairly large family with a really large extended family.

Jon: Well, it was kind of like Ozzie and Harriet. I mean, we lived in a three bedroom, one bath house, constructed in about 1954 and then eventually my brother and I got a room built in the basement and everybody in the neighborhood ... and then the house cost \$12,000 back in ... We moved into it in '55 when it was brand new, so there weren't trees and everybody had a bunch of kids. I mean, the neighbors had four kid;, the other neighbors had six kids. Five seemed to be about the average. They built a grade school and then it was absolutely full the first day and I ended up being bused to different—I went to five different grade schools, because the schools were always full—so they were always busing me all over town.

DePue: So the classic comeback in World War II: let's have a big family and get on with life, huh?

Jon: That's right, everybody was doing that and I don't ... it seemed to me perfectly ... My father valued family and work and family more than work. He was very successful in his work, but he grew up without a father and was kind of raised by an extended family out in the farms out in South Dakota and by a small town—everybody in town—and it helped him have money. I mean, they'd hire him at the pool hall, they'd hire him to deliver milk and he never felt persecuted or mistreated by it. His brother, the older brother, felt that life was not fair, which obviously it wasn't.

DePue: Well, not during the depression when your dad was growing up?

Jon: He was born in '27 or something, so yeah, he was around during the depression and his dad died when he was two years old, when a telephone pole or a power pole he was on top of, that's what he did.

DePue: So his father died ...

Jon: (unintelligible)

DePue: ... right at the beginning of the Great Depression.

Jon: Yeah, probably '29 ...

DePue: Yep.

Jon: ... and he had a, you know, his mother was one of 11 kids and his Mons Hauge was his ... then my great grandfather, but he gave ... that's who ... she moved back then to Howard from Baltic so that she could have family around to help her raise ... she had five little kids then, no husband.

Jeanne: She was a teacher though. She had a ...

Jon: She was a teacher ... yeah

Jeanne: Uh-huh.

DePue: And this was his mother?

Jon: His mother ...

Jeanne: Uh-huh.

Jon: Yeah.

Jon: But anyway, back to my dad and my mom. For example, every day in the summer we would go swimming. Usually we would ride our bikes to the swimming pool. Then when my dad would get home from work we'd eat and then we'd go swimming as a family. Every day during the winter we'd go ice skating. I mean, he always did stuff ... and then he always picked up all the other neighbor kids and dragged them along, because he just thought that was ... I never thought about it, but that's what he did.

DePue: And church-going family as well, I assume?

Jon: Yeah, very. And not, at least not as far as I was concerned, in any kind of Draconian way. It was, like, you go to church.

DePue: That's what everybody did?

Jon: I don't know. That's what we did. Here's what I thought: I thought everybody did what we did. I don't know what everybody did. I just know what we did and I projected from my experience outward, which proved to be not very accurate. I think other peoples' experience was very different. I just didn't know that at that time.

DePue: Okay. Any other memories that really stick with you about growing up and going to school, involvement in church, things like that?

Jon: No, not particularly. I mean, I always did well at school. I remember that. And that was kind of my reputation with other kids; I was the kid who got good grades. But then I thought everybody got good grades. It never occurred to me that other people didn't. I just thought ...

DePue: But you weren't necessarily ostracized because you got good grades going to school?

Jon: No, no, no. I had lots of friends. I wasn't particularly, you know, I wasn't a great athlete. I was apparently quite resistible to women. (DePue laughs) Didn't have ... I wasn't ... (Both laugh)

DePue: Darn.

Jon: I wasn't besieged by female admirers. I was just ...

Jeanne: Yes.

Jon: Kind of your nerd who didn't know it, I guess would probably be what I was.

DePue: An ideal ... idyllic lifestyle then? I don't want you to get too far into the story, but when did it occur to you that, "Hey, being a minister, that sounds like a really neat thing to do."?

Jon: Well, I had a mind, and I still do, which tends to think, "Well if it's worth ... if something's right, then it's really right. I mean, I don't kind of go for wishy-washy on a lot of different things. I mean, a lot of things I'm terribly wishy-washy about, because I don't care. But when I do care ... I used to sit in church and think, "Well if this stuff is really true, then I guess what should you spend your life doing other than that which you think is most important?" And I remember in sixth grade, I'll never forget it; the guy's name was Paul Hrdy—without a vowel, H-r-d-y, some kind of Eastern European guy—and we were always going around the room and saying, "What are you going to do when you grow up?" they'd ask us. This was after they trained us during Sputnik in about third grade to dive under the desk in case of nuclear attack. Then after that when they decided we'd survive ...

DePue: And certainly South Dakota would be the first place to launch missiles at. (Jon laughs)

Jon: And we were strategically important (DePue laughs) ... at least in our own mind. So, I remember we were going around the room and it was in Garfield grade school, clear over on the other side of town and he said, "When I grow up I'm going to be a minister." It struck me, "Well wait a minute, if he's going to be, I suppose maybe I could be." And that, I guess, is when I started considering it, although I did ... I always studied what I was interested in. That's what I studied. I always said back then I was going to be in science or math, because back in about 1958, they decided anybody with a brain had to do science or math to defeat the Russians, you know.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: So we were all going to be little industrious scientists. So, that's what I always said.

DePue: Or at least an engineer, huh?

Jon: But it didn't turn out to be that's what I was interested in.

DePue: Okay. And you went to Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota?

Jon: Correct.

DePue: And how did you end up at Macalester?

Jon: Well, there was a guy named Jim Powell from high school that went there and I knew him and I kinda liked him, so I heard about it. I associated his name with that school and they had a very good academic reputation. I was a National Merit finalist, or semi-finalist, or whatever, and Reader's Digest gave 60 national merit scholarships a year to Macalester College because Dewitt Wallace's grandfather had been the president of Macalester College once upon a time and he was the founder of Reader's Digest and had oceans of money. So I applied to Macalester, applied to Northwestern, applied to Yale. Didn't get into Yale, much to my—I think, it turned out to be a good thing. Got into Northwestern, got into Macalester, and Macalester offered me a massive \$300-a-year scholarship, so I took it.

DePue: Three hundred dollars a year, that's what the scholarship was?

Jon: It was based on financial need and my dad made too much money. So it would have been a full ride, but that's what I got; I got \$300 a year. But, I also went because I didn't want to go to a Lutheran school, because everybody thought I would.

DePue: So this would have been about '68?

Jon: I started college in 1968, that's correct.

DePue: And at this time were you definitely thinking about being a minister?

Jon: (Jon laughs) I took religion classes. I ended up with a religion major. I ended with a double major in German and religion.

DePue: And you started as what kind of a major?

Jon: I said pre-law.

DePue: Okay, you went from science and engineering to pre-law?

Jon: Yeah, because I had established to my satisfaction during high school that I didn't really like science or math (both laugh). So what's that leave you? What are your professional choices? Medicine? Nah. You know ... engineering? No. Law. So I said, "Okay, I'll be a lawyer. I like words."

DePue: Okay.

Jon: But what happened was, my freshman year I was in a high track poly sci class seminar and they called me in and they said, "We're hiring a new prof, Charles Green—I can't believe I remember all these names—to teach political science and we want you to be his student assistant. This will be a big deal. It'll be a great honor for you, and since you want to go to law school, you better do this." But they were also, at the same time, offering just a week or so before—the German department where I was taking a class just to complete my foreign language requirement, second year German—was saying, "We're going to have a course, we're going to

take a program to Vienna. We're going to start a new program and we're going to spend eight months in Austria. If you want to go, sign up." And I sat in that room and said to the guy, "Look. I want to go to Austria." And he said, "Well, you can't do that. You better stay here and take ..." I said, "Forget it, I guess I won't major in poly sci." (Both laugh) So ... that's how I make my decisions.

DePue: Well, your commitment to poly sci was shallow.

Jon: And I think my choice not to be a lawyer proved to be a good one.

DePue: But somewhere in this process you decided that you were going to become a minister and were going to go ...

Jeanne: This is where the Vietnam War comes in.

DePue: Oh boy.

Jon: Well, no. Here's what happened. I applied to seminary at the end of my junior year in college and then during that senior year, then we had the draft lottery and my number was 33. So, toward the end of my senior year in college, I get this greetings notice from the federal government to report to the federal post office, I think—some federal building in downtown Minneapolis—for my pre-induction physical. Well, I got through the physical and I passed all of the tests. But, I had a theological deferment because I was going to seminary. So I went to seminary. But, I wasn't ... I don't think I got the deferment ...

Jeanne: (unintelligible)

Jon: I don't think I went to seminary to get the deferment, because I think if I had done that I wouldn't still be doing this. Thirty-some years later there is no particular incentive for me to keep trying to convince people I need to beat the draft.

DePue: Yeah. So the decision to go to seminary, the decision to become a minister, came before outside influences like the draft.

Jon: Yeah. The draft wasn't ... no ... because

Jeanne: That just confirmed ...

Jon: My mom was convinced that I would become Canadian. I mean, she was going to take me over the border herself. So ...

DePue: She was no great supporter of the war in Vietnam then?

Jon: No, but she always voted Republican. For some reason that particular issue—like it did for many other people—from '68 to '72 everything in the world changed. I mean, I went to college with a crew cut. It never occurred to me that anybody had any other hairstyle.

DePue: Did you finish college with a crew cut?

Jon: No. (Both laugh). I had hardly surplus clothes and I had long hair and periodic beards. It was a crazy four years.

DePue: As your way of protesting against the establishment and everything else?

Jon: Yeah, we were pretty angry. I mean it was a pretty angry time. Lots of people were pretty angry.

DePue: Angry about what?

Jon: About growing up innocent. We go from completely naïve and innocent, to completely cynical and bitter with no middle in between. That's how I remember it. Going from thinking America is always right and everything is always wonderful, to thinking, you know, this isn't what we grew up believing. This isn't what we thought we would ever be doing. And then drugs were huge. I mean, the whole culture was just going ...

DePue: Do you think that cynicism, or that feeling that was going on so much in college campuses at the time solidified your decision to go in the ministry, or is that kind of unrelated?

Jon: I guess I don't think it influenced it very much at all.

DePue: Luther Seminary was the next step, right?

Jon: Yeah. Luther Seminary is where Lutherans go to seminary. (Jon laughs).

DePue: In St. Paul again.

Jon: St. Paul, Minnesota, the largest Lutheran seminary, probably, in the world. It's got like 600 students. And that's where I went. So I went from college in St. Paul to seminary in St. Paul.

DePue: But how long did you end up staying there?

Jon: One year.

DePue: And why only one year?

Jon: Well, because I was involved in a relationship that went south over the course of that time and I needed to get out of town for personal reasons. And also because I don't learn well in situations where people are like me. I learn better when they are not like me. And Luther was kind of filled with people like me only more purebred Norwegian Lutheran. I mean, even more purebred Norwegian Lutheran than I was.

DePue: Was that how they were like you? Were there attitude similarities as well?

Jon: I mean everybody had all kinds of different attitudes. Well, quite a few of them, I'm sure, were way more conservative than I was at that time Macalester was a pretty radical left wing place for the Midwest. It was kind of like Carlton, wanted to be like Carlton, Oberlin, these little pinko organizations out there on the prairie. I felt like at Luther that they offered you no choices in the classes you took. They treated everybody like a C+ phys ed major and assumed that you knew nothing and were probably not going to learn much, but they would ram it down your throat and try to produce a uniform product. Everybody else liked it.

DePue: Well, you might not have liked my alma mater then.

Jon: (Laughing). I wouldn't have lasted three minutes.

DePue: Where the saying was, "We got a hundred thousand dollar education crammed down our throats a nickel at a time." (Jon laughs).

Jon: Yeah, I've always had authority issues and I've recognized it more with the passage of time. But they were very patient with me and nice to me at Luther, I should add. I remember a great many of faculty. Then I transferred to Princeton Seminary.

DePue: Which I would think would be a hard place to get into.

Jon: No, no, seminaries aren't hard to get into. I mean, it wasn't like Princeton graduate school in a PhD program or something. It was, I suppose, moderately difficult to get into, but the chair of the religion department at Macalester was very well-connected at Princeton Seminary. He made one phone call and I was admitted.

DePue: So the folks at Luther were sympathetic to what you were doing?

Jon: I think at that point they were totally unaware of what I was doing.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: But, when I came back two years, three years later and had my panel of questions, I had to appear before five faculty to be certified. Back then the seminary certified candidates for ordination and normally you appeared before two faculty. You write a paper, your position paper on various theological topics, and then you present it, or they ask you questions to see if you know enough to get ordained. Well, if you had been through Luther they knew you inside out, upside down, and backwards, so it was a formality. Since I had been away from Luther they had a policy that there was a representative of each of the five different departments, like new testament, old testament, church history, systematics, and practical theology, or whatever they were. What could they say? They all had their PhD's from Princeton Seminary. So it wasn't like they could tell me the school wasn't any good, so they were ...

DePue: The only reason I had mentioned that it had to be tough to get in there is because it is one of the elite theological seminaries, in the United States. Is that not right?

Jon: Probably. It's actually older than the university.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: And it has, I think, a solid academic reputation.

DePue: Denominationally is it Presbyterian or is it kind of non-denominational.

Jon: Presbyterian. It is a Presbyterian seminary, but they had a rule that 40 percent of their student body had to be Presbyterian and the rest could be anything. They had a rule, I think, a similar rule about the faculty. So for the time, it was very diverse in terms of lots of different faculty. They have Lutheran faculty, Methodist faculty, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic. All kinds of different faculty, all kinds of different students, and that was a large part of its appeal.

DePue: And you liked it at Princeton much better than you did at Luther then?

Jon: Yes, I did. Academically, certainly I did. I made some friends from—I mean, my two best friends—one was a Catholic priest and one was a Unitarian, and then there was me.

DePue: Even a Unitarian?

Jon: (Laughing). Yeah, well he actually ended up working for Brown and Root Construction. He never did get certified by the Unitarians, but he did complete his seminary education there.

DePue: And I would have to believe that New Jersey is quite different from living in places like Minnesota and South Dakota too, or did you not get out that much?

Jon: Well, I was only there one year when I lived in the dormitory, before I did my internship. I mean the formative educational experience at seminary was the intern year, which was after my first two years of seminary and before my last year of seminary.

DePue: And, you ended up at Oak Park in Illinois, right?

Jon: Yeah. Well, I ended up at Oak Park and Park Ridge.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: But I lived in Forest Park.

Jeanne: Um-huh.

DePue: Okay. Was it United Evangelical Lutheran Church?

Jon: Just United Lutheran Church.

DePue: United Lutheran Church? Okay. That would have been before the split, or the unification.

Jon: Well, I mean, it was the name of the congregation.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: It was an ALC congregation.

DePue: Why Oak Park and back to the Chicago area?

Jon: When I was signing up for internship sites. Another thing that happened was I did all of my Lutheran stuff by myself. I wasn't on a Lutheran campus where everybody would discuss all of these things to death and all of the subtleties of internship placement and that kind of stuff and later what synod are you going to be sent to and that. I just sat out there in New Jersey, filled out the forms, and they had one opportunity where they said it would be both hospital chaplaincy and pastoral parish ministry and I said, "Well, two for the price of one. I'll take that." And I got in because people didn't want to do that. And it happened that I ended up at Oak Park three days a week and Lutheran General Hospital three days a week. The supervising pastor at Oak Park—I had been a member of his church when I was two years old in Aberdeen, South Dakota. He knew everybody in my family for generations, but I didn't know any of this. I mean, Ed Nervig knew at one time, I think, half the population of the state of South Dakota.

DePue: So this was a good place to even broaden your experiences then?

Jon: It was wonderful. It saved my educational experience.

DePue: Well, this is the point in time I wanted to shift gears and let Jeanne do some talking now, rather than hearing these stories for the millionth time (Jeanne laughs) about Jon I suspect.

Jeanne: Oh no.

DePue: And most all of this is going to be new to me, because I've heard a lot of the things that, Jon, you've mentioned obviously from your pulpit. Tell me about your background.

Jeanne: Well, when I was born in 1950, my parents lived in Chicago. I'll go back to my mom. She was orphaned when she was about four and spent her childhood being kind of passed around between relatives, though she spent many years off and on during her childhood, and finally, the last part of her elementary and then her whole senior high school experience, lived with her aunt and uncle in Oak Park.

DePue: And what was her maiden name?

Jeanne: She was Beverly Barker. My father grew up in Chicago. His father, let's see, he worked for the CTA and he was, you know, on the elevated train, a conductor. He died when my father was young and so my father was raised by his mom and a bunch of older sisters. Anyway, one of his sisters worked at the same bakery that my mom worked in and my parents met that way.

DePue: This is in Chicago?

Jeanne: My mom was living in Oak Park; he was living in Chicago. At that point he had been in the Army, had gotten out and was working at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. He sorted cash and then eventually he became one of the people who destroy old money. He was on a team of people who—you drill holes in it and then you burn it.

DePue: I would think these are people you have to trust.

Jeanne: Well, you do go through background checks and, in fact, they are on two teams. They had two teams of destroyers of money. One team observed the other team destroying it and then they would trade places so that nobody ever did it without being observed. So, anyway, he was working at the Federal Reserve Bank and his sister introduced him to my mom. She was still in Oak Park - River Forest High School and, in fact, they went to her prom and things together. They got married, I think, in '48. I came along in '50 and I'm the oldest of six kids.

DePue: What was your dad's last name?

Jeanne: His name was Ernest Nelson.

DePue: Okay. So neither of these names sound...

Jeanne: Okay, and so my mom is kind of English, Irish, Scottish background.

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: We would kid that she was a mutt, a mongrel, a mix. My dad, his mom was Finnish and his dad was Swedish. My grandmother was from a part of Finland that was actually Swedish culture and so they spoke Swedish. And, in fact, the story goes that, like I said, he worked for CTA. They were at some sort of business do once and all the women were in one room and all the men were in another. My grandmother's child, her first son, my dad's brother, got ill. He was an infant. He got ill. She couldn't talk to anybody because she only spoke Swedish; it took so long to find my grandfather, that the baby ended up dying. So at that point my grandmother said, "Nobody will ever speak Swedish in my house." And, indeed, they stopped speaking Swedish in her home. My dad grew up in kind of unusual circumstances. My mom grew up in unusual circumstances. They were living in Chicago, but their goal was to raise a family in Oak Park, because of the educational system.

DePue: Right.

Jeanne: They valued education. They were obviously very poor, relatively poor growing up, so they bought themselves a little house in a section of Oak Park, which—Oak Park- River Forest is a well-to-do suburb with small little pockets of less beautiful, less fancy homes—but everybody got the great education. I have twin brothers two years younger than me, a sister six years younger than me, a sister eight years younger than me, and then my little brother came along when I was in high school. So, I grew up in a situation where we had lots of kids in a little house, but on a block with every house full of lots of kids in little houses.

DePue: In a quiet suburb of Chicago.

Jeanne: Yeah. It was quiet. It is fairly metropolitan so, you know, there is not a lot of land between houses, but, you know, there are lots of parks, lots of culture, and lots of opportunities. The thing that stands out in my mind is that I had a superb education. The school district would test kids and you would get kind of an individualized education. In fourth grade I read eighth grade, so I got sent to a little group of other kids who all read in eighth grade, so we weren't stuck in little, you know, departmental things. It was a superb education. I loved leading little kids around. I can't remember ever not wanting to be a teacher. I remember taking all the neighborhood kids, making them stay in my little school (all laughing) and I'd organized carnival shows and what not.

DePue: Were the brothers and sisters part of the troupe that followed you around?

Jeanne: When I could drag them into it, though the boys were probably pretty much like boys. They'd be off on the side throwing rocks or making mud pies or whatever to torture the girls.

DePue: Well, I wanted to ask you, before we get too far into this. Your father was a World War II veteran; both of your fathers were.

Jeanne: Yes.

DePue: But I don't have any idea what your father did during the war?

Jeanne: Okay, this is the family story he used to tell us. He was a radio engineer repairman and he was in Hawaii and for some reason they kept getting stuck there. He claimed that there was a guy in his, whatever unit, whose father was a doctor, who would send over stuff and somebody would inoculate themselves and they would get quarantined there. So, he claims he was quarantined in Hawaii all of that time. I don't know.

DePue: In the Navy or ...?

Jeanne: He was in the Army.

DePue: Okay. But he spent the war in terrible conditions in Hawaii?

Jeanne: In Hawaii, yes (laughing).

DePue: And Jon, your father?

Jon: My dad had to go to Gustavus Adolphus. He was in a pilot training program until they found out he couldn't see well enough. Then he was in a Naval ensign training program. It must have been rough duty on those college campuses to be in uniform when everybody else was off getting shot at.

Jeanne: Yeah.

Jon: He doesn't talk a lot about it, but I don't think it was a terrible time in his life.

DePue: Neither of them were scarred for life because of their experiences. (Jon laughing)

Jeanne: No, no, no.

DePue: Okay. So, in high school you say you always wanted to be a teacher. Was there a particular area of study you were interested in?

Jeanne: Well, let me tell you that I was, like I said, very interested in working with kids. Even in eighth grade we had this project where, you know, they were trying to get everybody to do science and math and I did well in science and math. We had to like just write a book, a little book about what we wanted to be and I wanted to be a teacher, so I know for sure at that point I was very firmly into wanting to be a teacher. I'll tell ya, my extended family—I had a huge extended family because my dad had, I think six or seven brothers and sisters, all of whom had their families in the Chicago area—and I was intrigued because I had one aunt who, when she was in her late teens had a nervous breakdown and developed schizophrenia. So, my whole childhood I remember watching the impact she had on this entire extended family and I became interested, intrigued by mental illness, trying to understand it. When I went to college I informed everybody I wanted to not only teach, but I wanted to teach people who were emotionally ill and there wasn't such a degree in Illinois at that time. This was in the early 1970s. So, they said the next best thing I could do is get my elementary degree and then study psychopathology. So, indeed, I studied psychopathology as much as I could. This was back in the days where there was sensitivity training and all of that kind of stuff in psychology.

DePue: But this is what you are doing in college now.

Jeanne: This was what I was doing in college.

DePue: Okay. And where was college again?

Jeanne: Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois.

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: Right outside of the Chicago area.

DePue: So, it was not in Chicago, it was far enough away from Chicago, but still close enough.

Jeanne: Yeah. But let me go back to, I grew up a poor kid in a rich suburb and there was some of that anger Jon talked about. In my case I knew specifically it was I felt angry that I ended up ... Now my parents gave up a lot to move to Oak Park. I had a great education, but all I could see in my eyes at that point was, "Boy, I don't have all that my friends have." I mean, my friends went to Europe every summer in high school and got cars on their birthday. I didn't, but, anyway, so I decided I did not want to go to an expensive college where I would be the poor kid in a rich school again. So I picked good old Northern, because I got a full scholarship, too, and mine was \$500.00 (all laughing).

DePue: Wow.

Jeanne: Yeah. That was what tuition was a semester when I went to Northern.

DePue: Back then that's a sizable amount of money.

Jeanne: It was. It was a huge chunk. Yes. I think on the scholarship forms my dad raising six kids by that point was making a little over \$10,000. So, a \$500 scholarship was a big chunk, it really was. Anyway, so, I studied that in college. When I got out of college I had my elementary certificate. I went and kind of accidentally found a job in a special ed cooperative in Chicago and went back to school; then I got the courses I needed to get. I have one of Illinois' first special ed certificates and it was in learning disabilities, then I got another one that was in social maladjustment, emotionally disturbed, and cultural disadvantaged, of all things. That was what the special ed certificates were like back then.

DePue: That's a mouthful.

Jeanne: Uh-huh.

DePue: When you were growing up, church?

Jeanne: We were Lutheran. My mom, I think, might ... I don't know what she was when she was a child. The aunt and uncle in Oak Park, she was Presbyterian, but when she met my dad, his whole family was very solidly Lutheran. I was baptized a Lutheran and grew up Lutheran. I did, you know, the singing in the kids' choir, singing in the adult choir, teaching Sunday school and all of that.

DePue: So was the United Lutheran Church your church?

Jeanne: Yes. We moved to Oak Park when I was four and so I had been there all along then.

DePue: Was that an American Lutheran Church congregation?

Jeanne: Yes, um-huh. ALC.

DePue: How about yours, Jon, ALC?

Jon: Yeah. Originally we were ELC, the old purebred Norwegian church, but then after 1960 we were ALC.

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: Actually, mine was a Swedish congregation and they spoke Swedish into the 1950s, I think, at my home church there.

DePue: Okay. So that gets us to the point where you two bump into each other, doesn't it?

Jeanne: Um-huh.

DePue: So who would like to be the one who tells about that? Who is the one who is taking the initiative?

Jeanne: Okay. I'll describe this story. Like I said, I did a lot of work in the church. While I was teaching special ed I had decided I needed to keep my hand on what were normal teenagers like and so I volunteered to do the youth group back then. It was called Luther League. And so every Sunday, you know, I would go into Oak Park and the male leader and I would lead the Luther League. I got it into my mind that I wanted to have kind of like a coffeehouse atmosphere with the kids, where we could kind of talk about what was bugging them and all of that.

DePue: This was 1973?

Jeanne: This would have been '74, I think. And so, he said, "Oh, we have a new intern coming and he's got a psychology major and he'll probably want to help you set that all up, so why don't we wait until he comes." So, I'm put on hold and I wasn't very patient about this whole thing. Finally he shows up and the first meeting he comes in and I introduce myself and he introduces himself, and I go, "Okay, so I want to start a sensitivity group. Tell me all about your psychology background and all this stuff," and he goes, "I've never had a psychology course,." I was so upset and I was so turned off. So, that was a big disappointment. It was not even like at first sight. It was kind of "ooh" at first sight.

DePue: You had this whole image of him and then he comes and he shoots it down the first words out of his mouth.

Jeanne: Yes, yes.

Jon: I would imagine that

Jeanne: But he was almost disdainful about my ideas.

Jon: I'm sure her image also included much taller. (Mark laughs)

Jeanne: Well. So, okay, he was the intern at the church and one of his duties turned out to be working with the youth group also. As it happened the other youth group leader was Ron Felt; He happened to be my dentist. It also was the place they decided he would, as the intern, live with Ron Felt the dentist, because he had room in his apartment. So, he kind of got, I don't know, did you get forced or heavily suggested, or whatever, to room with Ron?

DePue: It was probably cheap.

Jeanne: Probably.

Jon: Yeah, I think that that was its major benefit.

Jeanne: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Anyway, Ron would work on my tooth on Wednesdays and he invited me back to his house to have dinner. The first week Jon was there he came in, said hello, took his tennis racquet and left. The second week he stuck around and then we slowly became friends after that.

DePue: Now, you were doing this internship for one year?

Jon: Correct. Yeah.

DePue: Nine months?

Jon: No, one year, calendar year basically.

DePue: Okay. So, somewhere in this process, I take it, it got much more serious and you decided that this was for life.

Jeanne: Well, there was some fun incidents, like his phone call from my mom who called him up once and asked him if he would help her figure out what to do with her black sheep daughter (laughing), which was me.

DePue: In what way were you her black sheep daughter?

Jeanne: I'm not sure. (Jon laughing). I'm not telling. (DePue laughing). But, the cute story really is when we decided to get married we called his folks in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and told them, but I wanted to tell my folks in person. So at that point I was living down in a suburb in the south side of the city. We drove up to my house and got there and there was nobody there and we were disappointed. Shortly after my little brother, he was about 10 years old, came home and I said, "Guess what?" and he goes, "What?" "We're making Jon your brother. Guess how we're

going to do that.” and he sat around and he goes, “Oh, mom and dad are going to adopt him?” I go, “No, no, no, better than that”, and then he caught on. “Oh, you’re getting married.” Yeah. So then a few minutes later my folks show up and I have them come in and sit down on the couch. I say, “We’ve got something to tell you.” And we said, “Well, Jon and I have decided to get married.” My mom whips around to Jon and she goes, “Well, but what about your career?” meaning, you can’t be a pastor and be married to my daughter. Do you believe that? Anyway, we had a wonderful experience because I was a daughter of the congregation, he was the intern. Even though that might be frowned upon nowadays, it was greatly celebrated. So we had a wedding ceremony at the church with a little cake and coffee reception and probably 500 people from the congregation.

DePue: A nice small intimate wedding, huh?

Jeanne: Yes (laughing). It was really super. It was very nice. We were so well supported by the congregation.

DePue: So this all happened fairly quickly? This was still while he was an intern?

Jeanne: Oh, yeah.

Jon: Yeah, well we probably dated for three months and got engaged.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: Well, maybe longer than that. Well, we probably didn’t date the first three months I was there much, and I was only there twelve. At some point Jeanne said, “Well this is nice, you’re a pretty nice guy, but I don’t do long distance relationships,” which was her subtle way of ...

Jeanne: ... or not ...

Jon: ... indicating that I should make a decision here.

DePue: Apparently she thought that you needed some nudging towards that direction.

Jon: Oh, she was just providing me with information ...

Jeanne: Yeah.

Jon: ... so that I could make up my own mind. (Jeanne laughing). Anyway, it worked. It was a good thing.

DePue: So how long were you married while you were still an intern there, or did you immediately, after the wedding, head back to Princeton?

Jeanne: He had to work the summer at the hospital and I had obliged myself to do a summer school thing. So actually we got married the weekend between when school got out

and summer school began. We got married during that weekend. We only had a weekend. We went for a very short weekend honeymoon. Then I worked for another month, he worked probably six weeks, and then we had off the month of August and half of September, and got to go out to his folks' cabin in South Dakota. Then we went on to the Black Hills and Colorado and, so, kind of honeymooned there for—I think it was about six weeks, before we then moved back to New Jersey for him to finish his senior year, or his last year, I don't know, was it senior?

Jon: Yeah, and then we moved to Trenton. Yeah, I think they called it senior.

Jeanne: Yeah, last year of seminary then.

DePue: Were you working out there then?

Jeanne: Well, you know I have a teaching certificate in Illinois and it did not translate to a full teaching certificate in New Jersey, so I did a lot of substituting. Eventually I went to work for an adult learning center program. Back then they were paying adults to go to school, they got salaried to go to school if they did not have adequate reading and math skills to be employed. I taught kindergarten, first, and second grade math and reading levels. Some of these adults had Trenton High School diplomas, but when they went out to get a job they could not read and write and do math.

DePue: Something of an eye opener after growing up in Oak Park, I would think?

Jeanne: Yes, yes, exactly, yeah. It was an experience, because it was definitely inner city work. Yep.

Jon: We shared a house, too, with another couple, because there was this big house and we needed a place to live, so we split the rent and there was like three or four bedrooms.

DePue: Is there anything that stands out in your mind about that last year at Princeton?

Jon: Well, probably the interesting parts of it. I mean, academics absolutely not. I mean, when all you've done is go to school your whole life, academics are just—I could have gone to school my whole life and by the time I quit going—if I had gone to school much longer I could have done it in my sleep. I mean, I don't think you learn anything after awhile, you just crank out the stuff. You know, it's like factory work. I mean, you just do it.

Jeanne: Here's what happened that was interesting. That's when he got his call, what synod he would be placed at.

DePue: That was my next question.

Jon: Here's how that works. Apparently I've learned from my colleagues since. When you're at a Lutheran campus, everybody is up in the air, all frantic. I filled out this

form and it had, “What synod?” I put, “I would like something urban or I would be interested in overseas ministry,” because I really liked it when I was overseas. Well, that year hardly anybody indicated that they would go overseas to be a missionary. I mean, nobody wanted to do that. So I instantly got a response from Global Mission because they found I was a warm body and was willing to go overseas. And then I was assigned to eastern North Dakota (laughing) in America.

Jeanne: And so that’s when I decided God was telling you, “Go to Africa, Jeanne.” Yeah.

DePue: So, eastern South Dakota sounded much worse.

Jeanne: Worse.

Jon: Eastern North Dakota.

Jeanne and DePue (together): Eastern North Dakota.

Jeanne: Silos and potatoes was all I could think of.

Jon: Well, your mom was from there.

Jeanne: I know. That’s why I knew about it; I had been there.

Jon: So we also during that year then interviewed a time or two. The first time was in New York City, when one of their executives from Minneapolis—the headquarters of Global Mission was in Minneapolis—and one of them was coming through. So we went with him to dinner and talked to him for a while and then we were flown to Minneapolis. The, since we were still interested, and it’s not like we said we’d go to Africa, they said, “Where would you go?” and we said, “We’ve never been anywhere; we’ll go anywhere,” which wasn’t the right answer.

Jeanne: They initially talked to us about South America.

Jon: Yeah, because I spoke German and they thought we could go to Quito, Ecuador ...

Jeanne: And I spoke Spanish ...

Jon: ... where they had a German speaking congregation.

DePue: You learned German in college and then you had a chance to ...

Jon: I was a German major and then I spent eight months in Austria. I became a German major because I had all those classes from the overseas study program. All my classes were in German language, everything was in German.

DePue: Now Jeanne, what did you think about the notion of going overseas? Apparently that appealed to you as well.

Jeanne: Very much.

DePue: Why?

Jeanne: I liked the idea of doing for others and I liked the idea of doing unusual places. I've always been interested in working with people who other people weren't interested in working with.

DePue: Now, I'm going to ask both of you, but I'm going to start with you Jeanne. At the time when this discussion began and it looked like, "Okay, he could be a missionary and we could go to some different kind of a place," describe what your impression of being a missionary was going to be like.

Jeanne: I knew that I wasn't going to do it if we had to be what everybody thought missionaries were like. In other words, just like I wasn't going to be a typical pastor's wife, because I didn't think that mold was good anymore. I did not think there should be a mold for missionaries. I thought we could go overseas; I thought we could teach or preach or do whatever we needed to do as long as it was right for us. We were planning for a family, so as long as it was right for our family, but I also wasn't going to do, "So what if we are getting sicker, so what if your kid needed special education" or something. "Too bad, we were going to stay there no matter what." I guess I didn't see it as a call for life, but I saw it as for awhile it would be a good thing to do, a good thing to try, but if it didn't work, I was okay with that, too.

DePue: As a great life adventure maybe?

Jeanne: Uh-huh. Yep.

DePue: Okay. Jon, how about you?

Jon: Well, I knew I liked being overseas. I knew I liked working in a foreign language, and my theory was, "Why would you not do something unusual if you had the opportunity?" I mean, why not? I always thought the last place I would ever want to go was Africa, but when they said, "Well, would you consider Africa?" We said, "Well, sure." But mostly, I guess missionaries are supposed to be motivated, or stereotypically are motivated by a kind of just sort of absolute conviction of their own rightness and a passionate, almost fanatical desire to change other people or something. I think we were inspired by just ridiculous levels of curiosity and a profound interest in learning from other people and about other people. We almost did it backwards.

DePue: What strikes me about both this decision to be a missionary, but maybe just as important, or more important, the decision to go into ministry in the first place, there was no "ah ha" moment for you. This was just kind of a gradual understanding that this is what you were meant to do?

Jon: The closest I had to an "ah ha" moment was internship, because all I'd been up 'til that time was a student, so what did I like to study ... theology. I mean, I don't know. Why would anybody like to study theology?

DePue: But this is kind of late in the process to have an “ah ha” moment after you’ve practically at the doorstep of being...

Jon: Well, what I thought was going to happen was, I mean life goes quickly, I was 20. I thought that when I went off to—and I keep recalling that this—and I think this was what I thought. I thought that I would go to be an intern and I would, you know, preach and teach and work in a church and work in a hospital in a spiritual capacity and everybody would say, “Man, you’re nuts. You can’t do this. You’re not suitable for this role.” Then I would say, “Okay, I tried,” and now I’d go do something else. I had no idea what else, but at least I would have that proven to me, because my idea was, “I will be true to myself and they will not accept that.” Whoever they are. I’ve always been looking for the “thems”. The “thems” aren’t there. When I get to know people I like them.

DePue: It’s like you’ve thrown down the gauntlet and you’re waiting for somebody to call your bluff. (laughing)

Jon: To tell me, “Get out of here.” That’s right. That’s exactly how it was. I mean, I had a really belligerent attitude, if you can imagine that (laughing).

Jeanne: And I have to say that’s what appealed to me.

Jon: But I was in, for example, a very high pressure hospital program; great teachers, great and there were three guys in my program, I’m the only one that got ordained. I mean, people crashed and burned all over the place. It was just ...

DePue: The one who “had the calling”.

Jon: The other ones just, for various reasons, washed out. I mean it was a place to discover what your personal chinks were. They kind of figured them out. So it just happened that at each level of ministry where I’ve been privileged to work, I’ve liked it. If I run into the day when I hate it, then I guess I’ll go do something else. I’ve always found people who let me be in ministry with them.

Jeanne: When we got to Africa and we started to meet the missionaries in Cameroon, we discovered really quickly that we came with a mindset that was extremely different from everybody else and, frankly, they didn’t know what to think of us. We were saying, “We’re here and we think we can do good and we’re happy to do good and we’re happy to live out in the bush, or do whatever, as long as it’s good for us and it feels right.” And, everybody else was out there, “We’re here for the rest of our life, no matter what.” And we said, “We can’t buy that. We don’t come with that feeling.”

DePue: They were questioning your level of commitment then?

Jeanne: I guess. Would you say it was that Jon?

Jon: Yeah, but they also sent us out there where none of them would live.

DePue: Let's back up just a little bit and, again, I think I'll generally ask Jon to lead and then Jeanne you can certainly jump in here. So, where in this process was the decision made, or you to find out not just that you're going to be a missionary, but "We're going to send you to Cameroon?"

Jon: Okay, here's the way it worked. We went through a series of meetings, and they were pretty thorough.

DePue: This was all out in Princeton?

Jon: No, this was in Minneapolis. We spent eight hours at the Mayo Clinic having psychiatric testing, both of us, to find out if we were, as we've often said, (Jon and Jeanne together) crazy enough to go. (Jon laughing). And we apparently passed that hurdle with flying colors. (Jon and DePue laughing). They had all kinds of problems. Especially in the part of Cameroon where we were going because of its isolation and poverty, that people would go and not go back for their term, the missionaries. They would spend two years and they would leave.

DePue: But why Cameroon versus all the other places you could have gone to?

Jon: When we said, "We'll go anywhere", they said, "We know just the place." (Jon and DePue laughing). That was literally how it worked. We have this lovely place, Poli, Cameroon. (laughing)

Jeanne: Nobody else will live there.

Jon: And since, like sheep to the slaughter, they are led.

DePue: Now Poli, Cameroon because it used to be a German colony?

Jon: No. Maybe it was German. Poli is not a German name or anything, it's an African name I think.

DePue: Yeah, but the Cameroon used to be German and then it was taken over by the French and the Brits after the first world war.

Jon: Yeah, they lost after the First World War. Poli, Cameroon because there were missionaries. When missionaries arrived in that part of Africa, they would move in from the coast. The Catholics have the whole country and the Protestants would assign kind of like rings on a tree, according to when you got there and that was in the part of the country that was there when the Norwegian and American missionaries ...

DePue: But I'm assuming this ...

Jeanne: Americans partnered with Norwegian missionaries.

DePue: But this is in the late 1800s, early 1900s?

Jon: I don't think that we had had missionaries that long there.

Jeanne: Well, but, Cameroon; actually what is interesting about there is, we were salaried by the American Lutheran Church, but we were going to work for the Cameroon Lutheran Church. It was an established church of its own.

Jon: Recently established, yeah.

Jeanne: Yeah. And so when you were assigned there, you are kind of put at the mercy of the Cameroonian Lutherans, "Where do you want these missionaries to go?"

DePue: How much did you know about Cameroon before you went there?

Jon: Virtually nothing. I mean, they give us a little bit of instruction. You know, you'd read a little bit. Nothing.

Jeanne: When we knew we were going we started educating ourselves, but, you know, very little.

Jon: Back to the whole interview process. Once we were assigned there, then the first year we went to France, which was wonderful. I mean, we were in the French Alps for a year and our job was to learn French.

DePue: Both of you.

Jeanne: Yes.

Jon: And we had to know French before we could go to work in Cameroon because they spoke French there.

DePue: So you're thinking for this first year, "You know being a missionary is not so bad." (Jon laughing).

Jeanne: Not so bad, no.

Jon: A paid year to learn French. The good thing about living overseas is find somebody that will pay you to do it.

DePue: Where in France then was this?

Jeanne and Jon together: Albertville.

DePue: Oh, well, that's rather famous now.

Jeanne: Yes. It was before the Olympics. But just to show you how little we knew about it, we were out for dinner one evening with the guy who was the secretary for Africa. He was flying to Africa and he stopped by to see us at mission school and see how things were going and see if we had questions. I remember specifically having this conversation where I said to him, "Okay, if I was to be very, very ill, you would

send a plane up to pick me up and take me to the hospital?” and he said, “No, that’s not how it works. If you’re very, very ill you’ll die.” I was shocked to realize that we had signed on for that. So perhaps we went with a lot of naïveté. We just went on faith.

DePue: This is something you heard in Albertville?

Jeanne: Yeah, when we were already well into our year of study. We were trying, you know, picture what is Africa going to be like and what’s it going to be like there, and we are asking questions and getting answers.

DePue: So, did you come back to the states and then fly to Cameroon, or ship over to Cameroon?

Jon: Yes, we did. That was the new change in their policy. The change in their policy was they had had people go one year to France and then immediately to Africa for two years. You were overseas 33 months, your first goal. But they said after those first 22 months in Africa they wouldn’t go back. So they said, “We want you to go to France for a year, come back for a month to America of leave, and then go spend 33 months. We think if you spend 33 months in Africa, you’ll actually stay. You’ll get over the culture shock and you’ll have adapted and you’ll be comfortable there and you won’t just leave after your first ...” So we were this experiment. So we came back for one month, but we’d already packed everything before we went to France.

DePue: But the notion—this is the American Lutheran Church—the notion at that time if you’re going to be a missionary, this is something you do for life.

Jon: No. The notion was that they were telling us we would like a seven year commitment.

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: And we felt we would give that a good try. We thought that was reasonable to ask of someone.

DePue: Okay. So you came back to the United States. To Chicago or to South Dakota, or both?

Jeanne: Both. We did a runaround between them. Plus, another thing that happens is, though you are salaried by the Lutheran Church, you get token sponsors, churches that when they are giving money in to sponsor missionaries, they get a missionary name. So we had a few by then, so I’m sure we went and visited them also. I was also pregnant by then.

DePue: At the time you flew overseas how far along were you?

Jeanne: Well, we went to Cameroon in August and he was born six weeks late in December.

DePue: Okay, so we are going to back up a little bit. How much did they allow you to take over as far as household belongings?

Jon: Well, more than we could afford. We loaded everything into 55 gallon barrels and then over there they provided us with a house and furnishings, like furniture. Then we had this long list of things; it was like preparing to take your covered wagon to Oregon or something. So we had this huge list of stuff, you know, pressure cookers and meat grinders and ...

Jeanne: Water filters.

Jon: Tupperware, a lifetime supply of Tupperware, and water filters and weird stuff you buy from missionary supply houses in the Chicago area.

DePue: Things that you wouldn't have begun to imagine had they not had them on the list.

Jeanne: That's right, exactly.

Jon: That's right, and then you didn't have any money. I still can't figure out how we paid for it. We must have borrowed the money. But we didn't know what to buy so we would argue about it, at length.

Jeanne: Actually, Ed Nervig—the pastor at our home church—we were packing up and he got up one Sunday ... We were ...

Jon: We were in his basement.

Jeanne: We were packing in his basement, because there was a lot of room there and our stuff could be stored there. He got up one Sunday and goes, "We're going to have to pray for those two; they're down in the basement arguing. (DePue laughing). You know, books or kitchen gear, books, kitchen gear?" He got up the next Sunday; he said, "We haven't prayed hard enough. We need to pray harder (DePue and Jon laughing) They're still down there arguing, books or kitchen gear?"

DePue: Were there medicines on the list as well?

Jeanne: Oh, yeah. Yes, yeah.

Jon: Well, and diapers and baby clothes for kids we didn't have.

Jeanne: We packed that when we came home for that month, because we did not send it initially the first time.

DePue: So this was shipped over before you flew over then?

Jeanne: I mean it was like trying to figure out how many toothpaste tubes would you need in five years, how many boxes of Tampax would you need in five years, how many ...

Jon: How many bars of soap?

Jeanne: ... Soap would you need for five years, and stuff like that. So it was rather interesting shopping trips to go to the store with all of that stuff in it.

DePue: Now, just going through that exercise, I'm sure about this time it is starting to sink in exactly what you've gotten yourself into?

Jeanne: Un-huh, absolutely.

Jon: But it was never like, we're not going to do this.

DePue: No second thoughts?

Jeanne: Oh, no. It was kind of like fun.

Jon: The other thing is, people say—I love the fact that stereotypes are seldom right. I mean, missionaries, we are renouncing materialism, we're going and living ... There is nothing that will make you a materialist more quickly than being a missionary where you have to fight for every little convenience. You don't want to live without this stuff and, yeah, you want to eat with your hands and have one bowl? or do you want to have some kind of a life like you're used to?

DePue: Yeah. So the household furnishings, everything you own, is in these 55 gallon drums that are heading over and now you fly over. So how does one fly to Cameroon and where do you fly into?

Jon: Douala. We fly to Paris ...

Jeanne: Yeah, Paris to Douala.

Jon: Chicago to Paris to Douala.

Jeanne: And then up country.

Jon: So the first place we set foot in Africa ever was Douala.

DePue: Which is where? That's on the coast?

Jon: Right on the coast. It's like you'd imagine, kind of a rainforest, swampy. You step off the plane and you know you're in Africa.

Jeanne: We stepped off the plane, took a cab to a hotel. I'll never forget—we had a dinner there and it was French cuisine, so we were pretty impressed with that. We go to walking around and somebody goes, "Be careful of the snakes falling out of the trees." Well, they were giving us a hard time, so, of course, I walked around fearful that there were going to be snakes falling out of the trees and, of course, there weren't. But we got back to the hotel and I remember thinking, "Wow, that's a

great stuffed lizard on the wall,” and I went up close to peer at it and it turned its head and I realized it was alive. So ...

DePue: This is in Douala?

Jeanne: Yes. That was kind of our first experience. Hot, hot, and humid.

DePue: This is very close to the equator.

Jeanne: Un-huh.

Jon: Yeah, it is. We’ve actually never been south of the equator, which is kind of odd.

DePue: You’re only about six degrees north of the equator.

Jon: Pretty close, yes. And then we flew to Yaoundé, which is the capital. It is more in kind of a plateau area, and then we flew to Ngaoundéré, which is the big missionary station for our church there, and that’s where we stayed.

DePue: Where did you fly in?

Jeanne: Ngaoundéré.

DePue: Is that the one that is N-g-?

Jeanne: N-g-o-u-, yes.

Jon: N-g-a-o-u-n-d-é-r-é.

Jeanne: Now, let me tell you that that name means “belly button mountain. It comes to great significance later to know that that is the Norwegian missionary hospital where our kids were born and, of course, if you have ever seen a pregnant woman, you know belly button mountain, so. Yeah, it looked like a pregnant woman.

DePue: Now, I recall hearing you folks talk about a story of the debate that the missionary community ...

Jeanne: Oh, yes.

DePue: ... had when you were just getting there.

Jon: Yeah, when we got there they trained us, or kind of oriented us in Ngaoundéré for a couple of weeks. In fact, ...

DePue: This is the American Lutheran Church?

Jon: Yeah, the American and the Norwegians ...

Jeanne: American Lutherans.

Jon: ... they had a school there, like a high school, and they had a hospital. It was a nice place. It had a wonderful climate. It was up high on a plateau and it had pretty good shopping and they had nice guest houses. We stayed in like a little one bedroom apartment there. Although it was like two blocks from our apartment to the hospital, they wouldn't let Jeanne see the hospital for the first week, because they say, "You're pregnant. If we show you the hospital before you've been here at least a week, you'll just get on the plane and leave. You won't stay."

Jeanne: It was pretty hard not to get on the plane and leave after the second week.

Jon: Because it was just, you know, stuff was very different.

Jeanne: Primitive.

Jon: Primitive is, I guess, a word. Yeah, it was just not fancy, that's for sure. As far as this meeting with the other missionaries, we never knew this. It turns out that we were going to be sent up to Poli, Cameroon, which was where the church wanted us and where there was one other missionary family, and the other missionaries, of course, all knew each other. Missionary life will convince you that socialism is not a good idea. I mean, it's this socialist society where everybody knows everybody's business and everybody allocates the material goods of the mission like furniture and automobiles and things between each other and it's all this ... It's really not a good thing to have all of these people thinking that what you do with your life is particularly their business. And it's really not a good idea to have them think that they are going to decide what you are going to do with your life, which, in fact, is what they were doing. So, they are wonderful people, but they wouldn't go live up there where we were living. In fact, although they never told us this, there was a considerable debate as to whether it was realistic to expect us to live up there because of the isolation and the difficult personalities involved. It turns out, we learned years later, that they had a meeting late that night for everybody but us, to decide whether they would, in fact, send us up there, and I guess we lost. (laughing)

DePue: Now up there is about ...

Jon: Poli.

DePue: ... 100 miles north ...

Jon: Four hours.

Jeanne: Four hours when it was dry. If it rained ...

DePue: Four hours drive.

Jon: Drive.

Jeanne: Drive, when it was dry. When a rain had happened, there would be a couple of places where you couldn't get out for a day or two.

Jon: And then it would be two weeks.

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: Now, Ngaoundéré is pretty high up. You say that the climate is much nicer than the coast. Is Poli a little bit lower in elevation?

Jon: When you are going between Ngaoundéré and Poli, as you head north there is a paved road that goes all the way to Garoua, which is like four hours due north. Then the last 37 kilometers off that road was just dirt, so we were like 25 miles from a paved road where we lived. When you go off north of Ngaoundéré a ways, you go down what they call the falaise, which is a cliff, and you drop back, oh I don't know, hundreds of feet to a lower ...

Jeanne: I'm sure it's sea level.

Jon: ... level again. It's not sea level.

Jeanne: Oh.

Jon: And it got way hotter there. Just, that's the way the world works.

Jeanne: Well, it was the Sahel.

DePue: And you had a rainy season and a dry season.

Jon: Correct.

Jeanne: Yeah, and then mostly Harmattan, dust.

DePue: Now you mentioned the Sahel. Is that what you called it?

Jeanne: Yeah. That just ...

Jon: S-a-h-e-l.

Jeanne: Yeah. That's sub Sahara. You know, it's not as dry as the Sahara. I think one of the hardest things about the climate there, it was 90 to 110 degrees on average every day. Of course, I've mentioned I went pregnant and then I immediately got pregnant again, so I was pregnant or nursing every single day that we lived in that 90 to 110 degree weather. And then we had horrible, horrible red dust off and on during the year and it's called Harmattan. It was so bad that you'd get up in the morning, you'd have to clean off your dishes to eat on them, and then you'd clean them up and put them in the cupboard. Then you'd have to take them out and you'd have to wash them off, get the dust off, and then you'd eat on them. Then you'd have to clean them up and stick them away. Then you'd have to get them out at night, wash them off, eat on them, and then wash them up and stick them away. It was just everything coated in red dust.

DePue: Backing up just a little bit. So you go to Poli, which is a town of how much, how large?

Jon: Three thousand.

DePue: Three thousand. Do you drive there?

Jeanne: Um-huh.

Jon: Yeah, we had the mission truck with all of our stuff in it, the barrels, but I don't think that that went up initially. We had an old Land Rover, a diesel powered Land Rover.

DePue: That the mission gave you?

Jon: That the missionary had that was our vehicle.

Jeanne: Then we had a Toyota Land Cruiser.

Jon: Later, after the first one blew up, then they bought us a Land Cruiser.

DePue: Now you said there was another couple that were up there already?

Jon: Yeah. They had been the Johnsons. Ernie had been in Africa for a long time. He was an eccentric personality and had a real hard time getting along with other Americans because of his own insecurities about himself and because of just doing whatever he wanted to do. (laughing) He wanted to do it no matter what, so.

DePue: Okay. Is that the guy who Nigel refers to as Brown?

Jon and Jeanne together: Yes.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: Yeah, because Nigel is this English anthropologist who wrote a book about where we were living there; liable laws are very tough in England, so they insisted that the name of this particular—for example, we're in there as Jon and Jeanne Berg, but Ernie is in there as something Brown. I forget what his first ...

Jeanne: Herbert.

Jon: Herbert Brown.

DePue: Okay. Well we've blown his cover already then, and I was going to try to avoid that, but so be it. Where are we then? Describe Poli.

Jon: Okay. Poli was rural, very rural. I mean, it was 37 kilometers, like I said, on a dirt path off the paved road and there weren't a lot of paved roads in Cameroon. The reason there was a paved road from Ngaoundéré to Garoua was because south of

there there weren't paved roads, because the railroad ran. But the railroad ended at Ngaoundéré and then in order to truck things further north they paved this road. So we had a pretty good connection for most of the way and most of the year it wasn't a particular problem. Poli was ...

Jeanne: It was a governmental seat, a sous-préfet.

Jon: Yeah, but a sous-préfet was there and it had a post office and it has businesses downtown.

Jeanne: A market.

Jon: Yeah. Hardly any traffic. It was just profoundly poor.

Jeanne: It did have, like, schools. It had a hospital, you know, a small hospital, but it had some infrastructure. One of the significant things is people wore clothing there. When you went farther out into the bush, and this was back in 1977 to 1979 when we were there, up further the women didn't have clothing or didn't always necessarily wear clothing, so.

DePue: What was the ethnic background of the people that were there?

Jon: There were called Dowaayos.

Jeanne: Those are the local people, but the government people would be from all over Cameroon and they were assigned there.

Jon: And there were Fulbé people there who had conquered these people, so the Fulbés were the Pulaar speakers or Fulfuldé speakers. I learned Fulfuldé then because not enough people spoke French, so basically you spent a lot of time learning stuff. Fulfuldé was a market language that was spoken by Dowaayos and Lockes, and Locke Mbums. All of these little tribes of maybe 30,000 people would be a particular tribal grouping and they would all have their own languages, but the market language, or the lingua franca was then Fulfuldé,, they called it there, or Pulaar, they called it in Senegal, which was an imperial language like French or German or English are imperial languages.

DePue: Kind of a hybrid language?

Jeanne: It's a conqueror.

Jon: No, no it was the language of these Fulbé people ...

Jeanne: The conquerors.

Jon: ... who conquered all that vast stretch of West Africa before the Europeans came along.

Jeanne: So they would enforce a common language so people could trade.

Jon: Well, people would just learn the language because that was the language of commerce.

DePue: So there was a mixture of ethnic groups even in Cameroon?

Jon: Oh, good grief. Hundreds and hundreds, 200 and some languages.

DePue: But in the area in Poli itself, there was a couple of different languages that were being spoken?

Jon: Oh, yeah.

DePue: And the Dowaayos ... how do you pronounce ...

Jon: Dowaayos.

DePue: ... Dowaayos were the original natives there, but they weren't as well off as the Fulfuldé?

Jon: The Fulbé tended to be more powerful, because ... for example, the Sous-préfet was a Fulbé guy and they were Muslims, and the Dowaayos were animists and Christians. The reason they didn't become Muslims was because they were so badly mistreated by these Muslims who came in from Nigeria and conquered them, because it was Usman Dan Fodio who led this great Muslim Pulaar-speaking conquests of West African, from Senegal to Cameroon. I mean, that's a big stretch. He was originally from Nigeria.

DePue: Well, the transcribers are going to have a wonderful time with all these names (all laughing), but we will sort that out later. The language then. You mentioned the Préfet. What was the term they used?

Jon: Préfet. Sous-préfet, the under Préfet.

DePue: The Sous-préfet.

Jon: There was like a governor and then there was a Préfet and then there was a Sous-préfet, and then there was a mayor.

DePue: Well, I'm sorry, but that sounds awfully French to me.

Jon: That was very French.

Jeanne: They were a French system.

Jon: It didn't work, but it was French.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: And the Sous-préfet lived in this palace up on the top of a hill. I mean, it was a great house.

Jeanne: Oh, I guess it's good to mention that he took the electrical system that had been in the city and took it out of the city and moved it up to his palace, so there was no electricity in the city, ever.

Jon: There used to be.

Jeanne: Yeah.

Jon: But the Sous-préfet had it.

DePue: The Sous-préfet was a Fulbé.

Jon: Fulbé. And he was married to two beautiful sisters.

DePue: Oh.

Jon: Since they were Muslims they would have more than one wife; he happened to have two or three and they were sisters. So, I don't know how all that worked out, but ...

DePue: So run through the religions of each one of these groups again.

Jon: The fundamental religion of all of the people of that area was animism, traditional African religion. They believe ...

Jeanne: Ancestor ...

Jon: ... in ancestral spirits. And they believe that when people die their spirits remain and if you don't keep them satisfied they might not—it seemed like the ancestors never did a whole bunch to help, but they could really make your life miserable if you didn't. This is kind of traditional family system stuff, so they had to feed them with blood and beer and offerings to the spirits and they did all kinds of ritualized incisions and magic.

Jeanne: Well, we had a skull tree in our backyard.

Jon: Yeah, they kept the skulls of the men in trees and baskets. It was all a whole cult of the dead. Because something's got to be running the world and their take on it is dead people are running the world.

Jeanne: Well you pop the head off skulls after about a year to figure if they were a witch or not and how they were going to be treating you.

Jon: And then they believed in magic, what we would call magic, and witchcraft, and curses, and blessings and ...

DePue: But that's only one portion of the population.

Jon: Well, but it's pretty much the whole population. Over the top of that, then they have either Christianity or Islam.

Jeanne: Mixed together.

Jon: And some of them espouse neither Islam or Christianity. The Pulaar speakers would mostly be Muslims. The people we worked with, the Dowaayos, were Christians, most of them.

DePue: So Pulaar was the language of the Muslims and Cameroon.

Jon: In Cameroon, some of the Muslims in Cameroon, yes.

DePue: And is also the language of the Muslims in Senegal?

Jon: Some of the Muslims in Senegal. Pulaar is the language which was called Fulfuldé in Cameroon and Pulaar in Senegal. It is this language in all of these various dialects, spread by these guys running around on horses conquering people from the ocean in Senegal to the mountain ...

DePue: So the Fulfuldé are the administrators?

Jon: Well, they tended to be ... they ran the government. The president of the country ...

Jeanne: In our area.

Jon: Ahmadou Ahidjo was one of them. So, they had control of the government.

DePue: Say that name again.

Jon: Ahmadou Ahidjo.

DePue: Ahmadou ...

Jon: Ahidjo. A-h-i-d-j-o-u or something. He was living in Dakar when we were there, because after he left power in Cameroon he went to Dakar.

DePue: Okay, I'd seen that. I've got that name someplace then. He was the president of Cameroon?

Jon: Of Cameroon, when we were there. Yes.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: And he was succeeded by a Christian, Biya. It turned out Ahidjo was very, very tough and pretty vicious in suppressing any opposition, but in terms of governmental operation he was way less corrupt than Biya, the Christian that succeeded him.

Jeanne: To give you an example of animism and Christianity, we had a guy who worked for us; his name was Reuben, and he worked in our kitchen. He had a young son, his wife had a son, and they brought him over to show us. So I'm unwrapping the baby from his things to ooh and aah the baby and I noticed that around his belly button he has all of these ceremonial incisions and I go, "What's this?" You know, "Why did you do this? You're a Christian, you don't have to do this." But he said, "No, no, you have to take no chances here." So he had the animism symbols cut into his son to appease the ancestors in case, but he also went and had his son baptized.

DePue: So, who were the Christians then? Was it a mixture of ...

Jon: Well, they were Christian. He was a Christian. He was a baptized Christian, he went to church. It's like, people always say, "Isn't it terrible that they don't just renounce their ...?" I say, "Well, you know ...". Africans have all of these magic charms where they have a leather pouch filled with a piece of paper, especially Muslims, and those are called gris-gris, and, you know, they wear them and we think, well, "How terrible of them. Why can't they just renounce all, because Muslims aren't supposed to do that." Christians would do it. Christians would practice the old things with the new things. And, "Why shouldn't they just put their faith in good old American Lutheranism? We don't do that, why do they do that?" But I always tell the Americans, "Well, we don't have magical charms in our pockets, but we carry leather pouches filled with paper and we think it'll make us safe." You know, we have billfolds full of cash and when Americans will give up believing that money will keep them secure, then Africans will believe—Africans would prefer to believe that money will keep them secure. They just don't have the option. So bereft of money, they go for the ancestral spirits.

DePue: Well, I hate to be pedestrian here and keep covering the same territory, but you've got these different ethnic groups that are mixed in there. I'm wondering if there is one particular ethnic group or strata of Cameroonian society in Poli, at least, that were more likely to be Christian?

Jon: The Dowaayos.

DePue: And that's who you were sent to convert.

Jon: Not to convert. They were already Christian and I was sent to work with a school that trained catechists to run village churches.

DePue: But you just said that the Dowaayos are animists.

Jon: Well, they were Christians, but the underlying ...

Jeanne: We're saying they're both.

Jon: ... the underlying spirituality was still this old thinking in the old ways. I mean, they believed in Jesus, but they also believed in the reality that was truth for them and their parents for generation after generation.

DePue: They obviously saw no conflict between believing both.

Jon: Oh, they realized it was conflicted, more so than Americans are aware of the cultural conflicts within our way of practicing Christianity. I think that they were more aware of it than we are.

DePue: Yeah, I'm just looking at a map—about a third of the population in a map here, you know, you have to call them one thing or another, you can't call them both—and it is about a third of each. Actually, Christian is probably the highest percentage of 30 to 50 percent.

Jon: Yeah. It was mostly a Christian country. The southern part of the country was nearly entirely Christian.

DePue: But the people who would do the things, worship the skull, they would make sure that the skulls weren't bewitched, those people would also consider themselves Christian.

Jon: Yes.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: And they wouldn't do it like in the old school. They had kind of modified it. They had become less traditionalist, but they weren't about to walk away from everything.

DePue: Yeah. Jeanne?

Jeanne: But a funeral would have been a mixture of the, you know, animism, wrapping them up in cloth and the way they buried them, with Christian ...

Jon: Yeah, but the funeral was pretty distinctly different.

Jeanne: Um-huh.

Jon: I mean, in an animist funeral, if a man was rich, they want burial cloth about a foot wide. They would wrap them up into a huge ball and you would see them carrying this big ball down the road by our house. I mean, it was like six feet in diameter. Just a giant ball of cloth and that would be what he was in. Whereas, when the Christians died, like the wife of Mamadou—one of the guys that worked at our house—died; they came to my house at nine in the morning and they said (her name was Michelle) and they said, "She died." And I said, "Okay." They said, "You're doing the funeral." I said, "Okay." We went across the street and they had dug a little hole and wrapped her in white cloth. It was a two-tiered hole, bigger at the top and then narrower at the bottom. They laid her in the bottom part and then they put sticks across and then we filled the rest of the hole up with dirt. Then the people would come and stay for three days. They would keep coming and coming. I

mean, you had to do the burial soon. I mean, you don't leave people laying around unembalmed ...

Jeanne: In 110 degree weather.

Jon: ... in 100 degree weather. So it was very solemn and very simple and very powerful. I mean, I'll never forget it. But then all of the Dowaayos men are cousins because they are all related. They have this relationship where they can only talk to each other in jokes. So all these people are Dowaayos at this funeral and it is literally across the street from our house. So when we are doing the last part of the burying and the men are throwing all of the dirt on top and the women leave, instantly all of the men start rolling around laughing, because the only way they can talk to each other is in jokes. (Jon laughing). And I'm thinking, "Oh, I know what's going on here." but it still looks pretty weird if you ask me. (DePue laughing).

DePue: And what language were they speaking?

Jon: Dowaayos. Their language.

DePue: So you didn't understand their ...

Jon: I didn't understand a word of it.

DePue: Did they speak a couple of languages though?

Jon: Yeah. They spoke Pulaar, French, Dowaayos.

DePue: So they spoke three languages?

Jon: A lot of them did.

DePue: And kind of a mixture of the three sometimes?

Jon: A little bit of this, a little bit of that.

Jeanne: Full Dowaayos.

DePue: Well, let's talk a little bit more about their culture and then I'm going to get to having a baby.

Jon: By the way, Dowaayos thought that ... We lived in this house that was built in the 30s, see? And we were surrounded ...

DePue: I'm just going to get to that. Do you want to go there first?

Jon: No. I'll go back to the ... Dowaayos thought, according to our English anthropologist guy, Nigel, that everybody is Dowaayo.

Jeanne: The whole world.

Jon: Yeah. They had a Dowaayo-centric view of reality, which is good, because we all have our own centric views of reality.

DePue: Don't we all?

Jon: That's right. But it's fun to see it in others. Nigel told us this and he said, "You know, they talk a lot about missionaries." And Nigel pretty much understood Dowaayo language. We never studied Dowaayo language. I mean, we studied Fulfuldé and French and we were kind of running out of languages to learn. He really understood them and he said, "You know, missionaries are a constant source of conversation. The reason that missionaries have curtains on their windows, of this they are certain, is because none of them need curtains on their windows, because they are just Dowaayos. But they know that missionaries are really Dowaayos, too, but they don't want to admit it. So they put curtains on their windows and at night when you pull the curtain shut on your windows, you take off your white skin and ...

Jeanne: You hang it in the closet.

Jon: you hang it in the closet, that's why you got closets (DePue laughing), and you sit around and tell jokes and speak Dowaayo like any civilized person." (laughing).

DePue: And we probably should mention that the Nigel they are talking about is Nigel Barley, who wrote a book, *The Innocent Anthropologist*, and mentions Jon and Jeanne in the book. Like a good anthropologist, he went and he found the most dismal out of the way place with the most primitive people he could find and says, "That's the place for me."

Jeanne: Yep.

Jon: And he didn't like it. (Jon and DePue laughing).

Jeanne: He probably was there a week, stayed with us a week.

Jon: Yeah. Back and forth. He was a fascinating entertaining human being.

DePue: Okay, so let's talk a little bit more about the culture and then we'll get to

Jeanne: Life. Life in Poli.

DePue: Life in Poli, absolutely. Family structure of the natives there?

Jon: Most of them, the Christians, were supposed to be at least monogamous; I mean, one man, one woman. It's really hard to sort out family structures over there because—this is pretty consistent in Africa in our experience—you know, everybody is a brother. So people come to your house and somebody introduces

you to somebody and they say, “This is my brother.” After awhile we would always say, “Mem mere, mem pere”, which means, “Same mother, same father?” and they would always look at you ...

Jeanne: And that would be to sort out whether or not it was a biological brother or a friend.

DePue: Right.

Jon: And they would look at you like, “Well, no, but he’s my brother.” The Dowaayos culture was pretty typically African in that men were circumcised in groups as adolescents. It was like confirmation, only a little more serious I would suppose in some way. So, they would go off into the woods and they would learn the secrets of men. In old school Dowaayos, before the missionaries came along and the Europeans started messing with their schedule by setting up school years, they would go for a nine month period, for a gestation period. They would be off and the men would be teaching them manly arts and manly secrets. The Dowaayo language is a tonal language and these guys would get so good that they could just whistle to each other and talk and just by the changing in the pitch of their whistles, the people would know what they were saying. Then, during this period, toward the end of it, they would be circumcised. Well, all in this group—and they might do it probably every year or every couple of years—were brothers of the knife, or circumcision brothers. These guys were like, oh I don’t know, maybe your West Point classmates or something. They had been through a lot together.

DePue: Well, just listening to Nigel’s description of the circumcisions, it is not anything I’d want to go through.

Jon: No, it was a painful experience and it was central to their identity. It was a hugely important thing. And then people die all the time. So guys, if they lived, might have a series of wives, because they would die or they would have a wife who didn’t bear children; they would never assume that that was the man’s fault, so they would go marry somebody else, too. So a lot of Christians simultaneously had more than one wife. They knew that they weren’t supposed to, but they did. We would discuss this and they would say, “Well, you know, the Bible isn’t particularly clear on this subject. I mean it says that a bishop should be the husband of one wife. We’ve discovered that westerners don’t have simultaneous polygamy, they have serial polygamy; that is, they get one wife, they get sick of her, they get rid of her; she is supposed to take care of herself so they go get another wife. At least we figure, well I got the old wife, I got to take care of her and I got to take care of the new wife.”

DePue: Their version ...

Jon: And they thought their version was much more ...

DePue: Civilized?

Jon: Civilized than ours, you know.

Jeanne: But woe to the woman whose husband died, because, whereas in Senegal women had way more rights, in Cameroon—back in that day we were there, 1977 to 1979 anyway—women whose husbands died, the children, the property, everything belonged to the man's family. They could swoop in, take your house, take your belongings, take your children, and leave you out on the street. If you were a lucky woman your family would take you back and assume you back into their family. If not, there was a huge population of prostitutes who were women who had lost their husband and lost their family. I was not pleased and that made me very upset.

Jon: And infertility was really a curse. I mean, none of this, "Well, I don't want to have a bunch of kids" stuff. One time at five in the morning I'm going out of my bedroom to the bathroom or something and there is this woman crouched in the corner. How she got in my house I do not know. And she is sitting there and I said, "Jeanne", you know ...

Jeanne: Come here.

Jon: ... would you come out here? And she wanted me to look at her belly and tell her why she couldn't get pregnant and she was just distraught.

DePue: Yeah.

Jeanne: It turns out now that we were living there right at the very beginning of HIV and the particular part of Cameroon we were living in has a particularly bad strain of HIV, drug resistant HIV. So, I suppose that was part of ... that, and venereal diseases. That was taking a bad toll of people there.

Jon: And I think that it's like, you know, you talk about small town. I mean, live in a small town and never go anywhere.

DePue: Well, it's not like they have TV to watch or the radio to listen to.

Jeanne: No.

Jon: No. They had radios. As soon as they have access to it, what people want are entertainment and travel. I mean, they'll take that over food. If they got enough food the next thing they want is, "Let's change the scenery here a little bit," you know?

DePue: Yeah. So how do people make a living?

Jon: Farming.

Jeanne: How do women make their living? Farming. What do men do? They sit under the tree drinking beer and talking, telling their jokes. (Jon laughing).

DePue: And the beer isn't the kind of beer that we would be used to drinking?

Jeanne: No. That's what the women have grown, the grain that the women have grown. The men do work in making beer. Yeah.

DePue: Then the grain is (unintelligible) ...

Jon: It would be like soup, it would be millet. They'd just throw in some water, grind it up, let it sit there and ferment. I don't know, I might have had a swig or two of it, but it wasn't very strong. So when they got the regular beer from the brewery, they were in pretty good bottles, but two or three of them would share one and all get rollicking drunk off that. (laughing)

DePue: Well, that's what Nigel says. The beer that they were drinking was very mild, so they get regular beer and, whoa, it hit them hard. (Jon laughing). What was the food then? Jeanne?

Jeanne: Essentially they had grains of different sorts. You know, if you could afford it, they would prefer rice, but they mostly had...was it millet?

Jon: Millet.

Jeanne: And you had to prepare it. I think there was a process where at a certain point it is poisonous unless you process it well.

Jon: No, no, that's manioc.

Jeanne: Oh, manioc, that's right. They had some of that there, but mostly they ate millet.

Jon: Millet was like corn.

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: Manioc is a root crop?

Jon: Yes, and you beat it and you lay it out on the side of the roads and it smells like vomit. So, you're driving for mile after mile as this stuff is drying out. It's soaked, because it has poison in it. You soak it and you pound it and then it makes like a flour. It's a starch. They cook it up and it becomes like potatoes.

Jeanne: Kind of like our dumpling. So, anyway, they would take whatever grain they prepared and then they would make a haako, or a sauce; most people could not afford meat and so they would make it out of whatever leaves or whatever they could find, vegetables or whatever. If you were lucky, on a special occasion, whatever, you would put chicken or beef or something in it to flavor it.

Jon: In fact, the word "haako" means leaf. That's what they name their sauce, because it was water and leaves that they would cook up, because they hardly ever had meat in it. They would take the millet, they call it gawri, and it would make up like a stiff ...

Jeanne: It was kind of like a dumpling.

Jon: But they would make a shape in it in a bowl and then in the middle of the bowl they would dump the sauce and then you would just tear off a piece of this ...

Jeanne: Yeah. There was etiquette.

Jon: ... this nyiiri, the grain stuff and dip it into the sauce and eat it.

Jeanne: In the country, men ate and then women ate and then children ate. You would have a common bowl, you would have it on the floor and you would sit on a mat. There is etiquette. Imagine a round bowl with pie shaped spots; you are allowed to eat the spot in your pie wedge shape. So you would eat with your right hand, because your right hand eats and your left hand wipes. So you would eat with your right hand and only in that section that was yours.

DePue: And the livestock they had? The chickens and cattle, that was generally it?

Jeanne: If you were better off you would have some.

Jon: Goats.

Jeanne: Yeah, goats.

Jon: Sheep.

DePue: How about education? Did the kids have any kind of education?

Jon: Yeah. They had schools, but they had almost no supplies. The schools would be a pretty simple building. It was interesting. You would walk in and it would be packed with kids. Every time I walked into a classroom there, every kid in the room would instantly stand at attention.

Jeanne: Yeah. Extremely respectful. Most kids probably got a couple of years of school. Certainly it wasn't mandatory and it was a privilege if kids went. Essentially it consisted of rote. The teacher would say something, the kids would, you know, have to memorize it and quote it back. There wasn't a chance for everybody to have a book in their hand. The teacher might have a book that she read from or showed the kids. Quite often they would write with sticks on dirt or they might have, if they were better off, chalkboards, where they could write on the chalkboards and hold up.

DePue: What language were they learning?

Jon: French.

Jeanne: French.

Jon: Education was in French.

DePue: Oh, okay. So if they were literate, that was the only language they were literate in?

Jon: Yeah. We did some translating and some writing in Pulaar for example or Fulfuldé, but not a lot. We had the Bible up there in Fulfuldé, because they didn't understand French, so we would read to them from that. That's why I had to learn Fulfuldé. That's why they had these catechists up there, because the educated people further south, who had good French education and went to the regular seminary that the church had for the people further south, they were mostly Bias. We thought that the people up where we were were really poor and really uneducated and nobody would want to live with them, so they stayed down in their area. They had French services and stuff, but they wouldn't come and work where we were, because it was too isolated. The French teachers—like we had this really smart guy from Southern Senegal, Cameroon, I mean, from like Yaoundé or Douala. He was, they called it “affecté”, placed by the government there for two years.

Jeanne: It was government service and ...

Jon: Yeah, it was either that or go to the army or jail or something. He was educated and part of his education, when he completed it, then he went to two years government service as a teacher in Poli. He was Cameroonian, and he was just at wits end. He couldn't believe that anybody could possibly live up there, “What were they thinking?” And he was a great guy. His way of survival was, he decided that the day he arrived there he would get drunk and he would stay drunk for two years and as nearly as I can tell he succeeded. (Jon laughing)

Jeanne: He pretty much succeeded.

Jon: He found that if he stayed positively drunk the whole time it wasn't quite as hard.

DePue: Well, I think we've got around this quite a bit, but I wanted to have both of you describe the personalities. It's kind of hard, because they are like any other group; I'm sure there are diverse personalities; but if there are particular traits that seem to stand out of the native population—I'd say the term, but I'm afraid I'd butcher it so bad—Dawunde?

Jon and Jeanne: Dowaayos.

Jeanne: Well, this is the physical attribute. I'm not particularly tall, I'm five-seven, and I stood above all of the men and women who were Dowaayos. I was a giant there, but they were not ... what's the word I'm looking for?

Jon: They weren't pygmies.

Jeanne: Pygmies. They were just short, short in stature.

Jon: They were malnourished for generations.

DePue: Were they stout or were they pretty thin?

Jon: No. They were not very stout. They were hungry.

Jeanne: Thin, small people. In fact, I had the privilege—shortly after I had my first child—one of the Bible school teachers was living, you know, like ten feet, their house was ten feet from our house. They came over pounding the door in the middle of the night and he goes, “My wife’s having a baby, come on over and help.” We had actually received missionary training in delivering a baby, so I sent Jon off to boil the scissors ...

Jon: Shoelaces.

Jeanne: ... and shoelaces and I go over with my flashlight to deliver this baby or to help or whatever and ... I forgot where I was going (laughing).

Jon: You were going to talk about the size of the baby.

Jeanne: Oh, yes. And so I delivered this baby. My baby had been 8 pounds 2 ounces and was a pretty healthy huge baby. This baby came out and I started weeping, “Oh, it’s so small, it’s not going to make it.” So we throw the mom and the baby into our car and take her down to the local hospital after I delivered it. I’m kind of waiting to see what happens and the doctor comes out a few minutes later and goes, “Baby and mom are doing really well,” and I go, “Really? Because that baby was so small.” He weighed 2.2 pounds and ...

Jon: No, he weighed 4.4, he was 2 kilos ...

Jeanne: Oh, 2 kilos.

Jon: She, she ...

Jeanne: Yes, she. It was a little girl. She weighed 2 kilos, which is 4.4 pounds, but the doctor said, “Ooh, this is a big healthy one for these people.” So, I mean, they were just very small physically people.

Jon: And this guy, this doctor, for example, was sent up there too, and he was Bamiléké. The Bamiléké from Western ...

Jeanne: Were huge people.

Jon: They all looked like middle linebackers in the NFL.

Jeanne: Men and women.

Jon: They were the most physically imposing group of people I’ve ever seen. This guy was like chiseled out of black marble, I mean ...

Jeanne: Yeah, huge.

Jon: ... and he was just a regular doctor. When you live in Africa you start saying, "Well, this person's from here and this person's from here and this person's from here and this person's from here," because of their physical characteristics that come from living in isolation and developing certain physical traits because of the people they are.

DePue: But I suspect it goes beyond physical traits. There are personality traits that these groups have, too.

Jon: Yeah, and one of the ways they exhibit that is in childbirth. I mean, there are certain African groups where the women will never utter a sound in childbirth and there are others where they will go on and on and on and make all kinds of noise, but it'll depend on their tradition they have as a group.

Jeanne: These people were, I mean, there were all sorts of ... When you go you're naïve, and so you just go and you try to be honest and say you're sorry when you do social blunders. Like, I thought it would be perfectly normal and natural with every woman I met, ask them, you know, "Do you have children? How many do you have?", only to find out after I was there long enough to be able to understand it, that it was very impolite to ask women how many children they had, because they all lose so many that it's very painful. So you're kind of rubbing their nose in pain. I found them to be warm and friendly. Hospitality is a huge thing in Africa and so you go somewhere ... We finally learned that we would have to like tell them, "No, we're not hungry, we're not ..." whatever, because if they had one chicken they would kill it for you. Then you'd know you were leaving them without, you know, some of their basics and stuff.

DePue: Gregarious, I would assume?

Jon: The Dowaayos would tend to be way more, sort of, shy and withdrawn, I mean, because they've been stomped on by everybody for so long that they weren't exactly going to stand up. They were not the victors and they never had been, and so they expected that whoever came along was going to treat them badly.

Jeanne: Kind of morose. Yeah, stoic and quiet.

Jon: I mean, they were country loners. I mean, when these Fulbé guys came along on their horses, we were living right by some of the oldest mountains in the world. These Dowaayos farmed the side of the hills for their millet and lived up there. There were still people up there living there that nobody had seen. I mean, it was way up there. They farmed on their hands and knees, because they figured out that these guys couldn't get up there with their horses and it was just too much work to come after them. So they said, "We're going ...", you know, it's like, "if I can see the smoke from my neighbor's chimney, I'm outta here. These were reclusive people.

Jeanne: And everybody is subsistence. You're just trying to make ends meet and ...

Jon: But when you live there what happens is, you just see people. I mean, I know that there was a big difference as groups of people between the Bamiléké, who were these big strong successful, wildly successful—I mean, they would take over.

Jeanne: Yeah. Very strong personalities.

Jon: They were always the best educated, they were just good at competing and modern civilization, at every level. The Dowaayos were kind of their opposite. They were really rural and kind of isolated. They lived in supreme isolation. We showed them this picture of—who was the guy? The guy from Chicago? the black leader?—I've told you this story I'm sure, but ...

Jeanne: Martin Luther King?

Jon: No, not Martin Luther King. The guy that's still around.

Jeanne: Jesse Jackson?

Jon: Jesse Jackson. We were sitting out there—I remember it was over by where we hung our clothes—and we were showing them this picture one day and going on and on about—see, we have black people in America, too, and some of them are—look at this guy. We're showing them a picture from Time magazine; it was in color, and they looked at him and they said, "He's as white as you are." (all laughing). "That guy is not black. Who's the black guy in this picture?" you know?

DePue: I'm sure Jesse Jackson might take issue with that. (Jon laughing).

Jon: Everything is just relative. I don't know. I mean, I can't generalize about those guys.

Jeanne: They really cared for us though, because probably the most we found out about it was after our house burnt down. We're kind of bemoaning, we're looking into the windows, whining, crying, carrying on about all the stuff we lost and blah, blah, blah. I guess to go backwards, we had baptized our second boy there and we had a big feast. We had invited all of the school and half the village and everybody was there. We had set up tables and crates with wood on them to make tables and places for people to sit and eat. As the sun came up and the house is still actually kind of burning on some parts of it, we turned around at one point and realized that all of the people who lived near us had come and were sitting there in silence, which is their way of grieving. So they came to share our grief with us and they won my heart. That was, you know ... I already knew I cared a lot for them, but then I knew they cared a lot for us when that happened. So ...

DePue: Well, I've still got an awful lot to ask you about, because we haven't even begun to talk about what your living conditions were there, or what it was like to be a

missionary there and work with them and we're already at close to two hours here ...

Jeanne: Oh wow, okay.

DePue: ... which is about the time that it's generally a good idea to call it quits.

Jeanne: Okay.

DePue: And that means that I probably need to have another session on Cameroon before we even get to Senegal. Is that going to work for the two of you?

Jon: Yeah. It's just hard to ...

Jeanne: You'll have to edit.

Jon: I'm sure glad we went there, I'll tell you that.

Jeanne: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: I am sure my life would be much poorer if I hadn't gone there.

DePue: Well, I think what we'll do when we come back the next time is start with having a baby in Cameroon, having two babies Then you can tell me Jeanne—especially you can tell me—all about what life was like in the house and the lack of amenities. Jon, you can talk about what being a missionary there and trying to bring religion to these people or those kinds of things.

Jon: Yeah. As far as these, you know, what were these people like? One of the problems you have as a rich white guy trying to figure out what they're like is, they're always trying to guess what you want them to be. So, it's really hard to get, you know, there's no profit in them irritating me.

DePue: So they're extremely deferential.

Jon: Yeah, you bet. "What do you want, sir? I'll be whatever you want me to be. You have money and power and you're the local employer and I'm not about to ..." You know, it's like, I'm not going to go running over ... if I ever saw the governor ... well, no, that's not a good illustration. But, they are so eager to please, because you have all the power. One of the hard things for rich white people in Africa to understand is to not exploit that and a lot of people do it unconsciously.

Jeanne: You got to say relatively rich. I mean, we were missionaries, we were not rich by American standards.

Jon: But we were 10 to 20 times richer than they were.

Jeanne: There. There we were unbelievably well to do.

DePue: Well I assume that it gave you a completely different understanding of what really being poor is.

Jeanne: Oh, absolutely.

Jon: That's right. And as a result, for example, when we came back from Africa, our kids never felt underprivileged or, you know, like they were missing out on all kinds of stuff. It does change your perspective on that. But it's hard to have an authentic relationship with people when the power difference is that great.

DePue: Okay. Well, I'm looking forward to the next session, because I think we still have some of the better stories, more important stories about your time in Cameroon. But at that, we'll stop for the evening.

Jeanne: Okay.

(End of interview one)

Interview with Jon and Jeanne Berg

FM-A-L-2007-005.02

Interview # 2: Thursday, June 21, 2007

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Thursday, the 21st of June. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here for part two with Jon and Jeanne Berg; we're here in their home, their residence, the parsonage for the Atonement Lutheran Church in Springfield, Illinois. We talked just a little bit before of how we want to structure this, so Jeanne, I think what we'd like to have you start with—you, not Jon—is life in the bush. So why don't you go ahead and describe the house that you had in Poli.

Jeanne: Well, when we moved there we were kind of shocked to discover that the other missionary family had been given a little budget to fix it up and perhaps he had worked on it, I'm not sure, but when we pulled up to this house there were several doorways with no doors on them and the house was fairly in ruins. It had been condemned by the missionary congregation as a whole about 10 years before, because it was so old. It was made out of mud bricks that had been fired in a wood fire and had a little corrugated tin roof over it with a false ceiling of some sort of tile and consisted of a couple of bedrooms, a kind of common room, a little kitchen, a little dining room, kind of, off of that, and a bathroom of sorts. Now, it was interesting because you could stand in the bathroom and look through the hole in the wall into the kitchen and you could stand in the kitchen and look through the hole in the wall into the bathroom. If someone had said to me, "Your life in Africa is going to depend on the strength of your husband's electrical skills, and carpentry

skills”, and so on, I probably would have never gone, because Jon had been in seminary; he wasn’t up to those things.

DePue: You mean, that wasn’t part of the required instruction in seminary?

Jeanne: No. We had no idea that we were going to have to kind of finish off the construction of our house, or repair of our house.

DePue: This hole between the bathroom and the rest of the house, was that a hole that was designed to be there or just happened to be there?

Jeanne: No. It was a wall that had crumbled over time and needed to be replaced. What had happened was the house had been abandoned. When you pull into the mission station it was maybe a couple of kilometers on the outskirts of the little town of Poli. You’d go out on a dirt road and you’d go kind of curving around a hill and then up this hill and this house was on top of the hill. It had a spectacular view of the mountains and the valley around.

DePue: So you could see the town of Poli from there?

Jeanne: You could see parts of it. It was far enough away and there was enough vegetation and trees that it was not clearly visible, but you could see where it was. We overlooked the housing for the Bible School students in the rear, right below us on the other side of the little road. Then behind us was another missionary house, a little missionary guest house, and the actual church for the Bible School and the Bible School buildings.

DePue: The other missionary house: European or an American couple there?

Jeanne: It was an American couple, the Johnsons. Then there was a guest house and at that point there was nobody actually living in it, though different missionaries would stay there when they would come up to Poli and there was a Peace Corps kid, Kim, who lived there periodically off and on. But anyway, in our house, squatters had been living in it for years, so we could see where they had had open fires on the floor. It had a poured concrete cement floor. One of the odd things about being a missionary that I grew to not like was it’s very communal in that there’s a little booklet that all of the missionaries in Cameroon had that described to you how many beds you were allowed and how many dressers and how many chairs and how many tables and how many bookcases and woe to you if you asked for more.

DePue: Because?

Jeanne: It was just the rule. (DePue (laughing). It is just the way it always had been, so. Anyway, we got up there and, of course, none of that stuff was there yet, though they were busily searching through everyone’s store rooms and through whatever to find some of these things for us so we would have our official allotment of those. I do happen to know that they went down to a day’s drive away to Garoua Boulai to a garbage dump and found the pieces for a wood-burning stove and brought it up and

put it together. Ernie Johnson was a master mechanic, or blacksmith actually. All the neighbors, the Africans, called him the blacksmith, and he, I think, put the thing together so we would have a wood-burning stove to cook on. So we were there for a few days and I was, at that point, six or seven months pregnant and they had already made the decision I could come up and see it and I was allowed to take measurements of, like, the windows and what not. I was driven back down to the Ngaoundere and I was staying in the guest houses and so I was then going to go to the markets and buy material and make bedspreads and make curtains and what not. Now, if somebody had said to me (DePue laughing), "Your house is going to be as beautiful as your skills as a seamstress," I probably wouldn't have gone to Africa either, because I was not prepared for that. But, luckily all those things just required straight lines and so we learned how to do that. And while I was gone Jon worked on the house with a couple of other missionaries who had come over to help with the project. So when I came back a couple of weeks later it, indeed, had doorways, they had repaired the walls, they had put in shelving, they had made counters. Our sink was no longer on the floor, it was in an actual cabinet.

DePue: Was this a rectangular house?

Jeanne: Um, yes. It was a rectangular house. There was a house, the two bedrooms were off of the main room and then on the other side of the main room was that little breakfast room or dining room area, a little bathroom, and then the kitchen, you know, next to each other so they could be seen through the wall at each other.

DePue: Now I'm sure that sounds like a peculiar question, but I know that the natives mostly had circle ...

Jeanne: They lived in round, yes, um-huh.

DePue: And how did your accommodations compare to the people in Poli?

Jeanne: We were, of course, living in deluxe accommodations. Compared to the average person we had a wonderful house. Actually, it was certainly adequate for, you know, they did fix it up to the point where it was fine. It had a generator, which we were allowed to run for a few hours in the evening. We were living fairly near the equator, so the sun came up fairly close to six in the morning and went down fairly close to six in the evening. We got up at six in the morning, it went down six in the evening. So, we could pretty much count on when we were going to need to run the generator. Once in a great while I might decide to turn on the generator and then plug in through, you'd have to put through –what were those things called? –I

Jon: Transformers.

Jeanne: –transformers. To take American appliances into your European current, you'd have to put them through a transformer. So, there would be my little hand beater with the generator going through a transformer and then I might be making some whipped topping for a cake or something.

DePue: But otherwise there was no electricity?

Jeanne: No electricity during the day. After, again, you know, we were kind of prescribed to how many hours we were allowed. He and I were young; we didn't need as much sleep as I do now, and so sometimes we would turn off the generator at the allotted time and read further into the evening. We would have a giant kerosene jug and then there were special lamps like you could put on top of them.

Jon: It was propane.

Jeanne: Oh, propane, okay.

DePue: Was the generator a gas generator?

Jon: The generator was a one cylinder diesel and it ran on diesel fuel, except we could hardly ever get diesel fuel and when we couldn't we would mix 19 liters of kerosene with one liter of used motor oil and shake it up and dump it in. It had this big flywheel with a handle and you'd get that spinning and it would be 100 degrees in there and you'd get it cranking around fast and then you'd flip the lever to close the valve so that there would be compression and if you were lucky the thing would start running. I mean, it had been there ... it was old. I mean, this was the 19th century, the greatest of 19th century technology, and we were permitted to run it from six o'clock until 10 o'clock at night because more would be wasteful. So our refrigerator ran on kerosene; it just burned kerosene in some white man's magical way of making things cold, because we didn't have enough electricity to keep a refrigerator cold, so we had a kerosene-burning refrigerator. We had a bottled gas stove and we had a wood-burning stove.

DePue: How about plumbing Jeanne?

Jeanne: Oh. Well, our toilet flushed usually. They did hook us up to some sort of contraption on our roof and we could pump water up there when the generator was on and then we would have flushing toilets and we would have water that ran in our sink.

DePue: Where'd the water come from?

Jeanne: A well. They had dug a well. The well was there for—I don't know how many years—long before we got there.

DePue: Just for your residence?

Jeanne: It was for the missionary station. We had to protect it to keep it fairly clean, because any water source around there was fair game for everybody. Clean water is hard to find. We had to dig it deep, but 24 hours after it came out of the tap we were able to drink it. First we had to boil it on our wood-burning stove. We constantly had big pans of water boiling on our wood-burning stove—all day, all night. So you were constantly having some burning and then they would be set to

the side to cool and when they were cool enough you could put them through water filters. And, so, I mean water was ... as soon as we got up there when we were traveling from the bush out—came home—we would turn on the water and start boiling and filtering water, because you'd bring enough with you for that first 24 hours. You better have gotten on the ball and gotten your water ready to drink for when you ran out with what you brought up.

DePue: So all of us spoiled lazy Americans, who just expect the water to be there when you turn the faucet on.

Jeanne: Uh-huh. And, now the other, we did not have a running shower, so one of the more unusual things we had was a shower bucket; they are specially designed. I suppose they are a camping type thing. You would take the well [water] from our wood-burning stove. We would empty it into that shower bucket and let it cool down to the proper temperature. Then the two of us—luckily we loved each other enough that we would share that bucket, one after another—we would get our showers and that was it for warm showers. When we had guests, one or the other or both of us had to give up the hot shower so that our guest could have the warm water, unless we wanted to boil more water to do that. When we had children, we could not fill from the tap a bathtub or the sink or anything to bathe our children in, because of the diseases that are in the water. So we boiled and filtered the water I used to bathe our children, because we would set them in it. It was okay for us to bathe in the water that wasn't boiled and filtered, because it just ran over our bodies. We did not sit in it like a bath; we let it run over our bodies and away, so we couldn't get the diseases you could get from water there.

DePue: When you say filtered, how did they filter the water?

Jeanne: We bought—I think they came out of Switzerland, you know—

Jon: Katydyn. They're called Katydyn filters.

Jeanne: Yeah. You could buy small ones that you could take out with you if you were in the bush and clean out a small, you know, canteen full or a bucket full of water. We had giant ones that you'd pour a large pan of water through.

DePue: Okay. But you didn't have to do anything like add chlorine or any of the other additives to the water to purify it?

Jeanne: You could get that and you could use it. We did, for instance, add, what was it to our water? Chlorine. We did add chlorine to our water when we washed our vegetables, because you can amœbas from lettuce and other vegetables if they are not. So we would, actually, wash every lettuce leaf we would, because people in Africa used night soil, which is human waste, to fertilize. They may. We never knew if they had or not with a particular piece of lettuce, so we would soak each leaf in this chlorine and water and then rinse them and then dry them and then eat them. We didn't do that that much, because it was just too much work.

DePue: Yeah. Well, let's talk a little bit about the food that you had there.

Jeanne: The mission group together had kind of a collective store where they bought and imported foods from America. We got cans of oatmeal and powdered milk, and some things like Jello. A few things that we imported into the country. We were like a cooperative; we paid into it and then we could buy those sorts of things. We would have to go down to Ngaoundéré, the mission city where we had a little missionary store there. Otherwise, we had to buy things on the market. So, for instance, my most famous egg trip. I went down to the market. I had these giant tins where I had had powdered milk. I had used the powdered milk so I had these big tins. I would try to get every Time and Newsweek magazine because tearing those pages in half makes the perfect size to wrap an egg. So, we'd go to the market, you would float your eggs in water at the market to make sure they weren't rotten and then you would bring them home.

DePue: The rotten ones floated?

Jeanne: Rotten ones floated. So then you would come home with your eggs and then I would wrap each one in a half of Newsweek or a Time magazine page and then packed them into these tins and then pack the tins with more paper, newspaper, whatever, and pack them in big boxes and haul my eggs up. In my most famous trip, I had bought 120 eggs and that was going to last us about a month. Ninety nine of them were broken by the time we went over the rough roads to get up to Poli. I was just devastated because I had to bake everything from scratch. We ate eggs for fresh protein because we could not get a lot of other fresh protein, so I was devastated. So we ate omelets and scrambled eggs and stuff like, because you better believe we ate them, (DePue laughing), we didn't throw them out. But we didn't have very many to last. So, one thing that I encouraged was all the local ladies: I asked them to bring eggs and let it be known I would buy eggs from anybody who would bring them. The going rate for an egg was 10 cfa, which is the currency that they had there in Cameroon. So the ladies would come up and, for instance, if there were three I would try to give them a quarter or a 25 piece and a 5 piece. They could not get it. They did not have the education required to understand that a 25 and a 5 equal 30, which is the same as three 10 pieces, 10 cfa pieces. So, I was constantly then having to save 10 cfa so that I could buy any eggs that people came. So, I would buy them, rotten or not, just to encourage them to keep bringing me eggs. I also, by the way, encouraged everyone that I would buy any snake, dead snake, that anybody would bring to my door, I would buy them to encourage all snakes to be dead snakes. (Jeanne and Mark laughing).

DePue: It wasn't because it was a delicious delicacy?

Jeanne: No. Every time anybody brought a dead snake, I would buy it. It was just my way of making sure everybody cleaned out the crop.

DePue: So apparently there were snakes around the house?

Jeanne: Oh, yeah. I know that a missionary woman, what was her name?, Harriet, Harriet Stovner, had lived in our house before us and she had had the experience of sitting at where our dining room table was and having a snake crawl across her legs. It was common practice for us to, at night—well, first of all, you'd have to take on your bed—with those wonderful bedspreads I had made myself—you would take and you would have to sweep them and get all of the bird poop, or the bat poop off them.

DePue: Bat guano.

Jeanne: Yeah, yeah. So you would scrape that off and then there was another purpose. Then I would slowly go over the bed with my hand to make sure there weren't any lumps in the bed, because lumps in your bed would mean snakes, or could mean snakes.

DePue: Now, did you learn this the hard way?

Jeanne: Nope. Luckily I had heard this from other people who have found out the hard way. So you would take and you would smooth down the cover on your bed or wherever you were sitting. I would always smooth down the cushion to make sure there wasn't any extra bumps. And like, for instance, when you went to put on your shoes, you would shake them out in case there were bugs or snakes crawling inside of those.

DePue: What kind of snakes?

Jon: Bad ones. Mambas. They had green mambas and cobras.

DePue: Wow.

Jon: And vipers. They called a lot of them vipers.

DePue: Everything you mentioned so far is poisonous.

Jeanne: Oh yeah. They would have what they called three-step snakes. I don't remember which one, if it was a mamba, a viper, or whatever, but supposedly, if you got bit you would get three steps and die. I think that might have been an exaggeration. I wasn't really ready to try that. (DePue laughing). Um, it might sound mean, like I said, I bought every dead snake that ever came. Even though my husband is allergic to dogs, we got a dog because I figured a dog was expendable and my family wasn't, and so we always had dogs around. Dogs do repel snakes and dogs also find snakes and would go for them. We also had a cat for the same reason.

DePue: Was the dog successful a few times?

Jeanne: I know for a fact the dog in Senegal that we had, found probably a couple of dozen snakes on our property. When we came back after having been gone a year, they had found several dozen in the couple of weeks before we moved back into our

house coming back from England. We retrieved our dog from where we had him being kept for that year and after a week of being there, there were no longer any snakes in our yard again, so it was very effective. Now why, I'm not sure.

DePue: But again, I can't imagine that this is all part of the instruction before you went over to Africa.

Jeanne: Oh, no. Nobody said you are going to be fighting snakes, no; no, no, no, no.

DePue: Or have to wrap each one of your eggs in a piece of paper so you can transport them back and forth.

Jeanne: Yeah, okay. So you'd go to the market and buy your eggs and you would also go to the market and, there would be beef, for instance, hanging there. And, so that cow had been killed that day, so it was not like the beef we buy in America. You had to take and you had to process it and age it yourself. So, we would go to the market and first of all, it's hanging there coated with flies, so I'd try to find the piece that was less coated with flies and looked fresh and the butcher's stand looked cleanest and what-not. Eventually we found people that we trusted more, or whatever. So you'd go, you'd buy your hunk of meat, and you would take it home. Then I would cut it into refrigerator handleable sizes. So you would take and cut down this big piece of beef into pieces that you could slide into your refrigerator. So in the guest house in Ngaoundéré, we would have this beef taking up all of our refrigerator for several days, aging. And one of the things we had brought out was a hamburger grinder and so, when it had aged we would sit and grind up all of our hamburger. Another thing I had never realized that we would have to be a butcher and figure out how to cut steaks and how to cut roasts and whatever. So, we would cut them up and then we had—Jon I think mentioned before—brought out a million years' worth of supply of Tupperware; I found a size that if I stacked them in my freezer area up in Poli I could get a whole bunch of them in and it fit a quarter of a pound of meat. And we found out that that little freezer compartment was big enough that I could put in a quarter of a pound of meat for the two of us for each day we were up there for about a month, month and a half. One of those rules that we had is we were not supposed to come down to shop more than every couple of months, but as I was pregnant or nursing or had a baby, we broke the rule and came more like every month or six weeks. We had to take the wrath of the other missionaries, because we were breaking that rule, but I insisted that I had to have fresh meat and I had to have fresh vegetables and fruit, because I was pregnant ...

DePue: Sure.

Jeanne: ... or nursing. Anyway, so, if somebody came to visit us, we might take out a couple of days' worth of meat to serve at that meal because, if you had three or four people, a quarter of a pound of meat wasn't going to go very far. So then, we would have to give up meat for a few meals or a few days, because we had served it to other people, but that was just part of, whatever. The good thing is, as your meat supply went down, then you could put space in for ice cubes and then you could

have cold stuff to drink and you could also make homemade ice cream, so. When we didn't have meat we had ice cream.

DePue: Well, if you're having ice cream it sounds like you had to have a supply of milk.

Jeanne: Powdered. You can make ice cream with powdered milk by turning on that generator at night and whipping up stuff. Actually there are cookbooks that are specially made cookbooks for missionaries, to make everything from scratch.

DePue: Well, Jon, Jeanne mentioned a couple of things, alluded to a couple of things, like you had to clean the bedspread off from all the bat guano. So, were there bats on the inside?

Jon: The room ceiling was like eighth inch Masonite with little wooden things trying to hold it together and it was very flimsy. The roof itself was this corrugated aluminum on a wooden frame. It was like an umbrella that sat over the whole house; it didn't really connect to the house.

Jeanne: It gave it shade.

Jon: Yeah, but it shaded it and it provided wind, though air could get up under it, but it was also the perfect place for bats to live and the place was full of bats. So every day the bat guano would sift through the cracks in this ceiling and it would just be everywhere. I mean, one time the missionary down the hill decided he was going to get rid of the bats in his house. He had a newer house and he could seal it tighter under the eaves. We could never do that in ours, which was probably better. So he tore out one of these 4x8 panels in the living room over the dining room table, or in the living room and the dining room and living room were together. Jeanne was gone and I was eating with them. He had a pellet gun and we were eating beans and ducking and these bats are flying everywhere, because they are coming out of this hole in this roof. And while we were sitting there eating, he shot 22 bats; he was a great shot. And every time it would land on the wall, we would all duck and he would blast away with his pellet gun and there were just bat parts all over the place. But, I don't know that you could ever really get rid of them. I mean, they are just everywhere. But, the thing Jeanne didn't mention, too, is all of this was like pioneer living and it's just so much work. I mean, just making it through the day. We had two servants. When we were discussing this in missionary orientation, we said, "Well, wait a minute. We're Americans. We do things for ourselves. We're not evil Europeans that are going to have servants and stuff. We're not that kind of people." Well, you get over there ...

Jeanne: We're just going to do this ourselves.

Jon: When we got to Poli, on the front porch of our house, before we moved in, was a line of men, not women, men. I said, "Who are these guys?" And they said, "Well, they're the guys that want jobs and you're going to hire two or we're going to stand here until you do. You know, you need a cook and you need somebody to wash your clothes." All of our clothes got washed by hand in plastic tubs, like you'd

carry your laundry down to the basement, only these were more heavy duty. They'd wash, rinse, wring them out by hand, and hang them up on the line in the African sun and so the stuff would just kind of start dissolving because of ...

Jeanne: And our babies' diapers were boiled and ...

Jon: Because they were cloth diapers.

Jeanne: Yeah, cloth diapers, boiled and then washed.

Jon: Samnugo Marcel was the name of our washer guy and that was his job and then he would wash our house every day. The floor would get ...

Jeanne: He literally washed the floors and the tables and then he was the one who washed all of our dishes so many times a day during the dusty season.

Jon: Because we just washed stuff constantly. Then Barmiro, Reuben was our cook and he'd worked for French people before and he knew how to make bread ...

Jeanne: From scratch.

Jon: ... and buns and all kinds of stuff. So, it was basically Jeanne and me and these two guys putting in tons and tons of work just to have kind of what approached a European lifestyle.

Jeanne: Very simple life. Yeah. In the morning, other than when I had children—I took care of my children—I cooked, took care of children, and managed our house, literally, with those two men helping me; otherwise I would never have been able to get through it all.

Jon: Yeah, and quickly you learned well they expected you to hire people and we would have been ridiculously stupid not to. And then they say, "Well how can you have people in your house all the time?" Well, you get used to it. I mean, people were just around all the time.

Jeanne: They would be there in the morning waiting for us when we woke up and we'd open the door and they'd come in and start working. They might take off some time in the high noon after lunch and then come back in and help with the evening meal and then go home after evening meal. I mean, like, Reuben came in and he would cook. Like, he learned how to make instant oatmeal or, you know, boil oatmeal up for me and make the bread, but it was so complicated, because the ants were such a problem. I had to take a 55 gallon barrel and move it away from the walls and the counter so it was freestanding. Then I had to put a giant bucket of, or a great big bowl, huge tin bowl of water, keep it filled with water. Then I would have two tin cans upside down, standing outside of the water with a wooden board on there and then on top of that board I would pile tons of Tupperware: that's where I would keep my bread and cookies and cake and stuff like that, because I couldn't keep ants out of even closed Tupperware. They would not be able to cross the

water barrier. So I had to take and do that to keep my cooking or whatever. Reuben did learn some simple recipes. He knew how to make a few dishes on his own. But, again, this was a very intelligent man. He had no education. So he did not understand measurements; he could not double a recipe or halve a recipe. I did finally –I mean, it got to the point where I wrote out simple, like picture recipes. I would put a little cup sign and I marked all of mine like the half cup was a 2 and a third cup was a 3, so I'd have 2 and then I'd have two pictures of those 3 cups, so that was two-thirds of a cup of. Then I'd have the picture of flour, or sugar, or whatever, so he could take and figure out how to follow a recipe when I wasn't there to tell him exactly what to do for each step. I did learn a little bit of Pulaar and I'm embarrassed to say it was things like, "lootu lesdi, lootu limce". Wash the floor; wash the clothes, do this, do that."

DePue: But I suspect as jobs in Poli go, few got better than these?

Jeanne: I know that they were very, very appreciative of them and we tried to, you know, maintain their dignity. I think they really tried to maintain ours—you know, they treated us very well. Again, when our house burnt down they were right there with everybody showing sympathy.

DePue: Well, I want to get to that in much more detail so ... Jon, why don't you tell us a little bit more about your transportation while you were there. I know you've mentioned the vehicles you had briefly, but ...

Jon: Well, we initially had a diesel powered Land Rover that was old and it kept breaking down. I kept pouring water into it until I managed to blow the head off it, because if you pour water into a hot engine long enough you'll ... So then we had to take it apart ...

Jeanne: We were on the way to the hospital.

Jon: I don't remember.

Jeanne: Down to Ngaoundéré to have our baby.

DePue: We'll take the story up here a bit.

Jon: Okay, but then we rebuilt the thing. But eventually they bought a Land Cruiser, which was brand new and had a big engine. But the way ... missionary economy was kind of wacky. They had a mileage rate and if you drove it for anything other than official business, you had to pay mileage and it was really expensive, so nobody wanted to do that. So what the missionaries would do would buy their own vehicle. So we bought a 404 station wagon and then they would drive that and get reimbursed by the mission and leave their mission vehicle parked, because they could make money driving the mission, their 404 ...

Jeanne: Personal.

Jon: Personal. So we had this four wheel drive monster and it always just, it always... I'm intrigued by the fact that Americans drive around on perfectly good roads with four wheel drive, whereas we drove everywhere through Africa on terrible roads, with our two wheel drive Peugeot station wagon (DePue laughing) and did just fine and it had a tape player. It was a great old car. It had a stick shift, you know, on the column. Everything was stick shift over there because automatic transmissions would burn themselves out trying to drive on the sand and stuff. They're just not made for that kind of stuff. We had this cassette player in there and we listened to the same 10 tapes over. So Africa has ... *Welcome to the Hotel California* ... (all laughing) we always think we're roaring down across the prairie with the Eagles singing *Welcome to the Hotel California*. (laughing)

Jeanne: One of my best memories—if you talk about what is one of your favorite things about Africa—it is he and I driving along the road; now we would have Africans in the back and they would throw up because they weren't used to cars. So we couldn't stand to have our windows rolled up and have air conditioning on; it smelled too bad. So we would have to roll down the windows and I would tie my long hair up and put it under a babushka. So then we had this wind whipping through the car and *Hotel California* blasting away (laughing) and us singing along with it. I'm not sure what everybody thought about us, but ...

Jon: Yeah, we didn't care. They thought we were nuts anyway.

DePue: You were a free ride, that's what they were thinking at that time.

Jon: That's right. And one time we were going to Garoua, which was like two hours north of us, this capital city up there in the region, and we saw this wild pig coming across the desert there as we were headed up; it was all desert up there. We thought, "Wait a minute, fresh meat." We never get pork, you know. So we thought, we timed it: we had a machete in the back and we decided if we drove at the right speed—I was driving—I could hit this thing, kill it, hop out with the machete, make sure it was dead, we would haul it home and eat it. And as I got closer and closer, Jeanne says, "This hog's looking awful big." (laughing) It was probably 300 pounds. (laughing)

Jeanne: We had the windows rolled down and my arm was hanging out the window and all of a sudden we started to think twice about this crazy mission and so Jon slams on his brake and the ...

Jon: I thought I sped up.

Jeanne: No, no. You slammed on your brake. The name of this animal in French is phacochère, so this poor phacochère comes ... he at that time was going to ... he was trying to time it so he could go behind us and he ended up, as Jon slammed on the car, hitting our car head on, horn right underneath my elbow, sticking out of the car, and he goes, blam against the car and goes rolling off onto the side of the road and then down into the ditch. Well, like he said, we had been hauling a machete

back; somebody had asked us to buy a machete for him in the market. We get out and we're creeping along the roadside with our machete looking for the thing and then we were looking down there and we don't see it and then we finally go, "Wounded phacochère, ohhh!" (Jon laughing) So we go running back to the car and jump in and drive off.

DePue: The great white hunters.

Jon: That's right.

Jeanne: We didn't get our pork that time.

Jon: That was just fresh meat; that's what you start thinking about after awhile.

DePue: Well you told me also the other day about another incident with Nigel in the car with you.

Jon: Oh, good grief. We were in our 404 and we were going somewhere and we were in this part of the country where there is basically no people. I mean, there were square kilometers where they listed the population density on the map as zero, but for some reason they built this monstrously wonderful concrete 4 lane road. I don't remember even, were we going to Yaoundé, or where were we going? Nigel, the anthropologist, was with us. He never drove.

Jeanne: We were on vacation down in the south; we went down to the southern part of Cameroon for a vacation and we took him with. We were actually staying in a bunch of different missionary guest houses down there. We were driving up between ...

Jon: Tibati. It was by Tibati. Tibati.

Jeanne: Where there were Finnish?

Jon: Norwegian missionaries.

Jeanne: Norwegian missionaries it happened to be. We are driving along the road and I am probably 7 months pregnant with my second child and I've got—this is before there were rules about—well, we had the backseat full of people and stuff and so I had my first child sitting on my lap, no car seat, but I was seat belted in, he wasn't, and Nigel says, "Well, I'll drive for a while." So he hops into the driver's seat and Nigel and I are in the front and Jon's in the back trying to snooze a little bit. It was getting to be dusk and it was getting to be harder to see what was on the road.

Jon: It was raining like crazy.

Jeanne: So visibility was a little bit less than perfect and we came across a section now. It happens that when trucks break down on this big road they are afraid of other trucks plowing into the back of them. So what they do is put big boulders out into the road

to slow down other trucks so they don't bang into the back of them. So, obviously, a truck had broken down and put the boulders out and had then repaired itself and took off and left the boulders in the road. So, as Nigel and I are barreling along we come across—and I remember him and I having a brief discussion; “What is that in the road?”—and it was too late; we were upon it and we drove right over this giant boulder. It took out the bottom of our car, it took out the drive shaft and so all of a sudden Nigel was driving a car with no steering left and we were barreling along at enormous—probably 60 miles an hour or something—as we just happened to be at a point where they had dynamited through a little hill and so it was one of those sheer cliff things on either side of us ...

DePue: Going up or going down?

Jeanne: We were heading up a little ...

Jon: They were up from us. We were down in the bottom and they were up on the sides.

Jeanne: Yeah. We were at the bottom and there were sheer cliffs up on either side of us. Anyway, so he was sitting there staring and he and I were looking at each other. I've got my little kids and I remember screaming, “I'm going to lose two of them at once!” Our back wheels swerved to the side and by luck and God's will, they both sank into the track, or the water ditch that ran along the side at the same time and so we rode the ditch up and over the hill just like we were on a roller coaster, or on a track.

DePue: The car is going sideways.

Jon: Sideways, yeah.

Jeanne: Sideways up the hill.

Jon: With the rear wheels in the ditch.

Jeanne: If we had had one wheel dropped in there we would have flipped and hit that wall. We should by all means and purposes be dead. Now, Matt and I hit our heads against the thing and, you know, we were pretty banged up, but we survived. It was very, very lucky, and then we happened to have the luck of being near this Tibati Norwegian missionary station where the missionary there actually trained mechanics! It was a little mechanic school. So they came and hauled our car there and actually repaired it. We got it back a few—I don't know—was it weeks or months later?

Jon: And sold it.

DePue: Maybe the guys in the mechanics school were the ones who put the rocks out. (Jon laughing).

Jeanne: That could be. Well, anyway, so like we got hauled there and the missionaries took wonderful care of us and our little souvenirs and stuff we had we stored at their little thing. So when they sent our car up they packed it full of our little souvenirs and our clothes and what-not that we couldn't take back with us, cause I think we had to take a train then.

Jon: Traveling in Cameroon was, and I would imagine still is a high risk activity. I mean, we had a disproportionate number of missionaries we heard of from other missions than our own in the decades they'd been there, who'd been killed. I mean this one guy, the Lutheran Brother mission, the one guy we knew pretty well, his father was killed and his mother was killed when they got in an argument over a tree with their neighbor that had been carrying on. They were old school missionaries in Garoua. They'd been having this feud for decades and finally one day the neighbor went nuts, came over with a knife and killed them both. And then his brother and his wife were killed roaring through Cameroon on a dirt road like you always did ...

Jeanne: Well, it was on the main road and they hit ... they ran into the ...

Jon: They ran into the ...

Jeanne: ... back of a truck parked on the road ...

Jon: ... in the middle of the night ...

Jeanne: ... in the middle of the night without lights on.

Jon: Just broken down in the middle of the road and you're driving faster than your headlights and they were killed. I mean, people were killed a lot over there.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about mail and/or telephones and/or lack thereof.

Jeanne: Oooh, ohhh. Well, telephones is really easy. There just weren't very many. We certainly didn't have one where we lived and we were there 2-1/2 years and we made a total of 3 phone calls. The first one was, "We have Matthew, he's been born." The second was, "Michael's been born" and the third one was, "Our house burnt down; we're coming home." As far as mail went, we would mail a letter and it would take about 2 to 3 weeks to go to America and then 2 or 3 weeks to come back and so you had—you know like if you asked a question you had about a month to get your response back. The mail in Poli—this is kind of a sad story to me—but it would come in on Friday afternoons. The postman and some other people from Poli would get into the sous-préfet's car and they would go up to Garoua and they would pick up the mail and beer. Depending on how much beer they drink as they drove back, the mail might get back by Friday afternoon or it might come in on Saturday. But anybody who was anybody who might get mail made their way down to the post office and we all just kind of gathered there on Friday afternoon hoping upon hope that the mail truck would come in. When it came in we would all cheer and yell. The postman would open the door and he would stand there and he would

hand out letters, kind of like I envision in movies where they're handing it out to the troops or something.

DePue: Mail call and troops.

Jeanne: Yeah, right.

DePue: So this is a social occasion?

Jeanne: It was a huge social occasion. Like, one time I had a girlfriend in France after my first child was born—he was a couple of months old—and my girlfriend sent some baby clothes down for me and one of these Friday afternoons get a box and you can imagine how exciting this is. I got a box, I open it up, and inside the box is all of this wrapping paper and a list of baby clothes that had been wrapped by that wrapping paper, but they had all disappeared. Coincidentally the postman's wife had a baby that was about the same age and had outfits that they would wear on those Friday afternoons when we were down there that were just like the description on that piece of paper.

DePue: How about that. (Jon laughing).

Jeanne: So, I couldn't really say too much, you know, because I knew, you know, like if I made a big deal I wouldn't get any mail ever. So then I also had contacted a girlfriend and she made me some little cotton dresses with a zipper in the front so that I could nurse my baby. I had her design them specially and they were kind of a shirtwaist thing so they had belts. So, again, I got a box on another Friday and I was so happy and I open it up and there is this list describing the dresses and a bunch of belts, but there are no dresses in there. And, coincidentally, the postman's wife had dresses that matched the belts, so I could never, you know, say anything about it because I would never get any mail again. I had this secret—I know this isn't very nice of me—but I had this secret thought that the last thing I was going to do when I left Poli for the very last day was I was going to go up to the postmaster's wife and hand her these belts and say, "Here, these match your dress. I think you could like these," just to let her know I knew.

DePue: That doesn't sound such a bad thing to do.

Jeanne: Ohhh, well, anyway, so ...

DePue: I had no idea. Well this gives me the impression, I can't ever say the natives' name, the Dowie...

Jon & Jeanne: The Dowaayos ...

DePue: The Dowaayos. Did they have a different notion of property?

Jon: I doubt that he was Dowaayo.

Jeanne: No, he was one of those ...

Jon: He was government employee and he was from somewhere else.

Jeanne: He got affected there and, you know, probably was pretty angry or whatever.

DePue: The only reason I mention that is because I think Nigel did mention that they had this notion that property wasn't the same sense that we would have.

Jeanne: No, not at all.

DePue: It's more of a communal thing that if you had something and they needed it, they would help themselves.

Jeanne: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Jon: And Jeanne was talking about how you had to be careful. For example, asking a woman how many children she had. And the other thing you learned, which is very odd to us, is you don't walk up to somebody and say, "Your baby is so beautiful," because if you do that, that will attract what they would call the evil eye; it would incite the jealousy of the spirits and then they might come along and take that child if it is so wonderful. So, you would say, "Well, I see you have a baby, hmmm," you know. But you wouldn't say anything wonderful about it, because it would be asking for trouble.

DePue: That's got to be a hard thing to break yourself of though.

Jon: You have to learn. There are reasons that people do what they do. It's just that they do different things than we do because they've got different reasons.

Jeanne: So, the way that kind of works, like, if I had a home and I had saved a little money and I had finally gotten together enough money to buy a transistor radio or a bicycle, if somebody from my family came and thought they needed a transistor radio or a bicycle, they could say to me, "I really need that bicycle." It would be pretty hard not to allow that person to have it. So, one of the things that occurred there—again, I've told you women didn't have a lot of rights—what they did have was, if you owned jewelry, that was yours and nobody else could take that from you. This was particularly true in Senegal, but was also true in Cameroon. So, a woman would try to buy jewelry with any extra money she had because nobody would come—it was not polite for a family member or anybody to come and ask for that piece of jewelry. So, it worked like a bank. When you had money you bought jewelry and you would wear extra bracelets or what-not and when you needed money you would sell off your jewelry.

Jon: And part of it is, it was very hard to refuse a family member anything, because people weren't thinking of themselves as individuals who need to triumph over their neighbors, they're all in this together. And one of the problems with that is if you wanted to get ahead, what people needed to do was basically leave home, go

where you don't have any relatives. Like in Senegal there were tons of Mauritians who ran little stores. In fact, our kids once asked us, "Does everybody in Mauritania run a store?" because all the Mauritians they knew ran stores. I said, "No, just the ones who come to Senegal all run stores." But they could gather up and work and save money because they weren't supporting their huge extended family back in Mauritania. And the other part that this family connectedness causes is things that appear to us to be ridiculously corrupt—like if you're a church treasurer in charge of taking care of the church's money or the seminary's money—one year they had to shut down the whole operation of that church, the national church basically, for a year 'cause the president and the treasurer stole all the money and gave it to their families. And from our point of view ...

Jeanne: But their families asked.

Jon: And from our point of view that's just terrible. From their point of view it's like, "Wait a minute. What am I supposed to do here? As a man I can't refuse my family." So, there are different values that cause many different problems and it's a complex social reality. One of the reasons it might be harder for people in Africa to get ahead is you start getting ahead, you get a job in a big city, you're successful, you're working for a bank, you're making big money, and all of a sudden 6 of your nephews move in.

Jeanne: I was going to say that one of the things that happens is people live where there are no schools so they will send their school age children to live with relatives in towns where there are schools. If you happen to have a kid who is a little bit smarter than the others, then you might end up sending them to another relative who lives somewhere where there is even a better educational opportunity.

DePue: All of this makes it sound like it's a great disincentive to be successful and that has a lot to do with the ills that still plague Africa and always have plagued them.

Jon: Well, another way to look at it is there's a great sense of shared social responsibility for one another. Maybe that's why they survived. Maybe that's why they've been able to live this long; they actually take care of each other.

DePue: Well, it sounds like a fascinating place to visit. (Jon laughing). I'm not sure I want to move there.

Jeanne: The system, you know, the whole system works like that. For instance, if you end up having to go to the hospital—and this occurred, we saw this happen to people in Cameroon. This happened to us in reality in Senegal. If you have to go to the hospital, you have to provide your own toilet paper, you have to provide your own food, your own water, and you need to have somebody from your family there taking care of you. For instance, you asked, "Did your dog find things?" Well, one of the things that we wanted that do to keep away from us were rabid animals; one time they brought a kid to us who had been bit by a rabid dog. You know, everyday

people came to us wanting us to help them, wanting us to give them things. I mean, one day a guy came to Jon and asked him for a whole herd of cows, because he wanted a dowry to buy a wife and we, of course, didn't have a whole herd of cows to buy. We often couldn't do everything people would ask us for, but we would choose to do things at times. This young boy, when he came to our door and needed to be hauled down to the hospital and given the rabies shots to save his life, we took that on. We decided, "Okay, this is one we are going to help." And so, we had to take him and we knew we had to take a family member to take care of him. So, I don't remember, somebody else from his family, probably a parent, we took with him and he had to have these shots over a series of several weeks or months and so we left money for them to be able to keep going in the hospital while in between these shots, while they are awaiting and they were taking care of him. By the time we came down a month later and stop by the hospital and see how he is doing, there were probably 30 people from his family living at the hospital with him "to take care of him. Of course, they were living off of the money we had left for this little boy. That was just part of the system. I mean, you know, this unfortunate thing happened to this little boy and because we chose to give the family some money, all of a sudden 30 other people were there, you know, benefitting from it.

Jon: Yeah, one of my most lasting and profound impressions of Africa is that out there, especially in Poli where people were so poor, people were able to live dignified lives in conditions where I wouldn't have been able to and that always deeply impressed me. They were gracious people, they made the best of their situations. They had no choice, but they managed to live with a kind of grace and dignity and kindness and decency. I mean, they weren't, you know, just sort of noble primitives, they were just as messed up as anybody else, but they lived in a very difficult place and they had lives there. You send me out there to do what they were doing, I probably would have died within 90 days because I just wouldn't have been able to cope, but they could and I respected them for that.

DePue: One of the last things I had on my list here for life in the bush is going to be the perfect transition, I think, for having a baby and that's medicine and doctors and things like dentists. So, Jeanne, why don't you start us on that one too.

Jeanne: Well. Like Jon had said last time we talked, they would not even allow me to go to the hospital for the first week, because they were afraid that I'd see the hospital, freak out, and get on a plane and leave. They were pretty close. I was very tempted, though I had made the decision in France, "Okay, I'm going to go to Africa pregnant so the decision has been made. I'm going to have a baby there." And, I guess I was probably naïve and somehow or other I had enough faith that so many women had babies in Africa, why would I think that it would be any harder for me or why would I think that this is something that couldn't be done. So, we met the American missionary. There was a nurse named Myrtle Noss, and she was going to be the person who would deliver my baby and she kind of took care of me. We would come down once a month, once every 6 weeks, and I would visit with her. I met a Norwegian midwife, who, if Myrtle needed some help, she would be available and then there was a Norwegian doctor who would be there as kind of the

last call. I did have doctor appointments with him during the last couple of months of my waiting to have my baby. The rule was that you came down to the mission station and stayed near the mission hospital for 2 weeks before your due date. So that's the famous trip where we were heading down 2 weeks before my due date. Remember Jon was talking about that Ngaoundéré is on a large plateau and you go down this cliff side called the falaise? Well, we were trying to go up that cliff side when our car finally—we threw water on it—and it finally burnt up our car on the way into the hospital.

DePue: That's where you blew your head gasket?

Jeanne: Yeah.

Jon: No, I cracked the head.

DePue: You cracked the head, okay.

Jeanne: Cracked the head.

Jon: It's much worse than blowing a head gasket.

DePue: Oh, my.

Jeanne: So we had to have somebody haul us in for the last few. Actually, I think he might have kept pouring water over something and I think we kind of, like, eased our way into the mission station. I remember something like, it just died right there, never to move again, or something. Okay. So, we were there then 2 weeks before and we started waiting. We lived in the guest house, very nice. We waited our 2 weeks.

DePue: We being Jon as well?

Jeanne: Jon and I, yeah. Yeah, Jon got to come with me because we were 4 hours away in good weather and if there had been a rainstorm or something there was no way I could call him on the phone and say, "I'm in labor, come on in." So, he was there with me waiting and we waited and we waited and we went past the due date and then we started to get in cars and I'd have him take me out on those roads that, what is that ...?

Jon: Washboard.

Jeanne: Washboard roads. So I would have, like, 3 hour Braxton-Hicks contractions 'cause he'd have me on those roads. In other words, I was trying to like induce my baby. I had jumped off chairs. I ran around. I was sitting there thinking, "This is getting ridiculous." I was 2 weeks late, 3 weeks late, 4 weeks late.

DePue: Oh my gosh.

Jeanne: I'm going to the doctor and I'm saying, "Please, do something." Well, anyway, finally at 6 weeks after my due date the doctor said, "I think we're going to induce your baby." So, yay, I think we finally decided to induce the baby.

DePue: So you had been there for 2 months now.

Jeanne: We had been there 2 months waiting for this baby, yes. Now, I had a friend who was a missionary, Jackie Blue, and she had had 3 babies before me, but she had had a baby a few years before me. So she decided she is going to teach me Lamaze, because nobody else knew Lamaze out there and so she and I had had a few sessions where she was—Jackie doing Lamaze breathing with me—and the two of us are Lamaze breathing, whistling away and trying to do this. She was going to be at the delivery and Jon was going to be at the delivery, and Myrtle Noss; she is a fabulous nurse, she's my favorite nurse ever. And so we go up and they hook me up to some Pitocin and start inducing the baby. Now, let me describe the room. It is a room. It's got windows to the outside and there are no window panes; there are curtains over this window. So periodically during this whole thing, Africans would open up the curtains and peer their head into the room. (DePue laughing). Their heads would appear kind of at my right shoulder. So this window was right there at my right shoulder. So there are all these heads appearing to see what's going on in there. The sink was lying on the floor. There was no running water in this hospital thing and there was a toilet down the hall somewhere, I don't know. So once in a while I would toddle on down to the—I think it was a flush toilet; I don't remember for sure actually. Now, some wonderful doctor in America had donated his old delivery table to the mission. It had arrived in pieces and the missionary people had put it together as best they could and then they were saving it for me because I was the first missionary who was going to be having a baby after that thing arrived. It had 3 pieces, so the part behind your shoulders and the part behind your back neatly fitted together, but the part where your bottom was and your legs were didn't, so they couldn't quite get it to fit, so my butt hung down in the middle of that section there. So there I was laying on this bed being induced and they couldn't get the Pitocin right and I had a horrible ... you know, too much Pitocin. My girlfriend and Jon and the nurse are having a picnic meal. They brought up lunch and coffee and a waiter, whatever.

DePue: Well, what's a guy to do while you're doing this?

Jeanne: Yeah. So eventually, it was more than Myrtle Noss thought she was comfortable with and that was because I had had too much Pitocin in my body. I was contracting all over and it made her nervous so she got in the Norwegian midwife who said this was more than she could manage, and so they got the Norwegian doctor in. To make a long story short, I'm finally to the point where I'm getting ready to have the baby and so they put in the stirrups for your feet and one was there and one was about 6 inches higher on the other side. They put in the things for my arms and the first time I grab a hold of them they come flying out and out the window. (DePue laughing). So, they weren't working.

DePue: The thing that flew out the window was what?

Jeanne: Was the hand grips for the women to pull onto when you get ready to push. So I'm getting ready to push and I'm pushing and pushing and it's not working. He was pretty large—he was 8 pounds, 2 ounces—so the doctor finally had them throw on the hospital generator and they vacuum extracted him out. So, yea, he finally was born. Again, like I was saying, people were walking in ... “Who's this?”, “What's going on?” ...looking in through the window. I laid there for 2 hours. They made me stay 2 hours and that's all, then you get to get up and you get to leave the hospital. And one of the interesting things was, as I was leaving the hospital all these people were coming up to me—and remember, he was 8 pounds, 2 ounces, but in relative to other babies there, he was absolutely huge. He was 6 weeks late so he looked like he was a month old baby.

DePue: Yeah.

Jeanne: And, so the Africans that we met were really impressed with this baby, because he was so huge and so old looking.

DePue: But they didn't want to say, “It's a beautiful baby?”

Jeanne: Of course not. It would not be a beautiful baby, that would be ...

DePue: This is a big baby. (All laughing).

Jeanne: A big baby, yes. So then after that, 2 hours later, I shuffled out of the hospital there and into the car and we drove me to the guest house and that was it. You're on your own.

DePue: Well, from your description of hospitals, maybe the guest house was a much better place to recuperate anyway.

Jeanne: Oh it was, definitely. Definitely, yes.

DePue: Well, this is probably a good time to make another transition here, because the thing we haven't talked about yet is taking Christianity to the bush, if you will. So, obviously, the next thing that's going to happen significant in Matt's life, is he needs to be baptized. So, Jon, I think I'll kind of turn things over to you for now.

Jon: Yeah, well, it should be said that missionaries had lived in that house we lived in since the 30s and we were there in the late 70s. We got there in 1977. So, there was an established church and it had become independent. It was called The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon; I won't tell you the French name. They had a president of the church and then they had the northern part of the church where we were. There were all of these little villages with all of these little churches and basically it would be a hut with a grass roof and they would usually make a cross out of like mango leaves or something and stick it on the roof so that you could identify it as a church. They make them like you made little paper chains at

Christmas. They take leaves and make paper chains and string them together in a cross and they'd lay it on the roof. But they didn't have any trained pastors, because the people who were educated enough, as I said previously, wouldn't come and work up there because the people were too poor and it was too isolated. They weren't their ethnic group anyway, so they didn't want to go live with these people, they wanted to stay with the Biyas further south. So, we were training catechists and that was my job at this little Bible school. It took a long time to get to the point of doing the job, because first you had to learn this other language, Fulfuldé. So I spent a long time learning that and we had to set up our house so we could survive. So it seems like much of the first year was spent just learning how to live; you learn a ton about the people and the culture because you're in it all of the time.

DePue: Explain a little bit, when you say catechist, exactly what function would they have?

Jon: The catechist probably had a fourth grade education if they were lucky, that would probably be the most public schooling they had ever gone to, and they would lead worship. They weren't ordained pastors, but they would lead worship in these little village churches all over the place so that somebody could conduct worship service.

DePue: Were they allowed to give communion?

Jon: No.

DePue: They were not allowed ...

Jon: No. They would have a pastor who would come around once in a while and give communion.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: And they had a big discussion and they ordained about five of these guys up there in the north who didn't have the seminary education that everybody in the south had, the southern part of the church. They said, "But we have to at least have some pastors so we can give communion and baptize people and stuff, and if you guys won't come up and do it ... Okay you come up and be our pastors." They said, "Well, now that you put it that way, why don't we ordain a few of you guys." (DePue laughing). "How about you older guys that have been doing it longer and we will make you ..." The president of that part of the church was named Beka, David and he was just a nice guy who had been working as a catechist in the church for awhile. They made him a pastor and then he became the president. He was like my boss technically.

DePue: Say his name again.

Jon: Beka, B-e-k-a, David (Daveed). David.

DePue: Right. And this was an African?

Jon: Uh-huh.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: So, as far as a baptism ... well, when Matthew was baptized there was a French pastor down in Ngaoundéré. We hadn't been there all that long and weren't very established in Poli yet, especially since we had spent all that time down in Ngaoundéré again waiting to have the baby. We arrived in August, he was born on December 13. We had this Norwegian-looking European church there where the mission people would worship and then they had a great big church downtown where the Africans and stuff. I mean, everybody could worship at either church, but we would go to both. But in this chapel on the missionary station, then—Aidou, Aidou Kempf was his name, which is a nice German name because he was from Alsace, Lorraine and he was Alsatian—well he baptized our baby.

DePue: Ahood ...

Jon: Aidou.

Jeanne: That would be Edward.

Jon: Yeah. E-d-o-u or something like that, Kempf, K-e-m-p-f. It's the same as mustard in German, which is sempf, but that's more than you need to know.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: So, we just had this little service and he was baptized there; his sponsors were (Jon and Jeanne together) Walt and Jackie Blue. And then later Jackie had a baby and that baby was born with a great many problems in the same place that Jeanne had had her baby a few months earlier. They had an emergency baptism and then he was sent back to America on a plane with his dad. We took care of Jackie for awhile and the other missionaries. Well they wondered if their baby would live.

DePue: Boy, that's got to be awfully tough on her to stay in Africa.

Jeanne: Well, she had had a caesarean, she had 3 other little kids.

DePue: Oh.

Jeanne: She has told me afterwards that she said, "I hated your guts because you were the one who took the baby out of my arms." Of course, that was not rational, but that was how she was thinking. And so her husband and Myrtle Noss, the nurse, and the baby took off. They flew them kind-of up country and then connected and flew them into New York and got them to the hospital. And he did survive, but we, again, not having that telephone, not having that connection, had absolutely no idea if he was alive or dead. So she and I sat there, I was nursing her. Again, if you had said your skills are going to be called upon, I had no nursing skills though I took care of this woman who had had a caesarean because the nurse went off with her

baby to America. You know, we sat there praying a lot and wondering what was going to happen. I had a baby and then her 3 kids and her having had a caesarean. About, I think, eight days or so later all of a sudden one afternoon up drove a truck and there jumps out her husband and the baby and Myrtle Noss and the baby was fine. It was absolutely a wonderful reunion. I think meanwhile we got some sort of dreaded virus and her kids were running around the house dripping white diarrhea. Jon pulls up from the bush and I meet him at the door saying, "Thank God. I'm so sick myself and I can't take care of all of these people myself." So ...

DePue: And you are just so happy to be there I'm sure.

Jeanne: Yeah, I can't wait to be here.

Jon: But that kid had pretty bad cerebral palsy as a result of this. His name is Josh Blue and last year on NBC they had a show called "Last Comic Standing" on national TV and he won it. You meet remarkable people over there and he just decided rather than feel sorry for himself he became a standup comic that talked about what it's like to live when you can't control your bodily motions and he made the best of it. He is a very successful comedian and he won this national show. So you have to admire the guy.

DePue: Now, Jeanne, I heard a story where you talked about, you know, not always these things turned out with a happy ending where the kid survived, that you knew people while you were over there who had children who died.

Jon: Yeah ...

Jeanne: Oh, yes.

Jon: We had two people who lived in our house; they were much older than us. Well, they were probably the age we are now.

Jeanne: Well, they were childbearing age and they lived in the same house up on the hill in Poli that we had lived in so many years later than them. I have to say, these are people I just don't know where they could get the strength. Evidently their children were toddlers or young anyway. They had two daughters and one of them developed cerebral malaria, and before they could do anything about it, she died. And so they took their daughters down to Ngaoundéré where the main mission station was and buried their daughter there and spent some time in the guest houses, kind of getting it together, deciding what to do. They decided that they did not want to leave Africa and went back up to the mission station, our house up on the hill there. Sure enough, not too long later their other daughter developed cerebral malaria and also died. They went back down to Ngaoundéré, buried her with her sister, and after a while decided they were going to go back to Poli and continue their mission work, so ...

Jon: And by the time we were there ... I'm trying to remember their names ... they were living in Nigeria working on an expanding ...

Jeanne: Cliff and ...

Jon: Michaelson, yeah. Cliff Michaelson.

Jeanne: Michaelson.

DePue: Was malaria in that whole region endemic?

Jeanne: Cerebral malaria was a problem. Actually, Ernie Johnson's family, they ended up leaving Cameroon, because while we were ... actually, the day that we had Michael, our second baby down in Ngaoundéré, they came rushing up to the hospital and Ernie's wife had cerebral malaria. I guess Ernie had been out in the bush and Evie, got sick with malaria. She was home with the kids alone and became so ill she was threatening to, you know, do horrible things. The kids were so frightened; they knew she was very ill. This was after a rainstorm and I described how the water would come down rushing through parts of the mission station. They could not get out, they could not get out to get to the police station even to get help, so they signaled somebody and they tied a rope across the oldest kid and they pulled him across this river. He ran down to the police station and had them send word over the radio—I don't know what kind of radio they had—and they went and found the father in—I think he was over near Tcholliré out in the bush doing missionary work—and they got him to come back. By then the water was down and so they got Evie in the car and drove her down—she was on the verge of death when they got her down to the guest houses—took her up to the hospital. They did manage to save her life, but she was so fragile after that they ended up having to leave.

DePue: What did you guys do then to ward off malaria?

Jeanne: Well, he didn't seem to ever ... I don't know if you ever got any uh ...

Jon: We took anti-malarial pills every day.

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: Yeah. We took anti-malarials, but I am not resistant to chloroquine-resistant malaria. I suppose because I was nursing and pregnant all of the time I was there, I could not get immune to malaria. Whereas most people take a preventive dose and if you get malaria then you take a curative dose, I had to take a curative dose all of the time I was there and I still got it once every month or two—I got malaria. So, when it was really bad, Jon would have to haul me down to the hospital and help me get better. Actually, I did much better in Senegal because chloroquine-resistant malaria wasn't there, though the last year we were there it had come across Africa and had entered Senegal. So I probably wouldn't have been able to live there any longer because it was there again.

Jon: And if I ever had malaria, which I don't think, it might have been once a year or so after we were home.

DePue: I was going to say ...

Jeanne: I did.

DePue: ... have you had any spells after you came back?

Jeanne: I had one about a year after we were back. We were up visiting his family. If you've ever had malaria you know when you have it because it is like having the flu and a migraine headache at the same time. It was like, when he would drive me down to the hospital, every rock he went over was excruciating. It was just...it was horrible.

DePue: Um-huh. Well, let's go back then and talk a little bit more about ministering to these people. Tell me a little bit about their customs and practices as Christians, because they obviously had adapted it to their own culture?

Jon: Well, as I experienced it, we would have church, only we would sit in these little benches and people would stand up and talk. Anybody would stand up and talk anytime and then somebody—this guy, the preacher—would give the sermon.

DePue: The preacher being you.

Jon: No, no, not at the African services. I preached at the French service. They had a French service and since I was there and spoke fairly decent French, then they started holding a French service so the educated people could come and I would lead the French service.

DePue: Who were the educated people?

Jon: Teachers and the government employees that got sent in from other parts of the country.

Jeanne: Christians ... yeah.

Jon: From the south.

Jeanne: Certainly not just Lutherans.

DePue: But Africans, not Europeans?

Jon: Oh, yeah. No, no, no. No Europeans. The only Europeans other than the missionaries there were the Peace Corps people...

DePue: Okay.

Jon: ... and Nigel. So there was Nigel and Kim, but Nigel never went to church in his life I don't think. Kim ... I don't know, he might have come sometimes. He is Lutheran and goes to church now I know. But it was all African. I mean, everything was African except for the missionaries, and we'd sit there on these little

tiny wooden benches. The ushers were always women and they always wore white dresses and they always had long poles.

Jeanne: Men on one side, women on another with their children.

Jon: And if you fell asleep then they'd come along and whack you in the ribs. While I never fell asleep, I was fond of listening with my eyes shut (DePue laughing) and so they loved that because they'd come along and bang and they'd hit you ...

Jeanne: Whack him.

Jon: ... in the ribs and everybody would laugh. (DePue laughing). And that's what you did. And then Ernie thought that nobody should ever drink alcohol so he made the communion wine, because ...

Jeanne: Ugh.

Jon: And everybody except Ernie drank alcohol there. That's kind of what you did to survive. And he made it vinegar, so you'd drink, you'd have communion ...

Jeanne: Oh.

Jon: ... and have this little bit of wine and this vinegar stuff.

Jeanne: The first church service that we attended in this place ... Remember, the temperature there averages 90 to 110, so it was somewhere between 90 and 110. I did not look at the thermometer every day, because it was torture to do it. It is in this mud brick hut with a tin corrugated roof, so it's like radiating heat, so I'm sure it is much hotter inside there than 90 to 110. You sit on these little wooden benches that are probably six inches off the floor and if you are ...

DePue: Oh, God.

Jeanne: ... and if you are seven months pregnant ...

DePue: Oh, man.

Jeanne: ... you have a giant belly and you are sitting there with your knees in your belly on the six inch high bench in this heat and I'm trying to be dignified and not faint. So finally it comes time to stand up, which was a relief, and walk up to take communion. I did not realize that Ernie made the wine and the wine had turned to vinegar, so I walk up and I take a huge slug of the wine out of the cup and it is vinegar. I had to go back to my seat and hold it in my mouth for about 10 minutes until I could come up with an excuse to go spit it out. (DePue laughing). That was my first communion. I did not want to throw up the communion wine the very first day I'm at church.

Jon: But the service was structured in Pulaar. In was all in Fulfuldé, because it wasn't French speaking, but it followed the same kind of order of service that we have and you could recognize the hymns often, because they would use a familiar melody and then they would translate it into the Pulaar ... Fulfuldé language there and we'd sing these hymns, and people would ...

Jeanne: And the music was absolutely wonderful.

Jon: Yeah. And people would pray all the time. The other thing is, we would have church meetings and I attended these church meetings. Since I was learning Pulaar, Fulfuldé, and I had no organized instruction, there was kind of a book you could use. But Ernie, he hired a guy to come and teach me Fulfuldé. Since this guy is real smart he knows some old distinguished guy, a Muslim character, and by the time I spent an hour trying to learn six different names for the hairs in your nose, (Jon and DePue laughing) I decided that perhaps this guy was interested in a more technical and sophisticated level of Pulaar than I would actually need to speak.

DePue: I'm sure that was practical in some circles.

Jon: But luckily I can kind of pick up language by hanging around where they talk it. And these church meetings—they'd start whenever. A 10 o'clock church meeting would start, you know, I don't know, 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

Jeanne: Some time that day, yeah.

Jon: And people would sit around and eat and people would be coming in and some of them would be getting rides in and some of them would be driving in. The pastors would come in from this vast area and when they got there then we'd have a church meeting. We'd sit inside the church building there at the bottom of the hill and everybody would talk endlessly. It was great if you were trying to learn a language, because they would never vote. There were no votes. And you would know that they'd reached a decision when everybody at the meeting—and there might be 30 people there sitting around—would say the same thing. When they all said the same thing then they realized, "Oh, we agree." And they would talk until they all said the same thing. So, expediency was not an issue, but getting everybody to finally work out an agreement was, and that's a whole different thing. It wasn't like, "We're going to win and you're going to lose. Maybe," you know, "maybe we'll just talk until you give up and say what we need you to say." But it was interesting to watch this process. And another thing I was impressed by was, we had this young guy, way out there in the bush. I mean, he was probably 30, and I was 30, too. He had been caught in an illicit relationship with a neighbor woman, which, of course, upset his wife. He was a pastor and it kind of upset the church. He was one of the bright young stars of the pastoring business.

DePue: He was a European.

Jon: No, no, no. He was an African, because no European would go out there and live where he did.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: I mean, he was way out there. And he came in and they said, “Well, you know, what are we going to do with you.” And he confessed it and he said, “Well, I’m sorry, but I just couldn’t help it.” And I thought, “Well, I don’t know, we’ll see what happens here.” It was fascinating to see that this wasn’t some personnel issue that can’t be discussed in public; this was discussed in public at this big church meeting. They talked about it and talked about it and they realized, well, you know, these things happen. So they suspended him from his pastoral duties, you know, for like six months and wished him good luck in getting along with his wife and moved on.

DePue: Um-hm.

Jon: I was struck by the candor of the meeting, by his, you know, weeping and repenting. There was an interesting and powerful humanity about those meetings. I mean, Africa—the people are just kind of right there and everything just gets talked about right there and there is a kind of directness about things, except they’ll say things in different ways, too. You have to figure out what they’re really talking about sometimes, but once you figure out what they’re really talking about, it’s fascinating. The good thing is, if you like learning from people who aren’t like you, then it’s a wonderful place to be. If you’re not comfortable with people who aren’t like you, then I suppose it would be terrible. I thought it was always interesting. It was frustrating, because it’s hard to tell people “no” all the time.

Jeanne: Well, and remember they wouldn’t tell anybody, “I don’t know” or “No.” Like you would ask somebody, “Do you know where something is?” or “How do you get somewhere.” They would not tell you, “I don’t know.” They would make up something if they didn’t know and send you off on a wild goose chase.

Jon: In the name of politeness they would lead you astray (Jon laughing).

Jeanne: Yes, yes, yes. So, I mean, because there wasn’t any, you know, “I don’t know” or ... you know, they always felt like they had to help you even if they didn’t know and would do their best.

Jon: And if you just tell them what you wanted them to tell you, they’d be happy to tell you. (Jon laughing). But, as far as their Christianity, I would say that by and large I would consider them better Christians than we are, because if Christianity means depending on God, all of these people depended on God. I mean, it never occurred to people over there that you would not depend on God. I mean, what else are you going to depend on? You’re a fragile person in a dangerous world.

DePue: Um-hm. And ...

Jon: And you need to believe in—and they loved this idea. The Muslims had come along and conquered them, but their name for them was Naamchi, and that means “dog”. They treated them terribly, these Muslims that conquered this part of the ...

because as conquerors do. I mean, they wanted them for taxes and if they had good looking women they'd like them, too. They rode horses and they had spears and they mistreated these people and they called them dogs and the Christians came along and said ...

DePue: After the Muslims had gotten them?

Jon: Sure, the Muslims came in the 19th century.

DePue: Sure.

Jon: Yeah, and conquered this area. So, for the most part, Islam in this particular part of the country at least, was not a terribly attractive thing. Christians came along and put in schools and hospitals and, you know, were all kinds of stupid in all kinds of ways in terms of European and American, you know, cultural imperialism or just dumb, you know. People who don't know who they're talking to have a way of saying things ...

Jeanne: Well-intended, but ...

DePue: Arrogant and paternalistic?

Jeanne: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah, but on the other hand, you know ... I'll tell you what. You have babies over there, you have kids die there and you stay there and people start to think, "Well, wait a minute, they're still here." At first they might think, you know, I'm sure they thought that we were there to make the big bucks. (DePue laughing). It's obvious that's why we were there. We were getting filthy rich being there, and to try to tell them ...

Jeanne: Because look at how we lived.

Jon: I mean, we lived in such fine style.

Jeanne: Compared to them.

Jon: So it's not like anybody is over there thinking we're suffering and when we came back to America people said, "Well we admire you for going over there and suffering." I say, "We weren't suffering. We're not masochists. We thought it was really a great way to live." And so ...

Jeanne: Well, it's hard, but interesting.

Jon: As far as them being Christians, I admire their faith, because it was essential to their survival. Americans have a harder time thinking that they really can't take care of themselves. Africans don't have any particular trouble with that. Americans get to that point, but it takes us longer.

DePue: It reminds you of that one passage of, it's harder for a rich man to get to heaven than for ...

Jon: Yeah, that camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Yeah, and it's not ...

DePue: And we all think of ourselves as, "No, I'm not rich."

Jon: Yeah, not me.

Jeanne: Um-hm.

Jon: The other is, I never thought I'd like Africa or Africans, but I went anyway and not because I have some romantic notion that it was going to be wonderful to go to this ... It's just because we had never been there. That's why we went.

Jeanne: Well, you didn't go thinking you weren't going to like them.

Jon: No, but I mean I didn't go with any particular background or I didn't have a childhood longing to go there.

DePue: Um-hm.

Jon: I just liked going.

DePue: Well, one of the things that strikes me, and this is my own bias, or my own misconception of what missionaries do, I think missionary and I think they're going to someplace where people aren't Christians and they are converting them to Christianity, but these people all sound like they're already Christians.

Jon: We were going where there was a church.

Jeanne: Yeah, we went ...

Jon: And we were serving that church. We were kind of technocrats. I mean, I was there not as a pastor, but as a teacher and in to help them. And the way that I first learned this language, Fulfuldé—one of the ways—was, since I couldn't speak it and their wives couldn't read anything, I taught literacy to the students' wives.

DePue: In French.

Jon: In Pulaar.

Jeanne: No, Pulaar.

Jon: In Fulfuldé.

Jeanne: They could speak it, couldn't read it.

DePue: Okay. You keep mixing Pulaar and Fulfuldé.

Jon: Pulaar and Fulfuldé are the same thing.

DePue: Is it the same exact language?

Jon: No, it's a different dialect.

DePue: Then it's not the same thing!

Jon: It's the same language, yes. It's not the same exact language.

DePue: Okay, so it's a different dialect.

Jon: In fact, the Fulfuldé spoken in Poli was way simpler than the Pulaar spoken in Senegal, because it was spoken by non-native Pulaar speakers and they simplified the grammar. It was kind of like a pidgin Pulaar.

DePue: But could the two groups have understood each other?

Jon: Oh, sure. But when I spoke Cameroonian stuff, which I still spoke when I went back to Senegal, they'd say, "Where do all of these old words come from? We've heard them before, but they're ancient words. Where did they come from?" (DePue laughing) and I'd say, "They come from Cameroon." (Jon laughing)

DePue: I'm glad I clarified that, because that was confusing me. You were trying to confuse me, which is not hard to do.

Jon: Now I don't even know where I was with this. So I spoke, I taught these women, or tried to teach these women how to read from a primer that was kind of like, "See Dick, see Jane, see Spot run. Jump over the barrel." That kind of stuff. So I would learn these words and we would talk to each other.

DePue: And you were teaching them how to write it.

Jon: Read.

DePue: Read and write.

Jon: Read and write. And I was learning from them how to speak it.

Jeanne: But they already spoke it.

DePue: What characters? These aren't Arabic characters?

Jon: No, this was in an English alphabet with certain hooked letters and different letters for different sounds that don't exist in English.

Jeanne: In English.

DePue: So this is something that the Germans or the French brought to them?

Jon: No. Probably these books were produced by either Norwegians or Americans.

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: Yeah. Actually ...

DePue: But somebody ...

Jeanne: Our mission group actually had printing capabilities.

DePue: I guess my only point there is, somebody took the time to translate Pulaar, which was not a language that had any kind of written script ...

Jon: It was a non-written language, yes.

DePue: ... into a written language and ...

Jon: Well, there was also a lot of Pulaar, especially over in Senegal that was written in Arabic script.

DePue: Okay. That does make sense.

Jon: Yeah. Because they were literate in Arabic script and so a lot of people can write both in Arabic script, especially in Senegal, or in, you know, Latin script, our alphabet.

DePue: So do you feel like you were successful in running these classes to teach people how to do the catechism?

Jon: Well, I was the director of the Bible school and we were there for 29 months. I was pretty much getting up to full speed at it when our house burned down.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: I think that we were making very successful progress toward adaptation and survival in Poli, Cameroon. I think we liked the African people that were there and they liked us and we weren't miserable and we hadn't died.

DePue: Well, that one part about you like the African people and they liked you, that probably was enough to advance the mission, to do what you were there to do?

Jon: Yeah, and we interacted with people all of the time.

Jeanne: Yeah, they were wonderful.

Jon: I mean, it was not like we didn't have relationships with people. It's like accomplishing things in a kind of linear western fashion. Luckily I'm not very linear, so it didn't bother me a whole lot, but if you had to meet certain performance goals in terms of what other people are going to do.

DePue: You mean a linear guy like me might have more difficulty?

Jon: If you had to have measurable quantifiable performance achievements, you would go nuts.

DePue: Or an engineer would have difficulty.

Jon: It's not the place for somebody who is going to get the job done, by golly, and leave.

Jeanne: There wasn't a day that went by that we weren't awestruck to learn that people thought about something in such a different way than we did or people, you know, experienced tragedies in their life with such grace. It was just amazing.

DePue: Um-hm. Mike came along here somewhere in the process. Did he come along before the fire or after?

Jeanne: He came along right before. I was, let's see, he was born in September of 1981 and Matt was born in ...

Jon: No, no, 70 ...

Jeanne: Seventy-nine, 79.

Jon: Seventy-nine.

Jeanne: Yes, okay. Okay, let me get this straight. Matt was born in December of 1977 and Mike was born in September of 1979, so that was fairly close to each other and not quite two years apart. And with him, we did the two weeks come down before the due date; luckily I only had to wait three weeks after the due date for him. Now September was when the missionaries who had gone home to America for leave for the summer would be coming back in. So, as I was at the guest house and that was now my fifth week there, I was pretty much on my own, everybody else was gone and a batch of missionaries had come back the night before. So I was up in the morning making pancakes for all these people and all of a sudden I realized, "Oh, I'm standing on my tiptoes. Why am I doing that? Oh my gosh I'm in labor." As the first one had to be induced, this one was coming naturally. So I fixed breakfast for them and cleaned up the kitchen. Because I wasn't used to being in labor I guess I didn't quite realize, this is really it. So I went across the street to where Myrtle Noss, the nurse, was and said, "I think maybe I'm having labor pains." So she checked me and she says, "Oh, get up to the hospital."

DePue: Now where is Jon at the time?

Jeanne: He's there. He's at the guest house waiting, again. He was there. No we had been there five weeks at this point because Mike was three weeks late. So we get in the car, go up to the hospital, and actually not too long after that Mike was born. He was an easy labor and delivery. Two hours later I'm up off the table and back in the

car and back into the guest house with two little kids under the age of two then, so. Actually, later that day is when the Johnson's came down and their Evie was so ill with cerebral malaria. So, then all of a sudden, the very day I have my second baby, I'm up helping take care of their, like, four or five kids or whatever and worrying about whether or not Evie is going to make it or not.

DePue: So this is like the old American pioneers of the 19th century. Yeah, you give birth in the morning and you're out plowing the back forty in the afternoon, huh?

Jeanne: You know, I think I had a way more complicated delivery than ... Most women there just kind of—you know, it is not uncommon, I am not telling a story—some women squat on the side of the road and have their baby and get up and keep going, so.

DePue: Um-hm.

Jeanne: Though many, of course, would choose to be able to go to a hospital and have some help and things, so.

DePue: So how much did Mike weigh?

Jeanne: Mike weighed nine [pounds], twelve [ounces]. So he was a lot bigger.

DePue: He is a big boy.

Jeanne: He was a big boy, yes. He was absolutely a big boy.

DePue: And another boy who was very large, but not very beautiful. (Jon laughing).

Jeanne: No. We could not let him be beautiful, so.

DePue: Okay, so you head back up north to Poli.

Jeanne: Okay, so this time we by now feel really much closer to the ... Well, the first baby—I have to say that we were very interested in celebrating our baby with the missionaries and the Africans that we had gotten to know in Ngaoundéré. We had been there over two months and we had had a close relationship. We had met the pastor who had baptized him. The second time we were much more interested in celebrating with our people who were really more important at that point in our lives and those were the people in Poli. So we arranged for a Norwegian couple, Gudreig and Kjell Kristofferson, to be his African godparents and so they were going to come up and a few other missionary people agreed to come up. We knew a whole bunch of Peace Corps kids by then who were scattered around in different villages and stuff in the area near Poli and so we invited them and we decided to not only invite all of the students from the Bible school, but, you know, the whole town, why not? And because they were people who were Muslim, we decided we would have to have them butcher—we bought a cow and we were going to butcher the cow up and we were going to have this big meal for the baptism. And I cooked, I

baked cakes and cupcakes and cookies and stuff for a week and this is in that wood-burning stove. At that missionary store I had bought a bunch of Jello and I thought, "I'm going to make Jello for all of these African people to taste Jello," so I made, I think, eight gallons of Jello and we had big tins, canned tins of corn and we brought up potatoes. We got potatoes from the Norwegians. Norwegians planted and raised potatoes for them and we could buy them from the Norwegians, because that was not something that grew in Cameroon. So we bought the cow and we had it butchered in the way that the Muslim people had to have it for their ... why is it Jon?

Jon: It's like being kosher. They had to have their Imam come and slit his throat and face his head toward Mecca and bleed it out.

Jeanne: And drain the blood and what not, you know, so the whole day before it took our cook and a bunch of other men to take this cow from standing on its hooves to little bite-sized pieces. And then, throughout the night before the baptism, they cooked it and made giant, giant pots of rice and then this haako sauce with this beef in it and vegetables and things.

DePue: Now what's the haako sauce?

Jeanne: I described it yesterday. It's leaves and, you know, would have been tomato paste and ...

DePue: That's the njiiri?

Jon: We'd call it gravy.

Jeanne: Yeah, or a sauce ... a meat sauce with beef and then, of course, we had tomato paste and we had a bunch of spices we provided and things, but it had to be done in a way Muslims could eat, so. That morning we had a baptism at the church service of the Bible school church. We had all of these missionaries and Peace Corps kids and then the village come and it was absolutely fabulous. We had put up a bunch of trestles and put out wood and made tables and people from everywhere brought in

DePue: This has got to be like one of the biggest celebrations that Poli had seen in a long time.

Jeanne: It was wonderful. It was absolutely wonderful. Well, we had these giant, what kind of ... mango trees, so we had a big shady front yard and we had all these tables and trestles and people. So all of the missionaries, us and some of our friends, we were serving out this food and, of course, we would take and we would put your rice and sauce in one section and you'd put your canned corn in another. You would have put your Jello in another spot and you would put your dessert, probably on another plate, but since I didn't have lots of plates it would have to be on that same plate. And there was this huge long line, dozens and dozens and dozens of people going through getting this food, so we gave it away for hours and finally realized that

people were taking and going through the line a second and a third time. I started to look and watch and they would go through the line and they would go down the hill and they had great big bowls and they were dumping the whole thing into these bowls and they were heading off into the bush. So our meal fed not only the town and the village, but out into the bush. But, of course ...

DePue: I was going to ask how they liked the Jello, but ...

Jeanne: Ugh. It was just mixed in with everything else.

Jon: Leftovers were not a problem.

Jeanne: Yeah, yeah, so. We totally were wiped out of food. Everything went. So, it was very, very ... it was a wonderful experience and we felt like we had really celebrated it with people that really cared and we cared about and it really mattered to us. I have to say, with worshipping with other people, one of the things that I have found most wonderful is, no matter where we go, no matter what language, whether it's a big fancy cathedral in Europe and we worshipped at lots of those, or some little town or bush village, the Lord's Prayer has a cadence that no matter what language it is spoken in you can always tell and you can tell when it's being spoken. So, that's one of the special things that has followed me everywhere we've gone in our whole life, that no matter what language it is, you can always tell and it always sounds so wonderful.

DePue: Now, Mike was baptized, this huge celebration was when roughly?

Jeanne: It was in October of 1979.

DePue: And then when did the fire happen?

Jeanne: Okay, so, again, like I had worked like crazy for that week before and, of course, we baptized him on a Sunday. So people dispersed and the next day I remember just being exhausted. Again, I had two little babies, it was 90 to 110 degrees, I'm nursing and I decided I couldn't take it and I took a nap and that's probably what saved our lives, because that night when we were sleeping I kept hearing a pounding noise and I kept struggling to wake up and I kept falling back to sleep and hearing the noise and waking up. I'm sure it's because our house was being filled with smoke and I was fighting the smoke, fighting to stay awake in the smoke ...

DePue: And carbon monoxide.

Jeanne: Yeah. But I had had enough sleep that I was able to finally wake up enough and I thought it was not uncommon for people to come and pound on our door at night and ask us to use our car to go out into the bush and pick up somebody who needed to be brought into the hospital. So I assumed, when I finally woke up enough and I heard the pounding, that it was somebody at the door who needed help.

DePue: And Jon's a little bit ...

Jeanne: Jon's sleeping still.

DePue: ... deeper sleeper then?

Jeanne: Yeah. And he got up and you don't go to the door in your underwear, so he threw on his bathrobe and he was barefoot and he had his bathrobe on and he went to the door and he said to me, I remember him saying, "There's nobody here." And then I remember him going into the room, that small little dining area—that's where our kerosene refrigerator was—and he started yelling for me. So I got up and went in there and he was fighting the flames and they were getting bigger, you know—visibly by the moment—and I started screaming "Get out of there while you can," because the doors had bars on them, so I didn't want him to be trapped—he wouldn't have been able to get out of there—and he says to me, "Go get the kids." I had what I feel like was a Sophie's Choice moment. I sat there and actually had this internal conversation, "Which boy do I get if I can only get one?" and I sat around debating, "Do I go and get the baby in the crib or do I go get Matthew and what if ... how will I explain to people why I chose Matthew or why I chose Michael if I can't get the other one, too?" I was, it was, you know, it was insane and crazy and it was all going on at once. I finally said, "Okay, Matthew I have to use two hands to get him out of this little contraption he slept in ..." ... we had kind of a rabbit hutch-looking crib that had latched from the top so that he couldn't get out and snakes and things couldn't get into his crib.

DePue: He's 2-1/2 at this time?

Jeanne: Yeah. Well ...

Jon: No, he's under two.

Jeanne: He's not even two.

Jon: He's 20 months old.

Jeanne: But he could stand up and so I thought to myself, "Well, I have to use two hands to get him. I can't hold the baby and open up that ... his," I wanted to say cage, "his crib. Then I only need one hand to pick up the baby or I can put Matthew down and pick up the baby and then pick up Matthew." So, I think this is logical and if I can't get to Michael, then I will be able to live with my decision that I thought I did the right thing for the circumstances. I don't know why I sat there and had this big eternal ...

DePue: Well, I suspect that this debate that you're having with yourself ...

Jeanne: Was fractions of seconds ...

DePue: Yeah, fractions of seconds.

Jeanne: Yes, yes. However, so I'm in there and I'm getting Matthew out and meanwhile Jon comes out of the fire and he runs in and goes into the room to get Michael when he saw I was getting Matthew. So, it became a moot point; we had both of our kids. I had on flip-flops and I had on a little bathrobe and the boys were each sleeping in their cribs in just their cloth diaper. And if I had gone –because we had baptized Michael the day before, the robe I was baptized in my mom had brought out and given to me to use for Michael's baptism and that was laying over this little lounge chair next to his crib –if I had gone in to get Michael I would have gotten that thing. Jon went in and he thought to get the car keys (laughing). He was practical. But we got out with the car keys, the two boys. We went outside and we decided well, we need to go get some help and so we jump in our car and we drive down to the police station and are calling and asking for help and they come stumbling out. It is about two in the morning so they are all drunk and can't get their flashlights to work and can't get their motorcycles on, so we finally all get back to the house and the house has, you know, totally gone up. We were afraid, because there were no gas stations in Poli, we would actually bring a 55 gallon drum of gasoline with us when we drove up there, actually in our car, and then we would leave it there so that we would have gas to get back to the mission station. There wasn't a gas station where we lived, so you had to bring your own gas to get out.

DePue: Um-hm.

Jeanne: And we were afraid that was going to blow and take out people with it. But our cook and washer had gotten there and realized that gasoline was in there and realized the potential for harm and they had broken down the door and wheeled that out.

Jon: That was in the storeroom right next to the main house.

DePue: Well Jon, can we back up just a little bit. Do you have anything to add or any other points of this story? You were in there fighting. Was it the refrigerator?

Jon: Well, it was a kerosene refrigerator. I had filled it up the day before. It had a 20 liter, five gallon tank that lays underneath it, like a jerry can on its side. It has a round wick and the kerosene isn't very clean, so if you don't clean the wick it's got this little swivel thing you put on and spin it around. Eventually it'll get dirty and it'll start to flash. I was really, really tired and had filled it up, but didn't clean the wick and I think what happened was it just started flashing. It heated up around this round wick and the kerosene got hot enough it started covering the whole top of the tank on the outside, so that caught fire. By the time I got out there the knocking we heard was the metal on the side of this refrigerator snapping from the heat and it sounded like somebody pounding. There were flames about two feet tall coming out from underneath the bottom, you know, from the refrigerator, like the underneath part of the refrigerator. I was trying to put it out with this rag, this floor washing rag and when Jeanne came, she saw me with this rag all filled with fire and she thought I was on fire and so that was ... But, we got out of the house and the reason we went to get the police was, yeah, to try to keep people from going into the house ...

Jeanne: Into the house and getting hurt.

Jon: We were more concerned ... we were bound and determined there was nothing in that house worth going in after we got the kids out.

Jeanne: After our kids.

DePue: So you came out with the clothes on your back.

Jeanne: We came out with ...

DePue: There weren't many clothes.

Jon: Right.

Jeanne: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Not much.

Jeanne: And shoes and things, so. We went down to the Peace Corps kid; that was Denise at that point. We went and sat at her house for awhile and I remember crying, "Oh my God, what am I going to do? I don't have any clothes for the kids," and you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, poor me, poor me. So after a few hours we decided to go back and see what was happening and we parked our car up there. We realized that some people had gone into the house and they had pulled out some stuff, only it was pouring rain, so everything they had pulled out was now ruined from the water, but they had gone in and gotten stuff that was important in their culture. They had gone in and gotten those washtubs that the cook used, or the washer used, and they had pulled off, like, the bedding from our bed—things they would have thought valuable, they would have found valuable, so. You know, I'm looking at that going, "Oh," you know, "that's not what I would have picked out, but oh well, oh well." So, I remember we had brought out 55 gallon barrels. Because I didn't know when I initially went out what sex my baby was going to be, I had brought zero to five years old size clothing of unisex colored clothing, because I didn't know what I was going to have. It was in a big barrel in the room that Matthew slept in and I was looking in the window of the house trying to see if that thing had caught on fire. I was thinking maybe that barrel was still there and I could get some clothes to put on my kids and I'm looking through there trying to determine, or try to figure what I was seeing. It started to get lighter and lighter and lighter and I finally realized that the sun was now coming up and the roof had burnt off the house and so the sun was pouring into the house and the very first thing I could distinguish was this charred wreckage of the bed that Matthew had been sleeping in. Like I said, it looked like a rabbit hutch with screening and it was just wrinkled, a horrible melted mess, and I really truly had one of those experiences I felt like I got hit over the head and was relieved of all worry about my stuff. I said, "I got what's important. Look what could have happened."

DePue: Yeah.

Jeanne: And so, it was like all of the worry and anxiety drained away and I was totally calm at that point and stopped worrying about whether or not there was anything left or whatever. You know, I was kind of getting over that feeling and we turned around—all those chairs and all those tables underneath that tree where we had celebrated with all those people--all of those same people were coming back in and they were sitting around, just sitting there. We knew that that was the way they showed grief. They were just there to share with us with our grief.

DePue: So this is first thing in the morning. Six o'clock?

Jeanne: Yep.

Jon: Five, six, five o'clock in the morning. I mean, the fire was like at three o'clock. I mean, well, your house burns down in the middle of nowhere, everybody knows what's going on.

DePue: Yeah. So the word got around very quickly in Poli.

Jon: Yeah. I mean, oh sure. We were always the entertainment.

Jeanne: Actually, about an hour or so after that, Harriet Stovner, who was a missionary out in the bush an hour beyond us, comes racing up to the house, jumps out of her car, and she goes, "Oh my God, thank God both kids are alive!" because the rumors had gotten to her that our house had burned down, but we had only gotten one child out, so. She had heard that and came racing in, but luckily ...

Jon: Then the police by morning were ruthlessly efficient. They said, "Well, who do you think caused this fire?" And I said, "Nobody caused this fire. I know what caused the fire. Maybe I caused the fire. Nobody burned our house down." "No, do you suppose it was Reuben or was it Marcelle? Which one do you want us to beat? We'll get a confession, don't worry." (DePue laughing). And I had to say at the top of my lungs, "You touch one of these people, I'll be furious. Nobody burned this house down. You don't get to beat anybody today." They were going to wrap this one up neatly in a bow for us and all I had to do was point.

DePue: Because accidental fires never happened in Poli?

Jeanne: I guess not.

Jon: And then the other thing was, one of our 55 gallon barrels had burnt up and was sitting there and somebody came along and it was like first thing and they said, "Can I have your old burnt up ..." and I said, "Yeah, take it." Well, Reuben and Marcel were just—they were really—"It's not his to have." So then I had to assign all of our broken up, busted up, burnt up stuff that we were never going to use again. They had to be in charge of distributing it, because their place had been usurped when I had given that barrel to somebody. So, you always had to ... it was just ...

Jeanne: Now, the office at the very end of the place hadn't burned, so ... do you remember early on when we were talking, I described how we had those arguments about kitchenware or books, kitchenware or books?

DePue: Yep, yep, yep.

Jeanne: Well, wouldn't you know, the one little part of the house that did not burn was that little office area with his books.

Jon: Because it had been built on later and the roofline didn't ...

Jeanne: He had seminary books ...

Jon: All these obscure theological books (laughing).

Jeanne: (unintelligible)

DePue: Well, maybe these were the books that Nigel wasn't reading, because he said ...

Jon: No, no.

DePue: ... when you arrived with your many, many books that ...

Jeanne: No, those books all burned.

Jon: I have books that have been sent from Chicago to Cameroon to Illinois to Senegal to Illinois and I still haven't read them. (Jon and DePue laughing).

Jeanne: So, we needed to, you know, we needed to put together our, you know, a life. So, we go downtown to that little market and I bought a bunch of material and then cut it up and made diapers for our boys. We ended up—let's see, Jon borrowed a pair of shoes from the Peace Corps girl and I think I found a pair of pants that were in a barrel that was in that storeroom that didn't burn so I had some clothes that I could put on. We went to the police station and they made us traveling papers, because we lost all of our identity papers.

DePue: I would think you also lost all of your money. You talk about buying some stuff.

Jeanne: Actually there was some in the safe that was in that office, so we had enough to get by for a little while.

Jon: And when we got to Ngaoundéré the missionary treasurer was there, he could give us ... And the other thing is, we were out there in the middle of nowhere with no insurance, obviously.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: So I said, what are you going to do, because the reason we're out here in the middle of nowhere where you can't get fire insurance is because we're working as

missionaries, so what happens? We had lots of stuff here that we'd spent a lot of money on and it's all burnt up. Does anybody help us with this? So the ALC at the time said, "Well, write a list of stuff that you lost." And so we made a big list and we had a pretty good idea because we packed it all. And they assessed an evaluation on it back in the states in some fashion. They have something called a Good Samaritan Fund or something to help people in desperate situations and I guess we qualified. So, they assessed the value of all of our possession that we'd lost at \$8,000 and then they said, "Well, you got to depreciate that by 25 percent." So they gave us eventually \$6,000 for the stuff we lost. So then when we came back to America they helped us.

Jeanne: We started our new life with that. Now, when we got down to Ngaoundéré, that's where the other missions were. We were, you know, enveloped with their love and care and stayed in the guest houses and, you know, got—actually some of those little kits for nursery kits that ... and those baby quilts that people, ladies in churches make all over America and send to Africa and other countries—we were the beneficiaries of that. I dressed my baby boy in a bunch of those layette sets and wrapped our ... we used those quilts to sleep with and we got some donations from other people there. We flew down to the American embassy in Yaounde and had to find somebody who had seen us, who knew that we were Americans and had seen us with passports in our hands, so they could swear that we were Americans so we could get, you know, issued passports. Actually, when our kids were born—when you're born you have to have a doctor sign a letter saying, "I saw this baby emerge from this American woman's body and this kid is hers." And so we had to get a couple of those letters and take them down so our kids could get passports.

DePue: But the decision was a pretty quick one between, "Okay, the fire happened" to, "It looks like we're going to have to head back to America"?

Jon: Well, we had reached a place in Poli, I mean this was a hard place. I mean, this was ... and we had told the mission, "Either move us where there are more people and more Europeans, like Ngaoundéré," because the guy in Ngaoundéré wanted us working down there anyway. We said, "We can't live in this kind of isolation forever."

Jeanne: Well, we had ...

Jon: "We know what we can do and we know what we can't do. We love Africa. We're willing to stay, but if you want us to return to Poli and live up here indefinitely, we're leaving."

Jeanne: Well we said we couldn't stay there when our oldest kid turned five, because you had to send your kids away to missionary school and that was two days' drive from Poli. It was only one day's drive from Ngaoundéré and being a teacher, I had even thought about if I lived in Ngaoundéré I could, you know, do some education and put off sending them away for awhile, so.

DePue: So this fire just hastened the decision to make the change.

Jeanne: They kept telling us, “No, we won’t move you from Poli.” And we kept saying, “Well, we’re going to honor the five years, but when it comes time for us to ... at that point we’re going to have to go if you won’t move us somewhere closer.”

Jon: And they said, too, “Look, you guys are doing great. You’ve figured out how to live here. People are happier here. You can’t leave. Nobody else—you know—people don’t adjust here.”

DePue: It’s interesting. They have this discussion unbeknownst to you about whether or not it would be fair to send you up there in the first place and then once you’re up there, it is “No, you can’t leave.”

Jeanne: Um-hm.

Jon: Well, but then we decided, I mean, we told our director—the nicest guy who ever lived, Jim Knutsen—who would come out from Minneapolis once a year and we finally just said, “Jim, we appreciate your input, but we’ve made a decision. We have to decide what’s going to happen with our life. We can’t trust you guys to decide what’s going to happen to our lives.”

Jeanne: And that’s where we departed from the way many of the other missionaries worked and felt and got a lot of problems.

Jon: A lot of people didn’t stay long, because they couldn’t. I mean, the burn-out rate doing what we were doing was very high, because people just couldn’t make the adjustment. People would have physical and emotional illnesses that would just make it impossible for them to stay. People would come and stay a month, you know, and just realize, “This is not for us. We can’t handle this.”

Jeanne: Anyway, I interpreted the fire as, “Go home, Jeanne.”

Jon: God has spoken. (Jeanne laughing).

DePue: And your parents didn’t necessarily disagree with you on that?

Jeanne: We left and I said, “I think God is saying, ‘Go home, Jeanne’.” I don’t know if I’d ever have the courage and strength to go back. I didn’t say never, but I just said, “I need to emotionally regroup.”

Jon: But she went home before I did. What surprises me is how much we were—I mean, we had a pretty high commitment to what they expected us to do. I’m kind of surprised we were that ... She went home right after the fire pretty much and I went home on the 22nd of December. I went to finish up the semester at the Bible school there and I stayed with Ernie.

Jeanne: And to finish the books, because you were ...

Jon: And I was printing some books and ...

Jeanne: Well, you were the treasurer.

Jon: So, we had this obligation ... yeah, to do something. And we were obligated; I had this sense of obligation to complete this and I'm kind of surprised by that. You think I would have just said, "Look." Because it was clear, looking back, that we were pretty much at the end of our ropes. I mean, I don't think we had a lot of physical or emotional reserve left by the time we got out of there. Then Jeanne was going home with two little kids, a 22-month-old and a two-month-old, by herself. When we took her to the airport we had to go down country to Douala, the last airport, before she got on a plane. I mean, I'll never forget: I'm down there, here's my two little kids and my wife taking off and I'm going back up-country to finish off whatever, you know. It couldn't have been that important. There's this Eastern European guy in this long line of people—there was a stairway that went down to the runway, off into ... across ... and this guy standing there. They said, "Okay, now we want old people and women with small children to board the plane." And this guy stood at the top of the stairway with his arms in a death grip on the railing, just furious. "Nobody gets on this plane before me. I've been here too long. You don't understand what this country's done to me!"

Jeanne: "Africa is trying to kill me."

Jon: "I have to get on this plane. Nobody gets on this plane before I get on this plane." Just raving out of his mind. Finally they took him and let him on the plane and I'm thinking, "All these other French people are just yelling at him and screaming at him (DePue laughing) and the Africans are going nuts." I said, "Oh, great! Here goes my wife and my two little kids off on an airplane with some madman." You know, it's just how things were.

Jeanne: Well, and then the plane trip went down from there. I get on the plane. I am assigned the middle seat between two huge guys. Because neither of my children is two years old, they won't give me a seat of his own for Matthew. So I have two children on my lap. They hang a hammock above my head and tell me I'm to put one kid up there and rotate them back and forth. The baby is nursing and I can't even get the baby up to myself to nurse, because I've got these two huge men there. When I try to lean my seat back to get room to nurse, the lady behind me takes her feet and kicks my seat forward because she's got her little dog on her lap. So I'm saying to the stewardess, "Would you please make sure she doesn't kick my seat anymore?" Now we left in the middle of the night and they had a little snack. So when it came to eat breakfast nobody would hold my children, so I didn't get to eat. When I went to try and change their diapers, they made me go into the little toilet in the plane. So I sat on the toilet and I put two children on either knee—because there's no way you can set one of them down on the floor in the bathroom of an airplane—and had to change their diapers like that with them both on my knees.

DePue: This is from Yaoundé to?

Jon: From Douala to Paris.

Jeanne: From Douala to Paris.

DePue: A direct flight.

Jeanne: Direct flight. The flight from hell. So then I land in Paris and I'm standing in line and I start being hassled. Of course, I have my American passport out and I've got two little kids. Well, first of all, we get off the plane and it's mostly been November, so it's cold. They've never been in the cold. And, so we come off the plane and we walk outside and they're screaming because it's cold. They've never experienced cold and we don't have cold weather clothes. Get into the terminal and I'm being hassled by these men and I don't understand why. Later I discovered that they had just taken over the American Embassy ...

Jon: In Iran.

DePue: The Iranians had taken over.

Jeanne: And these guys were Iranians and they were hassling Americans that they met, so I was being hassled there. I mean, literally, they were physically shoving and pushing me and yelling at me and I'm, you know, almost beside myself. I'm hungry, I haven't slept, I haven't eaten in hours and hours. I get up to the terminal and I discover that the airplane controllers have gone on strike and so there were (Jon and Mark laughing) no airplanes.

Jon: (unintelligible).

Jeanne: So there will be no airplanes flying out and so I go, "What are you going to do for me?"

DePue: Yeah, welcome to civilization. (Jon laughing)

Jeanne: And so they gave me a couple of little vouchers for food and they put me up in a hotel that's attached to the airport. So I went up into this hotel room and I put my suitcases and travel every ... Oh, first of all I have one suitcase only, because that's all the stuff we own, one suitcase; and I put that up and I put up everything that Matthew could hurt himself on. I'll never forget; this little room with two beds. I laid him down on one bed and I laid myself with the other baby in the other bed and I prayed to God, "Please watch over Matthew because I no longer can," and I went to sleep. I don't know what happened while I was asleep because I could not physically stay awake any longer. When I woke up he was fine, thank God. You know, I made sure he couldn't get out of the room and I made sure he couldn't hurt himself with anything and maybe he slept, I don't know.

DePue: He probably saw mom sleeping, "This isn't very exciting, I think I'll take a nap."

Jeanne: He was just a little under two years old, but I physically was no longer, psychologically no longer able to help him. So eventually—you know, later on that day, maybe 12 hours later or something—I found out that the airplanes were flying so I got put onto an airplane and then things picked up. The stewardesses heard my story and they put me up in the front, business class, and took care of my children and fed me champagne, so. I landed in America and they actually took me around customs. They went around customs; they didn't even make me go through customs, which means that Michael never was actually officially registered in the country as having entered for the first time. Then I came home to my loving family, thank God. Of course, they had beards. My brothers and brothers-in-law had beards and my kids freaked out, because they weren't used to seeing white people with beards, so.

DePue: Um-hm. Well, we're already at two hours and 14 minutes ...

Jeanne: Whoa.

DePue: ... on this session. We've been working on it for a while. So we're going to close here pretty quick, but, Jon, I want to go back to the fire and if there's anything else, and especially how the community responded to it that sticks with you today.

Jon: Well, what struck me—I mean, it struck me more later, because you're in shock. I mean, face it, we were in shock—but I guess what strikes me about it is, if I live next door to Bill Gates and his house burns down I'd say, "You know, too bad, Bill." I wouldn't give a rip, you know. I wouldn't care in the least. And it struck me as odd that these people would actually care what happened to us. That's ...

Jeanne: I don't think it was odd.

DePue: And they showed that by showing up at the house.

Jon: By just sitting there and being quiet. But they—you know—I was surprised. You know, I don't think I realized at first what was happening. You think about it later and you realize that they actually cared about us and it's hard, given that we were very different from them and, you know, it must have been really annoying to them in many different ways.

DePue: But I'm having a hard time coming up with the scene and I'm sure it's ingrained in both of your minds.

Jon: Well, it's just we have these little wooden benches from the church and everything and they're sitting around the house, this burnt up house. I mean, we've got pictures of the house. And there are just all these people sitting there looking at it. I mean, they couldn't do anything.

DePue: Were they talking to each other?

Jon: Yeah, but a little.

Jeanne: No, no.

Jon: But basically just sitting there to say ...

Jeanne: It was sitting in silence, which is the way you grieve.

Jon: Just sort of saying, "We care about you." I think that that's what they were doing.

DePue: How many were there?

Jon: I don't know.

Jeanne: Dozens and dozens and they just kept coming.

Jon: It's hard to remember.

DePue: Um-hm. And your reaction at that time? Or you didn't really have a reaction because you were still dealing with the house?

Jon: I don't know. I don't know when it dawned on me.

Jeanne: That morning is so emotional. I mean, you lose your stuff and then, truly, I really feel like I had the most spiritual ever moment of my life when I realized how really fortunate I was and how all that stuff really didn't matter at all. I think, you know—though I have surrounded myself again in a house full of stuff—that ever since hasn't meant anywhere near as much as things used to.

Jon: But the other thing is, those people are ... you know, you remember things. Baladé, Amos was the pastor there and he taught with me at the Bible school. Well, Baladé, Amos's son got bit by a snake after we left and it took them long enough to get him to realize what was going on to get him back in to help that by the time he got him in for help the infection, gangrene ... the kid died. I mean, you're not supposed to really die from snake bites; you're supposed to get them taken care of, suck the stuff out of it, clear it up, and live. And then later, Baladé decided that he had diabetes so he had this guy go down to the—a nurse guy or somebody he knew—go down to the market and buy insulin, shot him up with insulin and Baladé died from insulin shock. It's just, you know these people and these strange things happen to them. I guess it's just kind of like everywhere else, finally it's just about people. When I think about Africa, both of the places we've lived, it's very easy for me to see what benefit I've received from being in Africa, raising my family in Africa, my family being in Africa. I understand how that has enriched our lives. Part of my recollection about Cameroon is it might not be great to experience a major challenge in your life, but I think it's good to have the opportunity. I mean, our 29 months was the longest I've ever stayed out of America at a time. It was certainly the most strenuous period of life that we've ever experienced as a married couple or period. I mean, you were learning so much, you were being challenged in so many different ways and the fact of the matter is, we managed to adapt relatively successfully to that much of a challenge. It's kind of like you going to, you know,

paratrooper school. You know, you made it. That's kind of how I feel about Cameroon. And I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to be challenged like that.

Jeanne: And I truly feel that that's a bond between us, that there is nobody else in the whole world who understands that like he does, or what I went through like he does.

Jon: Nigel Barley, the guy that writes these books, this English anthropologist, one of the most fascinating people I've ever gotten to know in my whole life out there in the middle of nowhere. Kim Bradley—we have Barley and Bradley, you can almost spell their names with the same letters—he now is a major big shot with Goldman Sachs. He makes millions of dollars a year and when we met him he was a recent English graduate from Arizona. He went back to school, got an MBA at Columbia, got involved with GE Capital and then with Goldman Sachs, buying vast amounts of real estate for their funds.

DePue: But in Cameroon he was ...?

Jeanne: A Peace Corps kid.

Jon: He was a Peace Corps volunteer?

DePue: A Peace Corps volunteer.

Jon: A great guy. And he moved onto the mission station because the house they had put him in in town to live in was right next door to the TB sanitarium. When the Peace Corps doctor heard that he said, "You can't live next door to a tuberculosis sanitarium." So, you meet interesting people and I guess it's, you know—what we contributed to Africa or gave to Africans—I have no idea.

DePue: So, you're at the point that you figured out that you got a lot more out of it than you think you gave to them.

Jon: Well, I know I got a great deal out of it. I don't know what we give to them. I mean, certainly I don't bring God to them. They know about God. Certainly they wanted us there. I mean, we were there because they wanted us there. In Cameroon we provided essential logistical support and sources of income. We were a major economic resource.

Jeanne: Endless source of amusement I'm afraid.

Jon: Yeah.

DePue: But, thinking back on it, it's got to be incredibly heartwarming to think about the response you got after the fire and that's as much a symbol as anything.

Jeanne: I don't think we would have known how much they cared for us if that hadn't happened.

Jon: Yeah. I mean there are things that mean a lot to me. In a picture where Mike's getting baptized especially, where we have Norwegian missionary sponsors. I mean—talk about interesting people—their daughter ends up being a fashion model in Paris with Yves Saint Laurent. I mean, good grief, is it just odd that so many, kind of, the Blues are there and their kid ends up on the Last Comic Standing. It's like, I've met a lot of people in the world. Their kids aren't doing all of these crazy things. It's like there's something in the water over there. You meet a lot of very extreme personalities and I really like that. And then when you're living in a remote African village you meet a lot of extreme personalities because they're shipped up there. Everybody's in a stressful environment and it's interesting to watch what happens.

Jeanne: But there were also like one guy comes pedaling up on his bicycle and it was a European of some sort.

Jon: An English guy.

Jeanne: And he was bicycling across Africa and just came pedaling up to our mission station one day. We would have airplanes come and land in the field next to the mission. There would be people from God knows where and just doing something.

Jon: So it was all about, if you think people are interesting then Africa is a really interesting place because that is basically what there is.

DePue: Well, the next part of this, and we do have to end someplace tonight I'm afraid.

Jon: Well, let me finish my story and then I'll let you ...

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: Then I'll let you quit. (DePue laughing)

Jon: That picture where those Norwegians are there, of the baptism, I think that's kind of the coolest thing, because he was actually baptized by Ahmadou Joseph, who is an African, a Cameroonian pastor. I think that's representative of so many things in our lives because Ahmadou is a Muslim name, Joseph's his Christian name, and he was obviously a Christian pastor. That's kind of this hodge-podge of cultures and religions, and the way the world really is, a complicated place. And it just meant a lot to me that I wasn't there baptizing, we were there receiving ministry and giving our child into the hands of, sort of, Africa. The baptism was in at least a church all the time. I mean, he baptized him in French for the people who understood French, and in Pulaar for the people who didn't, and I think that that was important. I really think that's important. It's okay that we learned a lot more maybe than we taught, because we were there to be servants of people who never had servants, to help these people, to let them call the shots. That was a new role for Europeans to have in that place. I think we were still way more powerful and way richer, but we were pretty respectful of them and I think it meant a lot to them, too.

Jeanne: It was awesome.

Jon: I think it meant a lot to them that we had kids there, you know.

DePue: That's a sign of commitment that ...

Jon: Sure. I mean, we had children. Jeanne forever had women pulling up her blouse to see how she nursed the baby.

Jeanne: If I had the same plumbing as they did.

Jon: It's like, she could have said, "You can't do this to me." But she didn't say that to them, she just said, "Oh, I know what you're doing here."

Jeanne: And, "Yep, it works the same way for me as you." And we had a moment, mother to mother. We speak the same language, but ...

Jon: So, it was the most intense ... the whole thing. From going to France to going to Africa was the most intense. We lived more intensely in that 3-1/2 year period than we ever have.

DePue: Well, I think that's probably a good place to stop for tonight and next time we get together we need to talk a little bit about Fairbury and the way to Senegal and I think there will be some interesting contrast between what you had in Africa and what you experienced in Fairbury. So, with that, until next time. Thank you very much Jon and Jeanne.

(End of interview #2. Continue with interview #3)

Interview with Jon and Jeanne Berg

FM-A-L-2007-005.03

Interview #3: Tuesday, June 26, 2007

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Tuesday, June 26, 2007. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here for part three of a series of interviews with Jon and Jeanne Berg. Jon is currently the pastor at Atonement Lutheran Church here in Springfield, Illinois. We are right now sitting in their dining room? I guess that's where we are. Where we left off last time, Jon and Jeanne, was just basically finishing up your time in Cameroon and the decisions to come back home, the fire, the subsequent decisions and, Jeanne, your harrowing trip from Cameroon to France to the United States. I think that's pretty much what we ended up with. Jon, I think what I'd like to start with then is talk about how you ended up being assigned to Fairbury since your departure from Cameroon was a little bit in haste.

Jon: Yeah, we didn't quite know how it worked to receive a call in America, since we never had. Obviously I didn't know how I'd be received having literally burned our way out of our first call. I left Cameroon and arrived in America on December 22, along with Harriet Stovner, who was coming home for the last time, having retired as a missionary and having gone to Africa for the first time the month Jeanne was born so she had been there a long time.

Jeanne: January of 1950.

Jon: And we didn't, in the earlier tape, tell Harriet's stories, but we certainly could because there are lots to tell.

DePue: Well, why don't you give us a quick thumbnail of that then.

Jeanne: Harriet was famous for inviting you for a meal. She'd say, "I'm going to meet you at the intersection of such and such road and such and such dirt path." So you would go out into the bush and there she'd be, with a linen tablecloth spread over the front of her car. She would have her china and teacups and crystal and she would have a meal. She brought out and served you there in the middle of nowhere on her china and crystal and linen tablecloths.

DePue: Where did she live?

Jeanne: She had lived in Poli where we had lived and had had trouble living at that situation, getting along with the other people there and made the decision ...

DePue: The other people being missionaries?

Jeanne: Other missionaries. ...and made the decision she wanted to go farther out, so she lived in Godé, right?

Jon: Godé was, yes, another mission station. There were kind of mission stations scattered around because there used to be more missionaries. Now, as we speak today, there are very, very few indeed, but it has been a gradual—missionary work was 19th century, early 20th century, mid 20th century. It's kind of in decline, at least in many denominations now. So she lived out there in a house by herself. She had a driver that took her everywhere and she loved to travel.

Jeanne: Because she didn't drive herself?

Jon: Yeah, she was a demoiselle. Everybody in French said mademoiselle means miss. She was one of these famous demoiselles that was always a demoiselle and never got married and devoted herself ...

Jeanne: She was wonderful.

Jon: Devoted herself to the Lord.

Jeanne: Yeah. Like, if she decided there was a special service or something going to happen, she would get her driver to drive her into me. She'd have me wash and set her hair and then she'd take off back into the bush so in the morning she could take out her curls and look extra beautiful and fashionable.

Jon: She lived about an hour further out in the bush and the reason she went there was because my colleague and she, before we arrived there—which is one of the reasons they wondered about us living in Poli—because Harriet had literally been there for 25 years. She was pretty well African-ed. You know, she knew how to handle Africa. She and our colleague there, Ernie, got in a dispute over something and Ernie got up in church one Sunday when he was preaching. Everybody, of course, knew that he and Harriet were having this dispute. Ernie announced to the congregation that they should no longer listen to Harriet because she was possessed by the devil. (Jon laughing).

DePue: And she took objection to that?

Jeanne: And Harriet packed up and moved out to Godé.

Jon: That was her last day in Poli. Some things she wouldn't accept.

DePue: And so, you know, if you didn't think that Poli was far enough in the sticks, she found a place ...

Jon: Oh yeah.

DePue: ... that was even farther back.

Jeanne: And, you know, like some people go out for a movie on Saturday night for a date, Jon and I would get an invite from Harriet and feel like we were, you know, going out. We'd pack the kids up and run over to Godé for dinner and dinner conversation.

DePue: Now, was she a missionary herself?

Jeanne: Oh yes, yes.

DePue: And what church?

Jeanne: Lutheran. Lutheran.

Jon: With us.

Jeanne: She was one of ours.

DePue: Oh okay, okay. And I've lost track now after all of this. You mentioned her when you were coming back to the states.

Jon: Because we came back together on the same flight.

Jeanne: Yeah, she retired.

Jon: Harriet was extraordinarily fond of us. It was nice to have people who really, really like you, because not all of our colleagues really, really liked us. (Jon laughing).
And so we

Jeanne: It was a mutual feeling. We adored her.

Jon: We appreciated her.

DePue: And what was the reason that she came back to the states after all those years in Africa?

Jon: She retired.

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. How old was she when she got there?

Jon: Probably 35.

Jeanne: Yeah, I would guess that she was in her 30s. She didn't go right out of college or anything.

DePue: Okay, so she was getting close to 55 or so? 60?

Jon: Sixty-five.

Jeanne: Yes, um-hm.

Jon: And she lived up into her 90s. She may have died now, but she's lived up into her 90s.

DePue: Okay, okay.

Jon: In Minneapolis.

DePue: So, again, we were talking about how you ended up in Fairbury.

Jon: When we came back we didn't know what to do and We decided that we would like to live somewhere between South Dakota and Illinois, because I was from South Dakota and Jeanne was from Illinois and we had no idea. We would be paid two months by the mission.

Jeanne: Salary.

Jon: Salaried for two months because we'd spent two full years in Africa and they would pay us for two months after which time we were just out of luck.

DePue: Okay, now Jeanne, you came back and went up to Oak Park?

Jeanne: Yeah, I came back and I moved in with my parents, who were living in Oak Park, with the two kids.

DePue: And it was a while before he came back.

Jeanne: Yeah. Mike was born in September and he was baptized in October and so I came home probably about two weeks after that. I extracted a promise from him that I would agree to leave and go home ahead of him as long as he would agree to be back with us in the states by the holidays. That would have given him time to finish the Bible school thing and close up the finances for the year. He was in charge of the finances for the north district, I guess, of the church.

DePue: And you just barely made that commitment.

Jon: Yeah, I got home on the 22nd of December.

DePue: Okay. So it wasn't that long a time period.

Jon: Six weeks probably.

Jeanne: Um-hm, um-hm.

DePue: Okay. And then you had two months and were you in Oak Park as well?

Jon: We were drifting around. What I remember is this. We received a call from Bishop Osterbur, Ehme Osterbur, of the Illinois Synod of the old American Lutheran Church and he said, "I'd like you to interview at a church." We interviewed on January 22 of 1980. I know that because that was Jeanne's birthday and she didn't necessarily think spending her birthday interviewing for a job was the best way to do it, but that's what we did.

Jeanne: Here was the thing. We had been overseas for essentially three years. January 22 was also my father's birthday and for the first time in three or four years I was going to get to celebrate with my dad and have my kids and everything there. I was feeling particularly needy of family at that point, obviously, and so I thought, "Humph, that's not good, I have to go down and interview on my birthday." But we pulled up in front of the parsonage there and I changed my mind. I went, "Man, after where we had lived in Africa, this place was unbelievable."

DePue: And this was, I take it, Fairbury?

Jeanne: Fairbury.

Jon: Yeah, it was a four bedroom all brick house, ranch house with a fireplace and with a living room and with a family room and a kitchen. It was a year and a half old.

Jeanne: It was the world's nicest parsonage. I think it was decided by a committee of women and everyone got to put in what they all felt was necessary in a house, so it had everything you could want and then some.

Jon: The garage was about three times nicer than our house in Africa.

Jeanne: Yeah, it was paneled and heated.

Jon: It was heated and paneled. (Jon laughing). And had a big walk-in closet in the garage.

Jeanne: It perhaps even had running water, I don't know. (Jon laughing)

DePue: Not a bad birthday present after all?

Jeanne: No.

Jon: Yeah. Her line was—when we were looking through the parsonage—she looked at me and she said: "I'd kill to live in this parsonage." (Mark and Jon laughing).

DePue: So, I take that same day you had an interview?

Jon: Yeah, and the thing is I had Jeanne come to the interview. I've only ever had a couple of interviews for congregations in America. Both times I've asked her to come because my thinking is, if it goes well, fine; but if it doesn't go well I want her to know what happened so she can tell me what happened or so I don't have to try to explain it. And so we met with this committee and I guess the interview went fine and by the end of the interview they said, "If we were to call you, what would you do?" You're supposed to say, "Well, I would prayerfully consider it." I said, "If you were to call me I'd take the call,." They said, "Good, we're going to call you." So it was kind of a nice ... it was less of a sort of dangling conclusion to this kind of a meeting that is typically the case.

DePue: Did you have any opportunity to express your opinions about anything or was any discussion directed towards you, Jeanne?

Jeanne: Um, as far as, like did they interview me? Not really, and that's the way it should be. I mean, they truly interviewed him. I was just sitting here thinking, "He's never come to any of my interviews, but ..." (Mark laughing). It's a little bit different, because, yeah they do look at the whole family and they do look at other things. When we were there, obviously, we had a chance to like meet the congregation and they got a chance to meet us, which was really nice We were, you know, feeling like we were enveloped in caring people right from the very get go.

Jon: Was that all at the first time?

Jeanne: Yes.

Jon: Or did we come back?

Jeanne: No.

Jon: That all happened that first meeting?

Jeanne: Um-hm, yep.

Jon: Good grief.

DePue: Okay, now, one of you gets to tell me a little bit more about Fairbury as a community.

Jeanne: Well, I'll just say a little bit about how we were welcomed there. We made an appointment to show up on a certain day to move our stuff in. Remember, we had lost essentially everything in a fire. We had been given some donations from people and had bought a few little things here and there. We had had some stuff in storage, so that was nice. But we pulled up there essentially with very little, much less than a family of four would normally have. We were welcomed by a bunch of ladies from the congregation. That house was clean ... cleaner than it ever was after that, since I was living in it. They grabbed our sheets and towels and made up our bed and, you know, put things out in the bathrooms. I got to the kitchen, the freezer was full of frozen dinners and the cupboards were full of flour and sugar and spices and the kitchen was stocked, ready to go. They knew that we had nothing to come with, so I mean right from there you could see that they were going to be very, very caring for us.

DePue: Okay. And how about the community itself? Fairbury.

Jon: Twenty-five hundred people. It's defining characteristic is: We want to be here. That's why people were there. They had made a choice to not leave. Some people had married into the community and they had made a choice to not change. This was largely agrarian in both a religious and an economic sense. I mean, farming was the big industry and there was a conservative group of German Christians called Apostolic Christians and then there was a more conservative group called Christian Apostolics. They were kind of like Mennonites or Amish, but not quite, but of that similar background: they owned land and they farmed and they had big families. It made the whole community more socially and financially conservative than even a normal Central Illinois community and by and large they're remarkably conservative places.

DePue: These two groups that you're talking about both came in in the latter part of the 19th century to settle there?

Jon: I have no idea. There were there when I got there.

DePue: But it was predominantly a German town?

Jon: Oh, yeah, big time German town. Yeah.

DePue: Yeah. And they're sitting on some of the best farmland in the world.

Jon: That's right. And people were either AC or CA or formerly AC or a lot of Lutherans were ex-ACs. Then they married and intermarried and inter-intermarried and it was a fascinating kind of closed community in many ways. People really knew each other and then people tended to get married ... A lot of people would get married right out of high school and about the time they were 30 they'd get divorced; then they'd kind of shuffle mates and get married again. So a lot of people have been married to each other or their kids had been married to each other, so it was a small town. I mean, which looked like Mayberry and was just as complicated emotionally and as intermixed with family feuds and joys and conflicts as you could ever imagine.

DePue: Just as intermixed as Peyton Place?

Jeanne: Yeah. It was definitely a place where it was who you knew. Like, for instance, you could not move into town and get a job as a teacher, like I found out, because you either had to be married to somebody who already was a teacher or somebody on the school board or, you know, whatever. There were hundreds of people who wanted to teach and very few jobs and it was definitely who you knew who got you in there.

Jon: Well, but they would say to me, "Pastor, you have to understand, we have to live with each other." The people who lived there for generations. I understood this and it was fine with me; people like coaches, band directors and preachers were basically visiting technocrats that came and went and provided an outlet for the community to focus attention on something other than themselves and, when necessary, to focus frustration on something other than themselves.

DePue: Well, I'm curious, who kind of laid out the ground rules and told you where the land mines were and who was with whom before?

Jon: Nigel Barley taught me how to survive, because he taught me about anthropology. I didn't come in and say, "Here I am, I am smarter than you are." I came in and said, "I'll bet this is an alien culture to me. I wonder what the language is. I wonder what the word means." And then he taught me about kinship patterns. Well, there's nothing quite as important as kinship patterns in Central Illinois small town congregations. So, I approached Fairbury like an anthropologist and tried to figure out who I was talking to. I also approached them with the idea that they're really, really smart, because they hired me (DePue laughing) and I figure that represented amazingly good judgment on their part. I told them my first Sunday, "I want you to welcome my family like the false prophets were welcomed in the Old Testament." (DePue laughing). You know, "Be nice to me. I want you to like me. I'd like to like you, because I'm not here to not get along." And I still had to go through ... you know, people would come at me and later other people would say, "Pastor, we

knew that was going to happen. We know how these people are, but we wanted to see how you'd handle it." (Jon laughing).

DePue: Well, maybe that answered my question as much as any. Was there one person or some people who kind of helped you figure out the community?

Jeanne: Well, one of the things I had figured out was, I think it's a bit of a myth to say that small towns are more friendly. I think he was talking about the kinship; it's very important, most people there, their family was there and/or their high school buddies were there and so they really were sort of a closed culture. It was very difficult to come in from the outside and we figured out that everybody has to build their own support system. In Fairbury, again, it was their family, their high school buddies. We had to develop a support system, so we ended up, you know, like we'd have New Year's Eve parties for pastors, because nobody invites pastors to New Year's Eve parties because you can't have as much fun if there's a pastor there.

Jon: We had one group, one couple, a younger couple. They were kind of new to town and they said, "That's not true. You guys are just as normal as the day is long. You wouldn't cramp anybody's style at a party." And we said, "Okay." So they had a party and we said, "Invite us." And so we came in there and we wandered around and nobody knew us. Then after awhile they said, "Oh, by the way, this ..."

Jeanne: No. Somebody pulled up outside and said, "Hey, Pastor Berg, what are you doing here?" (Mark and Jon laughing). And mid-sentence, somebody who was talking to me in all sorts of special ...

DePue: Colorful language.

Jeanne: ... colorful language, stopped what they were saying, their mouths dropped open and they changed into perfectly appropriate language. (Mark and Jon laughing) My girlfriend said to me, "Alright, Jeanne, I saw it with my own eyes." (Mark laughing) People change the way they behave when they find out you're a pastor or a pastor's wife.

DePue: Well, that's interesting now ...

Jon: The thing is, too, we loved it there. I mean, we didn't go there thinking, "These people are odd" or ... We just liked the people and they were wonderful to us. I mean, there is always conflict in any situation.

DePue: Sure.

Jon: I mean, you don't get through life without people disagreeing. If the people there are, you know, a remarkably conservative group, they're also amazingly stubborn. (Jon laughing). I mean, you don't farm your way through the depression by being wishy-washy about anything.

DePue: Some might call them resilient.

Jon: That's right. And they were successful. I mean, remarkably successful people.

DePue: And, you know, this is the 1980s farming after all, and you don't survive in farming unless you are a master of a lot of different things.'

Jon: Yeah. They were remarkably competent people.

DePue: How many of your parishioners then were farmers, percentage-wise?

Jon: Oh I would imagine fewer than half, because they were more in the farm service businesses, because a lot of them were blue collar, trucks drivers, construction workers, a lot of construction workers, a lot of people that worked in hardware stores.

DePue: But many of them had farming backgrounds?

Jon: Sure.

Jeanne: It was a smaller version of what Springfield is: a support community for a big geographic area. That's where the doctors were, there was a hospital there, there was a nursing home there, there were lawyers, there was a small little department store, lots of little businesses.

Jon: We had bankers, teachers. We had a real cross-section of the community.

DePue: How big was the congregation?

Jon: Four hundred members.

DePue: How many in the service?

Jon: When I left we were averaging 180.

DePue: Very good.

Jon: Yeah, it was great. Attendance went up from about 150 to about 180 when I was there. It was my most successful place. (Jon laughing).

DePue: Now, Jeanne, I've heard you tell this story a couple times about the first time you met some of the ladies in the congregation.

Jeanne: Oh, yeah. Well, it was that interview time. Like you said, we had an interview with the church council and we walk out of the church office and we walked into the parish hall and there were all of these round tables and dozens of people sitting around there. As we entered the room everyone was quiet and nobody said anything and somebody from the call committee announced to the people, "Here are Pastor and Jeanne Berg,"—actually I think we had our little kids with us

perhaps—“They’re here to meet you and I’d like you to stand up and mingle.” Those were the words, stand up and mingle. Everybody stood up on cue and turned to each other and started talking (Jon and Mark laughing) and I really felt like, “I’m in the twilight zone.” (Everybody laughing). It was so literal. Anyway, but of course, after that then we walked around and met people and they were very, very welcoming. So, yes, it was very strange.

DePue: Well, you’re leaving out the one story. Maybe you were leaving that out on purpose.

Jeanne: Oh, yes, okay, about the shaking hands with ...

Jon: ... with a person who shall remain nameless.

Jeanne: Yes, yes, yes. I think we’ll leave that one out.

DePue: Okay. So be it. Well, I think you’ve answered a lot of these questions I’ve got.

Jon: The other thing that happened in Fairbury is, you get close to people. This was a new thing for me as a parish pastor and it’s still something that’s maybe the best and the hardest thing about being a parish pastor. You get very close to people who die, and that was new. I was 30 years old when I went to that church and I had never been a pastor in an American congregation. You get to know these people and then you start doing funerals and that changes you. You really get to know people when they’re dying. We had young people dying in that church.

DePue: Well, that strikes me, because your conversations, your comments about living in Cameroon, death was no stranger for you?

Jon: No, but it was different. I mean you kind of expected it in Africa and in America I was surprised by it more. It was more of a surprise. I wasn’t surprised that Africans are so vulnerable. I was surprised how vulnerable Americans are and I think I learned a great deal about that.

DePue: That people in general are.

Jon: Yeah. And how conflicted life is.

DePue: Now, a part of this is most of your married life together had been living in some very harsh conditions. Was there anything that you were surprised about in terms of adjusting back to life in America?

Jon: I think Jeanne once said it took her 30 seconds to adjust (Mark and Jon laughing).

Jeanne: It’s funny, because you do know you’re going to have culture shock going overseas. We’ve always advised people, don’t come and visit us in Africa for one week; you need to count on being there at least two, because it’s going to take you a week to get through culture shock: to be able to get over worrying about the germs and

worrying about the smell and worrying about the heat and start being able to see the beauty of the people and the beauty of the country and enjoy the experience. Probably I should have given myself the same, you know, thought. Okay now, remember it's going to take you a while to get used to things. I remember flying into Sioux Falls, South Dakota, one time with the boys without Jon and we would start there because we had a car stored in South Dakota and so I could have the kids visit grandma and grandpa for a few days. Then I would drive back to Oak Park and visit with my family. So we flew in there at night and I got up in the morning—of course you did not bring back deodorant and shampoo and dirty or, you know, old underwear, you came back to America to buy more deodorant and underwear and what not—so I got up early in the morning to run down to (I think I went to a Target) and wanted to just buy some basic supplies for the boys and I. I remember walking in and almost being dizzy and almost vomiting from being overcome by all of the choice. It was just overwhelming to be in that store. You know, I love shopping, and, you know, the bigger the store the better, but I remember feeling like I almost had to, like, sit down and get my wits about me before I could push that cart down the aisle with so much choice.

DePue: That it almost was too much.

Jeanne: It was overwhelming, yeah, it was just overwhelming. And I remember one time—this was after when we were in Senegal actually, so I've skipped ahead a little bit—I landed in New York City with the boys. I was going to spend a couple of days there giving them, you know, stop at McDonald's as much as you want and go to toy stores and stuff like that before we hit the relatives, where grandma would want you to stay at home and she wanted to cook meals for you. They wanted to go out to McDonald's; that was their big treat. So I remember hitting New York City and I took the kids to some stores and what-not. Then I thought I'd take them on a trip out to the statue of liberty or the Staten Island ferry or something. I'm on the boat with the three boys and Mike, our middle son, curls up in a ball and he's weeping. I'm going, "What's wrong, aren't you having fun?" He goes, "It's just too much, it's just too much." So, I know that the kids also sometimes would experience that, you know, too many. We were in the car coming from the airport one time and Mike looks out the window and he goes, "Hey, look at all these white people here. Where'd they all come from?"

DePue: Now, I guess to search a little harder here, what do you think exactly he meant by saying, "It's just too much?"

Jeanne: Um, too many people, too much noise, too much experience, just, you know, he OD'd on noise. And, of course, probably New York City might have been, you know ...

DePue: Okay. How about yourself Jon, was there anything that really struck you?

Jon: Coming back from Africa to America?

DePue: Yes.

Jon: I guess I was trying to figure out how to be a pastor and so I don't know. I think we were tired and so I think we just kept going. We had two little kids at the time. Another thing that we should say about the people of Fairbury is they were gracious with our children who were rambunctious; that could have been something which could have caused us more problems than it did. I think the people were very patient with our kids.

DePue: Well, that was my next question anyway. The kids started to go to school in Fairbury, correct?

Jeanne: Well, uh, okay, so we had a couple of month old and a two year old when we first moved there and so I did, of course, being a teacher, value ... you know, so we did play groups and we did nursery school. Matthew did go to kindergarten and first grade while we were there and, of course, the other two then did preschool. Actually, in Fairbury one of the things I found to do—I did not work full-time—I did a little substituting in the elementary schools for special ed positions once in a while, but I ran a community nursery school. Like you said with those AC people, they were not quite as removed from, let's see, normal conveniences or whatever as the Amish. But, for instance, a lot of them did not have TVs in their home, did not have a lot of the same experiences that other preschool kids would have. They did not put their kids into preschools. So one of the community services is, another lady and I made up a nursery school. We ran it for, I think, eight weeks every spring. It was designed to get kids ready to go to kindergarten and especially to service those kids who were not going to preschool so they had no school experience. I did it for five years, every spring, so my kids would also be involved with that, but ...

DePue: Jon, you're talking about your experiences as a pastor or as a missionary in Africa; it's not your typical congregational kind of ministry. So, what was that experience like, learning how to do it in the United States?

Jon: I guess I just did it. I mean, some things you have to do. You show up for the meetings when you're supposed to show up for the meetings, You preach on every Sunday. You teach confirmation. You try to talk to people. I mean, I don't quite know how anybody learns how to be a pastor, because I don't think anybody does it in quite the same way. Luckily, I made friends with other pastors. I've always had good relationships with other pastors, not all other pastors, but enough other pastors that I respect, and that you sit down and you talk about things. I think the key, as far as I'm concerned, the key was we were glad to be there and in a small town. I don't care where you are, probably anywhere, it seems to me the least that people would like you to do is to be glad you're their pastor. And so it was very easy for us to say ... when they asked us ...

Jeanne: That is so true.

Jon: ... “Do you like Fairbury?” and I always told my friend from Forrest, “If they ever ask you if you like Forrest, tell them yes, because it doesn’t matter if you like Forrest or not, the identity between the community and these people is so strong that if you were to be critical of Forrest, that’s a direct attack on them.” So they would say, not, “Do you like us?”, but, “How do you like Fairbury?” and we would say, “We’re absolutely delighted to be here,” and luckily, we were. So I think that makes it easy.

Jeanne: It was a wonderful place to raise three little boys and it was like the perfect time in our life. I mean, I think God really gave us the place we needed to heal; heal emotionally, financially, you know. We weren’t hurt physically or anything, but we really needed to get it together again after we had been overseas and after we had lost everything in the fire.

Jon: And I think too, if people got a little difficult sometimes... The first time that really happened to me, I remember, this lady just got really, really, really angry with me. It was a new experience for me to be just yelled at like this and I came home to my house and I was kind of shaken. I thought, “Boy, I don’t know. I wonder what’s going to happen.” According to this person I’d be run out of town within 90 minutes, you know. And so, like I told her, I said, “All I can say is, I hope you’re wrong, because if you’re right I’m in a world of trouble.” (laughing) So I went home to Jeanne and I started explaining this. Jeanne said, “Well, Jon, it’s not easy having to be a grown-up, is it?” (Mark and Jon laughing). “You always thought everybody would like you. Tough.” Which was the best possible answer, you know: what are you going to do? So, I think one of the things I figured out was a lot of the times when people would voice frustration—they were really nice to us, but they were often in painful and frus... If it would come out directed at you, it wasn’t about you; it was about them. And if you could get to the issue with them and get over defending you, then you were kind of okay. I think that was something that we were able to do. When people really got criticized for something we were doing, and occasionally they would, if they didn’t like how we dressed, or they didn’t like this, or they didn’t like ...

Jeanne: Like how I dressed. (Jon laughing). I wore shorts uptown and somebody was really offended, yes.

Jon: And so we would just have to say, “Well, you don’t get to tell us how to dress. So deal with it.” And, you know, you draw some boundaries and you live your life.

DePue: But it is difficult, isn’t it, when somebody’s mad at you, not to kind of internalize it and start fretting and fussing about that?

Jon: Yeah, it’s probably impossible not to.

Jeanne: See, and that’s where my BD teacher training had rubbed off.

Jon: The question is ...

DePue: Your BD being?

Jeanne: You know, teaching behavioral disordered kids. I had been doing it before we got married and that's the lesson I had learned. It's just like he said, it's their problem, not yours.

Jon: But you have all of those feelings, you internalize it, and then you say to yourself, "Do these feelings control my behavior and are they, in fact, the most important thing in reality?" Or do you move on and hope things work?

DePue: I know that you did some preaching in Africa and you oftentimes did your preaching in Africa in French, correct?

Jon: Correct.

DePue: Did you find that an interesting or challenging adjustment to make, giving and having to get prepared for services every week?

Jon: No. Luckily, if I didn't like to preach I would do something else. I don't understand pastors who don't like to preach. I found preaching to be interesting. It gives you something to think about/ One of the things I did early on in Fairbury was start a Wednesday morning women's Bible study where we studied the paricopes, that is, the assigned preaching text lessons for ...

Jeanne: For the coming Sunday.

Jon: ... for the next Sunday and we would talk about those lessons. There was a group of women who came and that still goes on in that congregation all of these years later, 25 years later; it was a support group that developed among these women. We would talk about the text, so I understood where they were coming from. Then I would preach what they talked about and they would say, "Well, wait a minute, you're actually paying attention to what we say." I said, you know, "I happen to think you know more about you than other people do." So I think the way that I talked to them spoke to them, because I listened to them. I guess I wasn't intimidated by having to preach. I mean, I don't have to preach. I have the privilege of preaching and I don't find it a burden and I like it.

DePue: Did you incorporate a lot of incidents or stories or lessons from your experiences in Africa?

Jon: I would imagine.

Jeanne: Uh-huh.

Jon: (Laughing). I can't remember what I preached about.

DePue: Jeanne, did you ever hear that he talked too much about those experiences?

Jeanne: No. I do feel like we feel that there are times that people just can't understand it really; not having been there it's really hard to totally grasp it. I think you can talk too much about it; some people aren't interested I think he talks to people about their problems, and sometimes he would relate it to the problems he had met which people in Africa had and actually are similar to the same kind of problems you have.

DePue: Sure. Well, it always struck me that your sermons most of the time aren't esoteric, they're very practical. They're very personalized so that everybody can relate.

Jeanne: That's what he loved, I think –that's what I witnessed –he is such a people person that he really loved visiting people. I mean, one of the beautiful things that I was able to do is—I was at home, staying at home with my kids instead of working—we were able to go visiting all of the old people in the home, with little kids.

DePue: Did you go out to visit folks on the farm or in the community?

Jeanne: Oh, absolutely.

Jon: Sure, all over the place.

Jeanne: Yeah, I was able to participate in his ministry much more and that was really cool for me.

Jon: And if you went to the store, there were people from church. If you went to the bank, there were people from church. If you wanted to see the people you didn't see at church that were in your church, you went to football on Friday night and they were all there. (DePue laughing). So you could wander the stands and meet the non-attenders and shake their hands, you know. So, you could find them, they weren't that hard to find.

DePue: Okay. This also gave you an opportunity to reconnect with both of your families. Jeanne, let's start with yours since yours was much closer to Fairbury.

Jeanne: Yeah, like I said I was disappointed by the day that our interview happened to be, because I didn't get to celebrate that birthday with my dad. Unfortunately he died before he had another birthday. So I was pretty bummed out by that fact until I realized, because our house burned down, I did come home and spend two and a half months living in the home with my dad. He got to meet my boys. If our house hadn't burned down we would have still been in Africa on our last months of our term there and he never would have met my boys before he died. So, I mean, there are good things that come out of everything. Anyway, at that point I had some siblings in college and siblings who had gotten out of college and it was very exciting. My boys were the first children on both sides actually, so we brought grandkids into the family gatherings and what-not, which was really exciting.

DePue: So you spent holidays with your family or the families?

Jeanne: Yeah. One famous Christmas we got up and went up to Chicago and spent Christmas morning with my family. We jumped in the car and were going to try to make it to Sioux Falls by evening and spend Christmas night with his family and then we hit a snowstorm, so we never tried that again. We would usually spend the holidays a few days with my family and a few days with his in between Sundays.

DePue: Yeah. But that's a lot of distance to cover in basically five or six days.

Jeanne: Um-hm But our kids were good travelers, so we'd throw them in the car and away we'd go.

DePue: Jon, in reconnecting with your family, same thing?

Jon: Well, my family is more scattered, I guess, than Jeanne's. The siblings—we've gone our separate ways and we see each other rarely. We didn't have ...

Jeanne: But, they would make it a point to come home for some Christmases, or everybody would make it a point to be there.

Jon: Yeah. So I guess we reconnected. I stay in constant communication with my parents and to a lesser degree with my siblings on the telephone and we see each other rarely, but that's our model. And then when we're in Africa, you know, we don't see them, we don't talk to them on the telephone.

DePue: But your parents did get a chance to go to Cameroon to see you.

Jon: They did, yes, and they'll never do that again. (DePue laughing). One trip to Africa was enough for them.

DePue: But I assume they made the trip to Fairbury a few times.

Jeanne: Absolutely.

Jon: Sure, and I don't remember what particular occasions. I mean, it wasn't like we always had Thanksgiving or anything, I don't think.

Jeanne: They were there for at least one Thanksgiving I can remember. They came and would baby sit sometimes where we could go away.

Jon: They were there for Ryan's baptism.

Jeanne: Yeah, they were there for Ryan's baptism.

Jon: I guess I've never felt isolated from my family. I mean, I didn't go to Africa and feel terribly lonely that my family was in America. My family wasn't. My family was my wife and kids. I mean, the fact that my brother and sisters and parents and I have lived in geographically separate spots, just seems normal to me.

Jeanne: There were tough times though. There were tough times, like when we were living in France. The first Christmas I was away from home I made a phone call from Rome. Now, I'm in Rome, how can you complain, but I made an 11 minute phone call and talked to 13 family members and sobbed, one after another, "I miss you." So it was extremely hard at times. One eight day period of time in June of 1977 we missed two of my brothers' and one of his sister's weddings within eight days because we couldn't leave language school for two weeks. We missed them by two weeks, so that was tough. I missed quite a few of my siblings' weddings.

Jon: That was always more of an issue for Jeanne than for me.

DePue: Well, it strikes me that your comment about being connected with your family, but not having to spend all the time with them, was a big contrast to what you experienced in the culture you went to in Cameroon, and even in Fairbury, where they had extended families apparently and they were interconnected and they were bothering with everybody else's business.

Jon: Yeah, but it's not, I'm sure, entirely true, but I'm convinced that many of the people in Fairbury have made a decision in their life that has shaped their lives, which is, "We're staying here. Now that means we'll find work here, we'll find families here. We love Fairbury, we're staying here." And then you tend to be ministering to the people who stay, who are exactly the people who aren't like me, because ...

Jeanne: Yeah, we were the people who don't stay.

Jon: Because if you told me, "You're staying here," I would have said, "Never!" (laughing), "Not!"

Jeanne: Now, to my horror, I have raised three sons who don't stay.

Jon: Oh, you haven't. That's not your horror at all. You'd be shocked if they were any different.

Jeanne: Yeah I would, yeah.

DePue: I can understand your predicament there. (laughing)

Jeanne: Yes, yes.

DePue: Okay, where are we now?

Jon: But it's okay. I mean, it's not like there's a right way or a wrong way to do it.

Jeanne: No.

Jon: It's just, you better know what shapes people, what they value.

DePue: Perhaps one of your great strengths in going all over the world and coming to places like Fairbury and Springfield is you like people and you like different people.

Jon: Yeah. I don't expect them to be like me. That would be boring. (laughing)

Jeanne: And we really love getting to know them and working with people.

DePue: Um-hm, but somewhere in the process—you were in Fairbury four and a half, five years, in that neighborhood?

Jeanne: Um-hm, that's right.

DePue: Somewhere along the line it's time to move on.

Jon: Well, I would've always gone back to Africa, in a minute.

DePue: Because?

Jon: Just because it's a challenge, because it's different, because it's different. I always said, you know, anybody can be a pastor in America. How hard can it be? They all speak English. You know, let's ramp up the degree of difficulty here. It's interesting because it's interesting. But I figured we'd never go back because I understood, you know, that it had been really, really challenging and really difficult. I figured Jeanne would never go back. So I just kind of forgot about it.

DePue: So I'll turn this question over to you then Jeanne.

Jeanne: I went to—I was trying to remember, I don't remember what year it was.

Jon: You went to Detroit.

Jeanne: I went to the American Lutheran, or Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Women's Triennial ...

Jon: No, no, no, ALC.

Jeanne: ALC? It was ALC then? Okay.

Jon: The ELCA formed when we were in Senegal.

Jeanne: Okay, ALC. Anyway, the women's Triennial (happened every three years) National Convention, happened to be in Detroit. I went with another pastor's wife and a lady from her congregation in Forrest and my mom. We got in a van, we went over to Detroit and we were at this national convention, the first and only one I have ever been to. I loved the experience. I loved being with my mom and having that experience, it was very special. One morning I got an invite to go to—they were having a breakfast for missionaries, any missionary women who happened to be there. So, I chose to go to it and I sat around with some of the area directors and

Mr. Knutsen, who I had known, and a few other people. I couldn't believe it: in my thoughts I just started to feel we were supposed to go overseas, we were supposed to go back. I said, "I can't believe I'm feeling this way." By the time we left that convention and we drove home to Fairbury, I said, "Jon, we're supposed to go back overseas, only we're supposed to go to Hong Kong," I made him go up to the embassy, or the consulate up in Chicago and we got literature out. I was absolutely convinced we were supposed to go overseas and I had kind of said, you know, to the people of the mission group, "Ehhhh, you know, I'm thinking this might be what we're supposed to do." And we got the literature, we started to talk with the mission people again and they had said, "If you're going to go to Hong Kong we need a ten year commitment." I remember doing my math and realizing what ten years would be: one of our kids would be having to go off to college and was also going to be after the turnover of Hong Kong to China?

DePue: In 1999, I believe.

Jeanne: Yes. I was afraid of what that would mean. I didn't know if I wanted to commit to be able to stay there after that. So we started to say, "Well, what else do you need?" And very quickly they said, "We have a position in Dakar, Senegal. You already speak French; that sounds perfect. We're needing somebody who is good with kids who could serve as a housemother for four kids whose parents are out in the bush." And then the other thing that we had already said about Cameroon is, we did not want to live where we had to send our kids two days away from us. We wanted our kids to live with us or very near us when they became school age. In Dakar the kids went to a school right there in Dakar, so the kids could live with us.

DePue: So all of your prerequisites, preconditions, were met.

Jeanne: Yeah, it's like all of a sudden there is no excuse not to go. (DePue laughing). And, this might sound corny, but I think subconsciously—when you take all your subconscious and conscious thinking and decisions when you are making it—it feels right in your gut or it feels wrong in your gut. I truly believe it is your subconscious and conscious working together, with a little bit of help from above. You know, your decisions feel right or wrong, and this started to feel absolutely like the right thing to do.

DePue: Um-hm. And Jon, you're up for it all along.

Jon: Sure. And we'd have five years in America, so we weren't anything like the sort of stressed and exhausted people that we'd been when we moved to Fairbury. I mean, like Jeanne said, it was a great place for us to get our feet back under us and we also understood that we liked being overseas. We thought it would be great for our kids to be overseas. We didn't see living in Africa as any kind of a sacrifice; we saw it as a chance to have a more privileged experience.

Jeanne: There were some other contributing things though. For instance, there was a woman in our church—I don't want to say her name—an absolutely lovely woman,

but she made the comment to me one day, “I can’t go and stay in hotels anymore, because I can never tell who had slept in that bed before me.” And then there were people I met who said they had never gone to St. Louis or Chicago because they were afraid of those cities and the people that lived there. I got to thinking; I said to Jon, “What? We can’t live in a series of Fairburys and have our children grow up thinking like that or being exposed to that kind of thinking without exposing them to another type of thinking.” And I started to have this, like, concept in my mind of an international child of the world, with a world view very different than that little small town feeling like some of those people we’re meeting in Fairbury. You know, just limited experiences. I wanted our kids to have more experience.

DePue: How did the congregation react to the news that you guys were leaving?

Jon: It was odd. They were an interesting group. They were better at showing irritation (DePue laughing) than they were at showing affection.

DePue: I know that type.

Jon: And they didn’t say much. They’ve said later, “Well, we were really, really angry that you were going to be leaving, but we couldn’t get mad at you because what are you supposed to do when your pastor says he’s going to Africa to be a missionary? I mean, if he’s that crazy what are you supposed to say? You know, it’s not like he’s leaving us to do something normal, you know, he’s just obviously ...”

Jeanne: Or if he’s going to another church.

Jon: It’s sort of like I’m not betraying them for a better congregation you know.

DePue: I guess I was thinking along the same lines. It’s harder to argue with you than if you’re going to be a bishop or something.

Jon: Well, or if you want to move to the next bigger town that’s a little snootier or something, then they could really hold it against you.

DePue: Then they might feel betrayed.

Jon: The odd thing was, the Sunday we left, our last Sunday there, it was ...

Jeanne: We had an installation.

Jon: We were installed as missionaries and Jim Knutsen came and preached. He was the guy from Africa, the African director that we had previously.

Jeanne: Which was really good because they were able then to be kind of like part of sending us away. Actually they became one of our sponsors. So they were included in the trip, so to speak.

Jon: At the end of the service people would come and I would shake their hand and Jim would shake their hand, and then they would grab Jeanne and start to cry. These guys, these tough old German farmers, were weeping and I was just shocked. It was like –I’m thinking of it now –I didn’t realize until the last day after our house burned down how much those people in Cameroon cared about us, that they cared what happened to us. I guess it was the same in Fairbury. I had no idea until that last day how much we meant to them and how upset they were, because it was just so hard for them to say, “We really care about you,” because they knew we’d leave. They were tired—it’s hard to invest in pastors who are always leaving and in those congregations that’s what always happens. You know, it’s easier to get a pastor you don’t like and then say, “Oh, good, he left,” than it is to get a pastor you do like. I mean, by this time things were going great there. They couldn’t say they didn’t like the church, that the church wasn’t doing okay. But they didn’t want to say how much they did like us either, because they don’t know how to say that. It’s kind of an odd situation. But I saw that last day and I was surprised how upset they were that we left. I was really surprised.

DePue: Well, they’re stoic.

Jon: They don’t tell that.

DePue: Northern Europe.

Jon: I don’t know why they should because, good grief, my relatives in South Dakota wouldn’t be exactly gushing. (DePue laughing). We don’t gush, thank you very much. We just don’t do that. But, it’s interesting—we had had a meeting, our congregational meeting six months previous, and they had said, “Oh pastor, money’s not very good; we can only give you a \$500.00 raise this year.” And I said, “Well, that’s okay, give me another week’s vacation.” And I had three weeks and I was going to go up to four. And they said, “Okay.” So they brought it to the congregation. They had this rip snorting debate and we’re sitting right there. All these people we know and like, they’re just outraged at the idea that I’m only 35 years old and I’m going to get four weeks vacation and by golly they don’t get four weeks vacation and why should I get four weeks vacation and he hasn’t worked here for even a decade yet and why should he ... They voted, near as I can recall, four times. Is this true?

Jeanne: Yes.

Jon: And after each of the first three votes the congregational president would say, “I’m sorry, but there’s been a mistake with this ballot. I don’t know, we just keep doing it wrong, so we got to vote again.” And nobody dared tell him no, because he knew everybody really well. So on the fourth time he got the results he wanted and he announced that I’d received an extra week’s vacation. So you get this kind of hard-headed ...

DePue: And then a few weeks later you tell him you’re leaving.

Jeanne: Yeah, oh thank you ... we don't need that.

Jon: Well not a few weeks later, but we're not going to use the vacation because we're leaving. But, it's the dynamics of the community.

Jeanne: One of the things I have decided as a parent working with my own children is that the attitude you take towards something—you tell your children or you teach your children their attitudes. So when we had decided to go overseas, we did not take the tack, "Oh this is terrible, we're going to miss all of our friends." We took the tack, "This is going to be a wonderful experience and we're going to miss our friends and we will communicate with our old friends, but we're going to make new friends" My oldest and my youngest kid were doing a lot of asking questions and talking about it and I felt we were doing pretty well. Our middle son, Mike, wasn't asking as many questions and I guess I just assumed he was okay with the whole thing. We packed up our stuff and we said our final goodbyes and drove out of the driveway and headed down the road. It was kind of late in the afternoon and the sun is setting in front of us as we're heading west to his folks in South Dakota. Mike just burst into tears. It really wrenched my gut, because he was saying aloud what we were all feeling inside. It probably took me two hours to comfort him because he was just heartbroken to be leaving. So, there was an impact, an emotional impact we paid for making those kinds of decisions, to leave structure and leave what you know and head off to the unknown.

DePue: He was five or six at the time.

Jeanne: He was five.

DePue: Leaving all of his buddies. Leaving everything he knew.

Jeanne: Yeah, everything he knew for the unknown, so.

Jon: And the other thing that I've developed is, I don't like saying goodbye.

Jeanne: Ugh.

Jon: We've said goodbye to too many people. I mean, in Senegal they would cycle through in two year periods, these Americans and Jeanne worked with them all. Then we've left other places, gone other places. I just want to leave and not say goodbye.

DePue: Well, I know you hate to see any kind of analogies or similarities with the military community, but ...

Jeanne: That's the same thing.

DePue: ... they have the very same kind of challenges.

Jon: It's got to be.

Jeanne: Many of those people were the ones that we were saying goodbye to, because the embassy community had a lot of military and those type of people in there.

Jon: And the other thing is, for a long time I said, “I know a higher percentage of the population of Fairbury than any other place in the world.” I mean, I’d walk through that town and I knew people. You’d talk to people. I’m so appreciative of the fact that we lived in a town that size because you start to figure out interconnectedness and relationships and personalities in a way that you never do in a bigger place. I mean, in Springfield it’s not that big, but I can wander around all day long and not see somebody I know. Well, that was never a possibility in Fairbury.

DePue: Any preparations going back to Senegal, going back to Africa?

Jeanne: Well, I knew how to pack better. I mean, things like—when we went out the first time I took eight plastic cups, eight plastic plates, eight sets of silverware—and I discovered that you couldn’t get everything. I had also realized, because I had children by then, that holidays were important and traditions were really important, so like I made sure I took the holiday decorations that were important to the kids. They still talk about, “Oh, I remember that thing. You used to have that pumpkin you used to put out,” or whatever. I made sure I brought, you know, gifts for ... I mean, we went to Toys R Us and picked out two and a half years’ worth of Christmas gifts and birthday gifts. In fact, our kids were really confused because we’d go to the store, I’d let them pick out stuff they like, the stuff would disappear I think they thought we had an endless checkbook or endless money, because we would spend hundreds of dollars at Toys R Us, for instance. Of course, it was on our credit card and we were paying it off for the two years we were overseas. But I knew how I wanted to make and preserve family traditions. I would go to the store and I would buy a pair of shoes in every size or like if that kid was wearing a size 7 when we went I bought a 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 for each kid because you knew they were going to outgrow their shoes and you knew they were going to outgrow their clothes.

DePue: Wow.

Jon: And this time we made crates.

DePue: I was going to ask you if you had 55 gallon drums.

Jon: No.

Jeanne: Nope.

Jon: We had two months. We spent a lot of that last two months that we were in Fairbury packing and we went to the local Walton’s, a department store. Of course, a lot of the people who worked there were from our congregation and they would have sales and they gave 10 percent off to pastors back then. So the women would ask... go ahead Jeanne.

Jeanne: They'd say to me, "Okay. What do you need this week?" And I'd say, "Well, okay, this week I'd like to buy dishes and pots and pans." So dishes and pots and pans would be on sale at the local department store. I'd say, "Okay, this week I want to go in to buy boys' shoes", so that all those shoes would be on sale.

DePue: Well, you can't beat that.

Jeanne: No.

Jon: And then we got the 10 percent discount. The last bill I went in and paid there was like \$1200.00, but at the time I was making \$18,000 a year. I mean, this was a ton of money. After we left town Walton's quit giving the 10 percent discount to pastors (laughing).

Jeanne: We blew it for everybody, yeah.

DePue: But they obviously were doing that just, well, especially having the sales match up with ...

Jeanne: They were supporting us, yes.

Jon: So we spent two months building crates and filling them full of stuff.

Jeanne: For instance, there would be a few pieces of furniture I did not want to sell and having learned my lesson when you get burned out ... You know one of the things that can happen to you when you are a missionary is, if the country goes into a coup, you could be told you have to be on an airplane in two hours and you get to take what you have in your suitcase, or whatever. So I had already gotten used to the idea that you might have to leave everything behind and start from scratch. So instead of selling off everything that we weren't taking, I farmed my furniture and my important things out. My mom had some, my sister had some, we gave some of our furniture away to a bunch of our friends and said, "Okay, here's the deal. If, when we come home, there's anything left of it, we'll ask for it back, but meanwhile, you get to use it." So we all win.

DePue: Not such a bad deal.

Jeanne: No.

DePue: Did you know exactly what your circumstances were going to be before you got there?

Jon: No.

Jeanne: More than we did before. We knew we were going to live in Senegal; we knew we were going to speak French.

Jon: We knew we were going to live in this big house on a mission station.

Jeanne: We knew we were going to live in a house. We knew we were going to have four extra kids living with us. We knew our kids would go to a missionary school.

DePue: So you knew that you were going to be settled in Dakar. Had you seen pictures of the house?

Jon: I don't think so. We probably had, but not that it made any vivid impression.

DePue: They had given you a description of it so you knew it wasn't going to be too bad, that there was running water and electricity and ...

Jeanne: Yeah, we knew that. We knew ...

Jon: And we knew Dakar was right on the ocean and it's got a climate like San Diego.

DePue: Um-hm. How about the trip then? Did you fly to France first and then to Senegal?

Jon: Uh, we flew to somewhere first, but it could have been Lisbon or it could have been Paris. I don't remember which one.

Jeanne: I don't remember, like, sightseeing. We used to try to sightsee on the way coming back usually, but not on the way there.

DePue: Had you shipped all of your household goods before you left?

Jeanne: That's why we usually didn't sightsee or anything on the way there, because when we would travel somewhere you get two suitcases per person and then a backpack. Well, we would load our kids down with backpacks and we'd have to hold the backpacks up so the kids could walk with them. We would have our carry-ons and we would take trunks and huge duffle bags of stuff with us. So we traveled so weighed down, but that was the cheap way of getting your stuff there.

Jon: That was pretty small compared to what the Africans were bringing back. So we were traveling light compared with the Africans.

Jeanne: So it would have been too hard to sightsee and stuff like that, so.

Jon: What I remember is, Lew Hille met us; he was the director of our mission there, and took us to our place. I remember the first night in our house there and I remember laying in bed ...

Jeanne: Terrified of mosquitoes.

Jon: More so than I ever have on any other single night, thinking, "What have we gotten ourselves into now?" I mean, for some reason it really hit me that night. I mean it didn't linger and I remember thinking, "Well, God, we're here. I hope this works."

DePue: You were a little bit ...

Jon: And it seemed pretty drastic when we actually ... this time I had a wife, three kids, had a pretty good idea of what I was getting into and was doing it again (laughing), and that kind of struck me.

DePue: So, going to Poli was, your young ...

Jeanne: Naïve.

Jon: Young and dumb.

Jeanne: Yeah, naïve.

DePue: And indestructible maybe.

Jon: Yep.

Jeanne: Definitely indestructible.

Jon: And, besides, what are you supposed to do? People tell you, "Do something," and they're the experts. But, I mean, Poli was a much more challenging place than Dakar was.

DePue: Okay, what I'd like to do next then is talk a little bit about the ethnicity of the population of Senegal and especially there in Dakar. Give us a little flavor of what the community was like, the country that you're going to.

Jon: Well, the dominant ethnic group in Dakar is Wolof, and it's largely a Wolof-speaking city, but the thing to remember is that Dakar was the administrative capital for French West Africa, a highly sophisticated French culture, the old colonial culture. Saint Louis was a part of it too. Saint Louis, I think, before Dakar. Dakar is a city, when we were there, of over a million people. It's a large West African seaport and there are ...

DePue: Saint Louis same thing as St. Louis.

Jeanne: Yes.

Jon: Saint Louis the same as St. Louis and it's right up in the northern part. The people in these certain cities of Saint Louis and Dakar and a couple of other places, Djolas, I believe, were considered to be French citizens. They were special members of the French Republic.

DePue: And they were very Francophile?

Jon: Very Francophile and very sophisticated in French language, especially the educated ones. So, Africans would say of the French that they would treat you all just fine as long as you became French. They didn't care what color you were, just

learn the language and the culture and act French and that's what they want. That's what civilization is.

DePue: Now the Wolof's were tribal-based before that or...?

Jon: The Wolof is one of the tribes or one of the ethnic groups. They were centered around Dakar. They were fishermen traditionally and warriors, but that just happened to be the group that dominated around Dakar.

DePue: And how would you compare them in personality and personal appearance versus the folks around Poli?

Jon: Well, the folks around Poli were about half the size of the people in Dakar.

Jeanne: Yeah. These people were normal. You know, they were more like American sized people, in height and weight and ...

Jon: They were well-fed and ...

Jeanne: Yeah. Muscular, more muscular.

Jon: Well-fed and prosperous compared to the people in Poli, but just about everybody in the world is.

DePue: And again, the people in Poli were deferential and they tend to be quiet or meek?

Jeanne: And they were diminutive, very, very small, I mean physically. Short.

Jon: But, the Wolof people are, you know, strong, proud, loud people. But then, there are all kinds of other ethnic groups there too. There are Sérères and there are Djolas and there are the Haal Pulaar. They're not native Fulbé, but they are Pulaar speakers that have been in the Senegal River in northern Senegal there forever. And then there are the Fulbé, I mean, who are the native Pulaar speakers.

Jeanne: And then there are Mauritians ...

Jon: Lot of Mauritians down there.

Jeanne: ... until we had a war.

DePue: Well, I hear you talk so much about Pulaar, but the people you were working with most of the time were the Wolofs?

Jon: Most of the people in Dakar spoke Wolof. The language I worked with mostly in Dakar was French. So I worked day-to-day in French and not in Pulaar. I worked among Pulaar speakers.

Jeanne: At your center.

Jon: Well, we tried to reach out to Pulaar speakers because that had been a goal of the mission all across West Africa. So we gave our center that we built a Pulaar name, which was Gallé Nanondiral, which means the house of listening to and understanding each other, but we spoke French there.

Jeanne: Wasn't it funded somewhat by that Fulani Project?

Jon: Yeah. They would have money left over from a project they had started before we went to Cameroon called the Fulani Project They were trying to do a ministry of outreach, Christian outreach, to these Fulani people or the Pulaar speakers across West Africa.

DePue: But your work was centered in Dakar, was it not?

Jon: My job description was to start an outreach ministry in the urban, largely Islamic setting of Dakar, Senegal.

DePue: So there were ethnic Pulaars in Dakar?

Jon: Yes, there were Pulaar speakers in Dakar, yes.

DePue: Okay, and that's the community that you were supposed to work in.

Jon: Basically we picked a place. As it turned out, as our mission developed, we decided that in this vast urban sprawl of people everywhere, we needed a place for us to do whatever we did. So we rented a center out in a place called Yeumbeul. We asked the government, "Where don't you have any services available for people? Where is it rapidly growing? Where would it be helpful if we did something?" and they said, "Yeumbeul." So out we went to Yeumbeul.

DePue: Well, where would Yeumbeul be on this map?

Jon: It would be out toward Pikine.

DePue: Pikine?

Jon: Just before Pikine. It would be northeast ...

Jeanne: In between there and there.

Jon: ...of Dakar proper.

DePue: Okay, and Pikine looks like it's oh, maybe about 15, 20 miles away from Dakar?

Jon: Yeah. I mean, it's all kind of Dakar now, but Pikine ... and then there was Guediawaye out there, too. There is just vast sprawl.

Jeanne: Here. It would be in here on the peninsula.

Jon: I guess we were past Pikine then. We must have been past Pikine in Guediawaye out to Yeumbeul. Yeah. Yeumbeul is out here.

DePue: Okay. What's the population of Dakar?

Jon: At least a million people when we were there.

Jeanne: And then they were a million people in the suburbs.

DePue: Okay. I've seen the pictures of downtown main street Poli and it looks about as vacant and abandoned as you can get. Describe the city of Dakar?

Jeanne: Well, I mean, the downtown section of Dakar was in Africa, but they call it the Paris of Africa. There was definitely, I mean, very classy restaurants and stores and shopping. Where the buildings must have been, some of them 10 to 20 stories high with, you know, elevators. The downtown itself—there was a presidential palace and then down probably a half a mile was a big plaza where actually the Paris-Dakar rally, that car rally, would do its final laps there in this great big center. A lot of people from Europe, in particular, vacation there, so there would be touristy resorts and hotels.

DePue: So there was a sizeable European or white population there?

Jeanne: Yes.

Jon: Probably at least 50,000.

DePue: And what was the climate like, since you are on this peninsula, abruptly thrust out into the Atlantic Ocean?

Jeanne: It was very much like San Diego from what we can tell. It was, you know, relatively speaking—of course it was the north hemisphere so it had the same winter and summers as we do here—when it was winter in December, January, February we might wear our lightweight winter coats at night if we were outside. We would go to the American Club and they would show movies that the Marine House [quarters for U.S. Marines] had gotten off some boat. They would lend it to the American Club and we would go watch, like, drive-in movies only sitting on a lawn chair outside. We would have our little lightweight winter coats on, so it would be that cool, but relatively ...

Jon: It seldom got below 60 degrees.

Jeanne: Yeah, it was all relative. I mean compared to ...

DePue: Yeah, you're on 15 degree north, but it sounds like a much more comfortable, manageable kind of lifestyle that you had there at least.

Jeanne: Yeah. I mean, it was like primarily being in spring or summer, maybe fall all year long and that was it.

DePue: What was your house like?

Jeanne: I'm not quite sure how it looked, but it was an old petroleum company office and they had converted it into a house somewhere along the line. It had a very large, like dining room, family room, with an area and it even had a fireplace.

Jon: A wood-burning fireplace.

Jeanne: A wood-burning fireplace on the floor. It was, what is that stuff?

Jon: Stucco.

Jeanne: Stucco on the inside walls and the floor was tiled. We had, like, bamboo furniture with upholstered cushions made and things. We had a kitchen there. It had running water, but we would have to filter the water there.

DePue: But not boil it?

Jeanne: But not boil it. And we had a gas stove, run out of ... what kind of ...?

Jon: Bottled gas.

Jeanne: Bottled gas.

Jon: Propane.

Jeanne: And we had an electrical refrigerator. We had electricity 24/7 for the most part, though right after it rained we would have a wire going to our house that short-circuited out for a little while so you wouldn't have electricity, but eventually it would come up. We had overhead fans. We did not have air conditioning. Most of the time we didn't need air conditioning because it was this stucco and tile house; it was fairly cool inside the house. We had high ceilings and so you would have your windows open all the time and a breeze.

DePue: Screens on the windows?

Jeanne: Screens and bars for the little animals critters and the human critters that would try to get into your house, so.

Jon: And we had a wall all the way around the place, about 8 feet tall. By the time we left it was taller than that because there had been more incidents of break-ins and murders and stuff.

Jeanne: In our neighborhood.

Jon: We had four apartments in one building next to us and two in another, so we had six little apartments on the same ground in different buildings that we were in charge of for the other missionaries who would come to Dakar and stay there.

Jeanne: There were guest houses that missionaries could stay in and then when missionaries weren't using them we could rent them out to other people. And we had, like you said, a walled compound. One of the things we had were, you know, sets of guards who open and shut the gate and then patrolled the grounds at all times.

DePue: Did you have servants as well?

Jon: We only had one in our house.

Jeanne: We would have at least one woman who was always, like, doing our laundry and cleaning in the house. Off and on we had a cook, somebody who would help us with some of that stuff. When we had those extra kids living with us, part of the deal was that--with all of those kids I couldn't get everybody to every lesson they needed to or get them to the school or to that place—we got a chauffeur who did some of the driving for us that year, so.

DePue: How about the economy, the local economy around Dakar especially, but Senegal as well?

Jon: Well, the local economy; the basic crop was peanuts. I mean it's kind of an odd economy, because the French set up this three-cornered economy where they had all of this rice that they couldn't figure out what to do with from Indochina, from Vietnam and stuff, and Laos, wherever they had colonies in Indochina. It wasn't the best rice in the world and they needed somebody to eat the stuff so they decided, "Well, we'll sell it to the people in Africa." So they started giving the Africans rice, but they wanted peanuts. So the Senegalese people could raise peanuts; they'd raise peanuts and sell it and then the French would make peanut oil and other stuff with peanuts, whatever you do with peanuts, and they would sell it for rice. Then they got them started eating French bread, wonderful French bread.

Jeanne: Made with wheat.

Jon: And they grow almost no wheat, so ...

DePue: No rice and almost no wheat.

Jeanne: Yeah.

Jon: But the two cornerstones of the Senegalese cuisine were rice and wheat. They didn't grow rice, hardly any rice; They grew some rice in Southern Senegal, and hardly any wheat, some wheat in Southern Senegal, but next to nothing compared to what they consumed. So then they had this crazy economy where they grew peanuts. Other than that, they used to be great for fishing, but the fishing industry I've heard more about lately again, is almost done. I mean, our good friend Diaté

was a traditional fisherman, but they've sold the rights to the Russians and the Koreans and the Chinese. They've just come through and taken all the fish, so these guys don't have any fish anymore. So they're really having a hard time.

DePue: "They" being the government obviously.

Jon: Yeah. You know, the Chinese came in and built, for example, a big stadium. They've done this in many different places in Africa; they work out trade deals or exploitation deals. And then their tourism was a fairly big part of the economy; people make money like they do everywhere else, buying stuff and selling stuff and having a million little stores.

DePue: So, poverty was no stranger in this part of Africa either?

Jon: No, but it's not, you know, it's not grinding, dehumanizing, terrible; you don't walk around watching people in abject suffering. They are just ...

Jeanne: Well, there were beggars and there were ...

Jon: Oh sure, but the beggars came from all over the place...

Jeanne: Yeah, because it became picky ...

Jon: ...lepers from all over the place, because Dakar was a great place to beg.

DePue: So compared to what you experienced in Poli as far as the economy, where Poli sounded very much a subsistence kind of an existence, that wasn't the case in Dakar?

Jon: This was a cash economy in Dakar. Some of the richest people I have ever seen—I didn't really know them, but seen and lived near—were Africans living in Dakar.

Jeanne: But there were also places like... There is a huge landfill, garbage dump—I would not believe this if I hadn't driven around in it myself—you drive in there and there are people who live in that garbage dump. They live there from the day they are born to the day they die, for years and years and years. They live in there and they make their living out of recycling garbage, you know, picking out and selling the glass jars or whatever they can find in the garbage. That's a horrible life!

Jon: That was out by our center and there was this guy that I kept seeing shuffle down the road by our center headed to the garbage place. He was always covered in like black, just black, black, black. I said, "What's wrong with this guy?" and they said, "Oh, he burns tires." Apparently out at the garbage dump that was his job and I don't know if he burned them to get the wires that are inside radial tires or what he did, but he burned tires. He could hardly move. He could hardly lift his feet off the ground. I mean, obviously this was killing him. So I stopped him one day and I said, "Here, here's, you know, three bucks, four bucks, thousand francs, go home. How much are you going to make burning tires? Well, nowhere near that. Go

home.” And I give him money and I say, “Go home.” And after a while he just kept on going and I said, “What’s wrong with this guy? Why does he want ...” and they said, “He says his food doesn’t taste any good if he doesn’t cook it over burned tires.” I mean, this guy has just absolutely had it. I’ve always considered that kind of a parable about addiction, you know. This guy was hooked on burned tires, but that’s what he did and it killed him, I’m sure. I mean, he was almost dead when I saw him.

DePue: Yeah. How about the religion of the population?

Jon: Well, about 80% to 90% Muslim and about probably 5% to 10% Catholic, about 10% straight up traditional, you know, animist stuff, and maybe less than 1% Protestant. The Catholics came in with the French.

DePue: And was it any particular type of Islam that you experienced there?

Jon: Yeah, it was Senegalese Islam (laughing). They had what they called brotherhoods; confréries is the French word, and there were five different ones. The two biggest ones were the Mourides and the Tijanis, but then the Tijanis subdivided into three different brotherhoods among them, at least. I mean, the reason I know this is that I wrote my master’s dissertation on Senegalese Tijanis.

DePue: What was the first group you mentioned?

Jon: The Mourides, M-o-u-r-i-d-e-s. They were the classic ... they were Wolof. In fact, they were Lébous. Lébous is the traditional, that’s L-é-b-o-u, the fishermen from right around Dakar. In fact, their holy beach ... oh, there were all kinds of ... Anyway, they had this guy named Ahmadou Bamba, Shiekh Ahmadou Bamba who stood up to the French and this earned him great repute. He also worked out a deal with the French. He became the great peanut farmer of the whole country and his deal was he got the people to believe in him as the intermediary between God and themselves. In Senegal everybody has this holy man that they go to, their marabout. The marabout is the direct intermediary between you and God and can do all kinds of magic and can arrange for success in your life and disappointment in the lives of your enemies, shall we put it that way.

DePue: It doesn’t sound very Islam to me.

Jon: Oh, it’s great. I mean, religion is never ... You know, the Saudis would have you believe that Islam is very pure and very ... they’re the Puritans of Islam. Well, these guys are not the Puritans of Islam. So, Ahmadou Bamba said, “Here’s the deal. I’ll pray for you, you farm for me. I’ll handle your salvation, you guys get out there and raise peanuts.”

DePue: Now how long ago was this?

Jon: He died in 1927, so it was recent, and it was powerful. They built this big city called Touba and Touba I means repentance, the village of There were seven wells in Touba and now there is this huge mosque and his descendents ...

Jeanne: Touba is around here?

Jon: All of these great marabouts have a bunch of kids and their sons then become their heirs in the religious structure, so it has passed on from father to son to son. So his kids now are these extremely powerful people in Senegal. The president would always go out to this big huge mosque out there in Touba that they built on the anniversary of the disappearance of Ahmadou Bamba, that is the day of his—we would say his death, but they would say, “He disappeared. Don’t worry, he’ll be back because he is too remarkable just to disappear.” The politicians would all go out there and visit the sons to honor Ahmadou Bamba. They called it the Magal, I believe, and they would come with suitcases full of money because nobody got elected in that country, president, unless the head Mourides endorsed it and everybody knew it.

DePue: Head Mourides, okay.

Jon: The head of the Mourides brotherhood.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: And the Tijanis were not Wolof speakers by and large; they were the more Pulaar speakers who became Tijanis. It’s kind of like, you know, Norwegians went one way and Germans went another way and Finns went another way.

DePue: So the Tijanis were ethnic Pulaars?

Jon: Tended to be more, yes.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: Ahmad al-Tijani, who started that brotherhood, ... I can’t remember ... came out of the 18th century, I think and he was from Algeria. But his deal was, he had the direct revelation from God of the secret prayers which, if you learned them and prayed them, guarantee your salvation.

DePue: Now that was Ahmad al-Tijani?

Jon: Tijani. He was the founder of the Tijani brotherhood.

DePue: Okay. And those are different people than the folks who followed Ahmadou Bamba?

Jon: Those are the Mourides. It’s like, you know, the Catholics and the Episcopalians and all these different denominations.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: Islam is an extremely complex thing. And the other thing is, Muslims aren't supposed to venerate people and they aren't supposed to have like holy shrines and go to the graves of the dead and stuff. Well, that's what the religion was for these people.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: And the Mourides were the most heretical, in that they prayed in Wolof. And if there is one thing that is clear in Islam, you can't pray in anything but Arabic. It doesn't count. But that didn't bother the Mourides; they'd pray in Wolof, because Ahmadou Bamba said they could.

Jeanne: In the middle of all of this we have our little Protestant ... (all laughing)

DePue: And that's kind of what I wanted to get to next. You have this little Protestant mission. Of course, what we're hearing all the time now is how Muslims are so dead set against any other religion being interposed on them. So how did the people of Senegal react to this mission?

Jon: Well, the people of Senegal had religious freedom and it was in their constitution. It was based on the French constitution, which had a strict separation between church and state. In French there is a term, "pays laic", which means lay state, as opposed to Republique Islamique, which means Islamic Republic. Senegal was very self-consciously a lay or secular state and they imposed no religion and they privileged no religion. They were sticklers for this because they understood the danger ... Mauritania just to the north is an Islamic Republic. By law, all citizens of Mauritania are Muslims. By law, the only people that can practice Christianity, for example, within Mauritania's geographical area and have a priest or a pastor available to them, are foreigners. No Mauritanian can. It's against the law.

Jeanne: Did they have Koranic law there?

Jon: Well, more and more so, sure. Sharia. But, the people of Senegal self-consciously did not want to be that kind of a place and they talked a lot about part of Senegalese culture they said is something called *téranga*, which is kind of simple human hospitality that transcends differences. We don't look for the reasons to hate each other; we look for the reasons to be kind to one another, because life's better that way.

DePue: And that applied for the Wolofs and the Pulaars and all the other groups?

Jon: Most of the time, yeah. It did. I mean, the people of Senegal were educated to the fact that Christians have a right. We have Muslims in Northern Senegal where we had a mission in N'dioum. They started getting really upset with some of the Finnish missionaries and an American, but it was because of what the Finns were doing up there. They said, "We want you kicked out of this part. This is holy

ground. This is where Chiekh Oumar Tall, this great Muslim prince, conquered this area. He came from here; this is his ground. We can't have Christians praying here." They said, "You can't have more than two people together to pray. You can't have church up here, because if you have too many people to pray it's too powerful." And I thought, it's the best testimony to the power of Christian prayer I've ever heard. Wherever two or three are gathered, there he is in the midst. They believed it.

DePue: But that was quite contrary to the rest of Senegal.

Jon: Yeah. And the president sent the governor up there and we had this big meeting.

Jeanne: The President of Senegal!

Jon: Sent the governor up there and we had this big meeting. There was me and this Finnish guy, who was the head of the Finnish mission, and 23 princes with swords. Luckily the governor was well-armed. (laughing) They complained and complained and complained and he said, "Look, our kids go to America and you know it." They've all got kids over here, you know. And he says, "When they go to America, nobody tells them, 'You can't have a mosque, you can't pray to your god.' We're not going to tell these people they can't pray to their god. They can and we can and whether you like it or not, that's the way it is." And the president went up there later, the president of the country, who was Muslim and married to a Catholic woman, and he went up there and said, "Forget it. We have a secular state. These people will be free to practice their religion and we will be free to practice our religion. That's how it's going to be." Now, when I was back there a couple of years ago, some of that is starting to change. That is all under Saudi influence. The Saudis are out there trying to make the world hard line anti- anything that's not us.

DePue: And they're pumping money into Senegal?

Jon: Oh, big time, sure. They've always been pumping money into Senegal. But the mosque that they built in the middle of Dakar, the Grande Mosquée de Dakar, was falling over. The mosque that the Mourides built for themselves, with nobody's money but their own out in the middle of the bush, was spotless and perfectly maintained because it was theirs; they owned it and they were proud of it.

DePue: So, you still had the impression that the Senegalese weren't—maybe the Saudis were making some inroads—but they weren't flocking to this new variation of Islam?

Jon: No, and they don't want to. In Sérèr culture—the Sérèrs are kind of from the middle of the country –it's not unusual, or unheard of at least, to have a Sérèr family where one brother will be a Catholic priest and another brother will be the imam at the local mosque. I mean, they don't figure that they have to—it is not necessary for people of different religions to hate each other. Now, here's a concept, but they really took it seriously.

DePue: Well, I happen to believe that's a good Christian concept, too. (Jon laughing).

Jon: You take it more seriously when you see a meeting where these people really wanted to just ... I mean, I sat in that meeting with these people that wanted us out of there and were told that it didn't matter what they wanted.

DePue: Now, you talked a little bit about your mission, and again, this is my perception of what a missionary is supposed to do. You go to foreign countries and you try to preach the gospel to people who aren't Christian and bring new people to the church. Was that an element of what you were supposed to be doing in Dakar?

Jon: Yes, it was. But, in order to do that ...

DePue: To these Pulaars?

Jon: Yeah. We had a church downtown that we were part of, so there was a ministry there going on. With the people in Yeumbeul our ministry was to establish a relationship of mutual respect and talk and understand each other and treat each other first with respect and then see if faith grew from that kind of a conversation, because to walk up to people and say, "Here I am, I don't know you, but I know you're wrong and I'm right," doesn't seem to be a terrifically powerful way to reach people.

Jeanne: We were kind of hoping that if you helped people learn to read and, you know, they had this library there. They went out to all of the local schools and figured out what textbooks kids would need in any one of those schools and then bought those and brought them in so that kids would have an opportunity to actually put their hands on textbooks. They would come in there and study or they would have a little study course that would help kids prepare for some of these national exams that Senegal, based on the French system, would have and would be a determiner as to whether or not kids could go on to further education. They had the basketball courts and they had sewing classes and opportunities for men and women and in the end we hoped somebody would go, "Well, why do you do that for us?"

Jon: And they did.

Jeanne: And they did and we could say, "Our God told us to." "Well, tell me about your God."

Jon: And they knew. I mean, these people are not naïve. They understood that there's a difference between Islam and Christianity and they all knew Christians and they all knew Muslims. Most of them were Muslims, but at the center, you know, it was representative of the population; probably 15% of the people who came to the place were Christian and 85% of the people who came to the place were Muslim.

DePue: Well, we talked a lot about on the fringes of this community center. I want to finish tonight. We've got about 20 minutes left I think. So finish tonight talking about

how the community center came about and what it was doing and what do you think it meant to the people there and what it meant to you.

Jon: When we were sent over there, there was another missionary and I and we were both going to be new. Our job description was to establish an urban ministry in an Islamic cultural setting of Dakar, Senegal. So that was it, and they said, "We have this money that has been put away for years to do something with. We've never done anything with it. We have a quarter million dollars." This was in 1985.

DePue: Who's "we" in this case?

Jon: The American Lutheran Church. So they had a quarter million dollars that they wanted him and I to figure out what to do with it to fund this ministry, this mission outreach.

DePue: And you knew that before you even arrived in Senegal?

Jon: Absolutely.

Jeanne: Um-hm.

Jon: And we went over there with that job description. He and I were to collaborate and it turned out that we did, very effectively.

DePue: Who was this?

Jon: His name was Dan Hart.

DePue: I can even spell that.

Jon: He had wonderful technical skills. I mean, he was very much a hands-on guy. He loved to weld. I keep running into these missionaries who liked to weld. Ernie was a welder and Dan was a welder. So we were to figure out what to do and we started just wandering around talking to people and looking around and trying to figure out what's going on and learning a little Wolof and a little culture. We talked to the Baptists who had a center and we talked to other people. Then I became pretty quickly a very good friend with the pastor of the Protestant Church of Senegal named Samuel Dansokho. He had been educated in France for years and knew a lot about Senegal and knew a lot of the Senegalese politicians and just knew them. In fact, I just talked to him today on the phone; he called me. We both happened to like each other, so we really hit it off. And then I worked quite a bit with his church and got to know a lot of people that way. We started an English language service down there that I was kind of in charge of. So we had this kind of international thing going down there. But what surprised Sam and then the other people that we would meet—and Dan and I both did this—we would ask people what they thought we should do and then we would try to figure out how to do that. For years Sam throughout his childhood and then as the pastor of this church, said, "Everybody always comes in from Europe, has a meeting with me and announces to me what

they're going to do and asks for my support." And he said, "Nobody ever says, 'Hey, Sam, we've some money. What would be a good idea to do?', you know, 'What might be useful?'" He said, "You do," and he liked that. I always told him, "Well, wait a minute, you'll know more about this country now and forever—you'll always know more about this country than I'll ever know. So why would I not depend on you?"

DePue: What was his denomination?

Jon: Presbyterian. Reformed Church of France. He was one of the very few Protestants. Originally his family came from Mali. They were Bambara.

DePue: So he was an African?

Jon: He was from Saint Louis. Yeah, he's African. Was and is. He teaches at Hood Theological Seminary in either North or South Carolina now. He has his PhD from a seminary; let's see, I forget the name of it, the UCC Seminary in Chicago. So he's lived in America now for quite a while.

DePue: So, how did you choose the location for the center?

Jon: Dan and I, I guess, had meetings and asked the government. I mean, we asked the government. We didn't figure, "Well, the government is just going to be a bunch of hopeless people." They said, "How about Yeumbeul?" So we started looking around at Yeumbeul. We found this building and we rented it. Then we hired a guy named Saidou. We were paying a hundred dollars a month rent for this place out there. You know, it was probably a 40 minute drive or an hour drive from our house, but it was out there in the middle of nowhere where everything was going up in a hurry and where there wasn't anything, so the government wanted us to be out there. There was a Catholic mission that was working with some women and stuff out there. They had like an infirmary or something or a doctor's office.

DePue: And Dakar was growing in that direction?

Jon: Oh, yeah, like crazy.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: It was like, if this peninsula that goes out to the mainland is like the mouth on a tube of toothpaste, it was all getting squeezed out here. This was where there was still room to grow. Everything here was full or protected by military bases or airports that you couldn't build on. It was all going out that way.

DePue: I finally found the map I was looking for here. So I think it should be on this one, isn't it?

Jon: No, it's still further out than this, I think. I don't know. Where was..., Jeanne?

Jeanne: Let me look here.

Jon: It's not on there, but it might be in that area. It was right out by Yeumbeul.

Jeanne: I think it was somewhere in this area.

Jon: It would be right in here probably.

Jeanne: Yep, fairly near the ocean there.

DePue: Okay. I think what I'll do is I'll get a couple of these maps and then work with you later on so I can pinpoint on the maps where we're talking about.

Jon: If you want to, that's fine. So, anyway, back to our center. We rented this place and then we went around to all of the village chief people and stuff and the local religious leaders. I mean Saidou took us around to meet all of these people and we said, "We would like to start a literacy program in Pulaar and then in French, but it won't do any good if nobody will send their kids. We're Christians and your kids aren't, but our teacher will be a Muslim and he's very respectful and devout and here he is. If we had this library and these classes, which is what we were going to start, would you permit the children of this neighborhood to participate?" And they said, "Okay". But if we hadn't had their permission, then we would have opened a place and nobody would have come.

Jeanne: But you booked classes for women, literacy classes with sewing classes, as people would allow their wives and daughters to come to classes to learn to sew and then they would allow them then to learn to read.

DePue: Now, I take it part of the discussion was that this would not be an overtly Christian kind of opportunity?

Jon: Yeah, one of the things that became clear for us was, we said, "We will not worship in this building." That was helpful, because if you worship in a building then it's just a mosque. So when we would have Ramadan, it was interesting, the people would say, "Well, we want to do our prayers, it's Ramadan. We have to do our prayers." And we'd say, "Okay, go out in the street like everybody else and do your prayers."

DePue: Because this is not a mosque.

Jon: This is not a worship place. It is not a church and it is not a mosque.

DePue: So people back in the United States might be shocked that they are spending all this money and you're not going to allow them to worship there? But that was part of the ...

Jeanne: Not Islam.

Jon: I mean, part of the deal was that, there were groups of Pulaar-speaking Christians meeting in houses and stuff, but it's a tricky and a delicate thing. And the thing is, you don't lie to people. You don't say to people, "Your child is going to come to our place to learn literacy" and then sneak in Christianity. You just—don't do that to me, you know, and don't do that to them. I figured, I'm fairly irritable; things that irritate me would probably irritate them. You know? And I'm not going to lie to people, especially regarding their children.

DePue: Well, you don't develop any trust that way.

Jeanne: No.

Jon: Our faculty, our staff—we had quite a few people working there by the time I left, probably 10, 12 people—were usually half Muslims, half Christians.

DePue: How were they selected?

Jon: By us.

DePue: You and Dan?

Jon: Yeah. We would ask for someone and he'd say, "Hey, we need somebody to teach this," and we'd get tons of people, because we paid them. We were dependable employers and they were doing something that they liked. They were helping people.

DePue: Now, one of the things you said that the school was for is to teach the natives Pulaar?

Jon: Yeah, but that quickly lost its charm and we got more into not to teach Pulaar, to take Pulaar literacy to Pulaar speakers, but that turned out to be something that they weren't very desperate for. They were more interested in learning French literacy, because that's what the tests were in.

DePue: And that's how they became employable.

Jon: Sure.

Jeanne: Yeah. Plus also, like I said, sometimes they would do study courses to get ready for specific exams and things: entrance to college or entrance to high school.

DePue: Had some missionary long, long ago figured out Pulaar in western language in our alphabet?

Jon: Sure. I mean, not long, long ago, but there were Pulaar translations of the Bible available. I mean, it's a big language in Africa. There are millions of people who speak it.

DePue: And Wolof wasn't based on an Arabic language obviously? If it was in written form it was using a western alphabet?

Jon: Or both. It could be written in either. Alphabets are the way of expressing sounds with a symbol, and Arabic symbols can express sounds.

DePue: But which one dominated there?

Jon: Oh, what dominated was the Roman script from the French influence, because literacy came in more from the French than from the Arabs for that part of Africa. There are certain parts of Africa where the literacy was brought in with Islam.

DePue: Were you teaching church services anywhere?

Jon: I was running the English language service.

Jeanne: For an international congregation. So, there'd be Americans and Europeans and ...

DePue: This was not in the center obviously.

Jon: No. It was in downtown Dakar at the Protestant Church of Senegal.

Jeanne: Actually, Sam Dansokho's church. We just used it at off times.

DePue: And you had a good sized congregation there?

Jon: We probably averaged between 50 and 100.

Jeanne: It had a Sunday school and ...

DePue: And was Dan working with you there?

Jon: Dan was less involved in that. He just wasn't as interested in that kind of stuff as I was. He became an administrator for the mission a great deal. He was very interested in computers. He was very interested in business for the mission and buying and selling and we had a big budget, and managing. He became an administrative person and a technical person. He liked doing those things.

DePue: He handled the books as well?

Jon: Yeah. The financial books. And we were nicely...what's the word?

Jeanne: Collaborative.

Jon: Yeah, where you have differing skills. By the end of the time ...

DePue: Complementary?

Jon: Yeah, but by the end of the time together we didn't much care for one another at a personal level. But that's, you know, the way it goes. But we worked very well together and we got a lot done. Initially we didn't know we didn't much care for each other; it took time to develop that.

DePue: That's not necessarily a prerequisite to do God's work is it?

Jon: No, and it's certainly not a prerequisite to get things effectively done.

DePue: Do you feel like you accomplished a lot then in this community center?

Jon: I think that for the time period that we were there. I have a tremendous sense of accomplishment in that we started with an idea, we developed the idea, we built a building, literally, and the way we did it. For example, the Southern Baptists that were there—we knew their director really well; smart guy, fascinating guy. When they built, they had a whole bunch of people from America come over and build. You know, these people would come over in work teams. They would have to hire people from Gambia to help them, because none of the Senegalese people spoke English and, of course, none of the Southern Baptists spoke French. So, they would get these people from Gambia that spoke English to come up and help them and then they would build this big center. It would make all of the American Southern Baptists feel really good, that they had been over helping these poor people in Africa build this center and they built a wonderful place. What we said was, "Forget it. The problem in Senegal is not that people can't do things, it's that nobody will pay them to do it. We've got money. Let's hire Senegalese." So we went out to our neighborhood. We hired a Cameroonian architect who was a member of the Protestant Church of Senegal named Pierre Mondo, who is just a stunningly smart guy, very fascinating guy. I mean, his dad was a huge merchant in Douala. I like him a lot. Anyway, he was our architect and we hired Ali Diack, who was a Muslim—actually Diack is a Pulaar name—contractor. We went out to the neighborhood and we told Ali, "Hire people from this neighborhood. There are all these people wandering around here who don't have jobs." He said, "Well, one of my foremen lives right down the street" So he was the foreman and we hired as many people as we could from the neighborhood and they did it all. We just showed up and, you know, had meetings with the contractor and the architect, just like here in America. The architect made sure the contractor did everything and authorized payments, and was very professional and very smoothly run, because they had plenty of people to do the work and they knew exactly what they were doing. It was smoothly run because we were one of the few people who had the money to pay them on time. Usually that's what stops everything. They work for a while and then they can't get paid. Well, that wasn't the problem.

Jeanne: And then the incredible thing was, 25 years later, which was two years ago, we went back.

Jon: It wasn't 25 years, it was 13 years later.

Jeanne: Thirteen years later?

Jon: Yeah.

Jeanne: Oh, okay. Thirteen years later we go back and it is bigger and they were expanding it and it was growing, going gung ho. It was fabulous to see that it doesn't die when you leave. It's a vibrant ...

DePue: Because the community ...

Jeanne: Yes.

DePue: ... has a buy-in right from the very beginning.

Jon: And because the ELCA has continued to subsidize it Its bang for the buck, it's a great deal. So, it was fun to start something, it was fun to see something work, and I'll always feel ...

Jeanne: You made a huge contribution.

Jon: ... that as long as that place is there I can go back and I can say, "Well, look, I was one of the reasons this place is here and this place is a good thing."

DePue: Now, I don't want to make this sound like this is the only measure of success, but do you think there were people who became Christian because of that community center?

Jon: Yeah, I think so, but I'd have to talk to the guys who are there now working with it, because they have a Senegalese guy that works with the people that have come through in that area and has a worshipping group. Now, what their direct relationship is with that community center?

DePue: Was that the expectation, that you would gain more people to Christ?

Jon: It was a part of the expectation, yeah.

DePue: What was your personal expectation? What were your personal goals?

Jon: Well, that was part of it. My personal goal? Here's my personal take on this: If this is God's work, then the Muslims firmly believe they wanted to talk to me, because they thought there was a pretty good chance I'd become a Muslim.

DePue: It would be more convincing.

Jon: I mean, if God is God, and if they are as firmly committed to theirs as I am to mine, then, you know, we talk to people at the level of their experience. The interesting thing about being in Africa is, you very seldom talk to people where you have to kind of sit there and cajole them into believing that maybe there's a God.

Jeanne: In God, yeah.

Jon: You start at a different point in the discussion. And they thought, "Gee, you're a swell guy. It's just too bad you don't have a proper faith in God. You got the wrong faith, but other than that you're a swell guy."

DePue: So, in both sides of the equation, people walk away saying, "These are wonderful people." They thought that of you and you thought that of them, if nothing else.

Jon: Yeah, and it's better to start with understanding than with antipathy.

DePue: Okay, now we are getting close to the end of what I think is the memory on this particular chip. I think this is a logical place to stop, because I want to talk, for our final session, about going to England, coming back to Senegal, and then coming to this peculiar community of Springfield, Illinois, and spending a few years here. So, any final comments about the community center from either one of you, or about that first few years in Senegal?

Jon: Okay, back to this. The community center. One of the reasons I've never felt a big, you know, like, "Gee, were we converting people?" is, another thing that Christ says is, "Help the poor."

Jeanne: There you go.

Jon: And he doesn't say, "Help the poor so that they'll be what you want them to be." He just says, "Help the poor." And these people were poor and they were cool. I mean, they were wonderful people and so we had the privilege of going over there and being ridiculously nice. There was no particular reason for us to care about these people. And they would ask us and I would say, "I'm doing this because of Jesus. Jesus said to do this, that's why we're doing it." And they would say, "But why are you nicer to us than the Muslims? We're Muslims." I said, "Ask the Muslims. We're not Muslim."

Jeanne: I remember having conversations with people, I know you said like, "What did you know before you went?" Well, people would say, "What? Are you out of your mind? You're going to a Muslim country? Aren't you afraid?" And I remember distinctly telling people, "Well, we're going to go and we're going to do good in God's name and maybe in a hundred years there will be some fruit to that." And I remember being convinced that we probably would never see any conversions or any of that and that was fine with us, because we were happy to be that point in the whole cycle where we were doing good in God's name.

Jon: Yeah, but, everybody, all of the servants and the guards in our home were Muslims. It's not like we didn't trust these people.

Jeanne: Oh, no, yeah.

Jon: I mean, we handed over the safety of our family and of our children to these Muslims. I mean, because they were all from Guinea, they all needed the work. They all spoke Pulaar and it never occurred to us that, "Well you can't hire them, they're Muslims." I mean it wasn't what you were concerned about.

DePue: It also strikes me that these Muslims had adapted that religion to their culture, just like Christianity has adapted to various cultures.

Jeanne: Absolutely.

Jon: And these Muslims had a lot of problems in their countries and a lot of problems in Senegal, but Senegalese government was not looking to a particular religion to blame for all of their problems. They weren't saying, you know, "All of our problems are caused by Christians." So we were fortunate that we were just in this place where tolerance was a very important part of their understanding.

DePue: Well I think that's probably a very good place to stop for tonight. Thank you very much and we'll pick this up again.

(End of interview 3. Continue with interview 4).

Interview with Jon and Jeanne Berg

FM-A-L-2007-005.04

Interview # 4: Thursday, June 28, 2007

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: This is session number four with Jon and Jeanne Berg. They're getting used to hearing me say that. It's been a real pleasure to talk to the two of you. We are again in their dining room in Springfield, Illinois. What we're going to do here, Jeanne, I am going to start with you and let you talk a little bit about what it was like for the kids in Senegal, because we didn't really talk about that and then we'll go into life in England. So, Jeanne?

Jeanne: Well, first of all, again I think I mentioned before that being a teacher, I had been very convinced that if we told the kids this was a good thing and, you know, talked to them about the positives and would say, "See, isn't this a good thing?" They would buy that and they would really truly feel that. We felt it would be a really good experience for them and for the most part I really think it was very helpful and very good for them. I think that it has changed their world view. I think they see things very differently. The first year we were there we put them into a missionary school. It is many, many denominations of kids, all of whose parents were missionaries or, I guess there could have been a few people who chose to put their kids into that school. It was a private school and our mission had to pay a tuition

there. And remember, I had four extra kids living with me, so I had a preschooler, Ryan; Michael was in kindergarten; and Matthew was in second grade; and then I had a second grade girl, a fourth grade girl, a sixth grade girl, and an eighth grade boy living with us also.

DePue: So you had quite a spread?

Jeanne: Um-hm.

DePue: These other four children, what were the circumstances there?

Jeanne: The second and fourth grade girls were sisters. They were the Zieglers and their parents were missionaries out in Linguere. Then the sixth grade girl, Joy, and her brother, Matt, were children of the Behrends,, who were even farther out in the bush; they were in N'dioum.

DePue: And both of these places are in Senegal?

Jeanne: In Senegal, yes.

DePue: And you were providing room and board and transportation and the whole works?

Jeanne: Yeah, I was. That first year my official job was housemother. So, yeah, you know, we absorbed them into our home, they lived in our home, and so I acted like *en parente loci* as the parent while their parents were out of town. So we would get the whole group up, mass feed everybody, and haul them off to school. It was very interesting because my two children were fairly new to being in school, of course.

The older children had gone there; the other four had already been there for at least one year, if not several years before. I guess I have to say that I was kind of shocked to find I was so disappointed with the school. As far as the teaching was, I knew there were fine teachers, they had good skills; those were all missionary people brought in from the states and paid by, what mission group was it?

Jon: I'm not sure. I don't remember.

Jeanne: Okay. I'm not sure if it was a group, or a group of missions, or a particular mission that had that school, but I became kind of concerned. You know, for instance, our eighth grade boy was in creative writing. He would get the assignment, "What does heaven look like?" So he would write a really Lutheran description, you know; he would write a creative writing story and then he would fail it because he didn't write the prescribed, you know, streets paved with gold. I'd go in and argue, "Well, wait a minute, it's a creative writing exercise. How could you do this to this boy?" and they would give him another assignment, "Describe Jesus" and he'd say, like a good Lutheran, "It doesn't matter what Jesus looked like, it matters what he did. That's the important thing about Jesus." and wrote a creative writing story like that and he was failed again. And so, we bumped heads with them so much during that year I pretty much came, well Jon and I together, came to the conclusion we did not

want our children to go to that school anymore. We wanted to be in charge of their religious education and at that school you could not separate the two.

DePue: What was the name of that school?

Jeanne: Um ...

Jon: Dakar Academy.

Jeanne: Yeah. Dakar Academy. Again, fine academics. We did not agree with religion that was being taught. Your kids couldn't go there and have the religious beliefs that we wanted them to have. So we looked into options and we decided then to put our kids into French speaking school. We found the French, kind of like the American International School, only it was the French school and we put our kids into there so they would learn French. Well, Mike was going to be in first grade, Matt was going to be in third grade, and I knew that those were important academic years. Being a teacher I went ahead and bought a course of work for each of them for first grade and third grade. So the deal was we would send them to French school and then I was going to teach them anything in English that they would need for their regular coursework. So Mike would go to school and he'd work on French stuff and then he would bring some work there. We made an arrangement that they could bring work there and he'd work on his American first grade work. After a couple of weeks I figured out, whoa, he was having trouble learning to read as he wasn't reading in his native language. So I quickly gave him a crash course in reading and he took off. As soon as he understood and grasped reading in English, then he translated that into French and actually ended up, you know, by the end of that year, being very, very good at speaking French. Matthew they wouldn't put into a third grade class because they didn't say he could not read and write French on a third grade level. So they made him go to a first grade French class also, which, of course, hurt his ego there for a little bit; but he did learn wonderful French. They were fantastic to work with. And so I would do some teaching at night in third grade and send him into school with his practice. So he would do his French first grade work really quickly and then do his American third grade work. And Ryan was in preschool. There was a kind of good play group that existed that had been formed by some American and British moms, and so we kind of developed it into an actual preschool. Eventually I became the director of that and eventually even got it certified by the Senegalese government and then finally recognized by the international school and then it got absorbed into the international school. That's where Ryan went to school for the first couple of years we were there.

DePue: That was not a French experience.

Jeanne: Nope. It was the only English language nursery school in the city of Dakar and so our clients, or the kids who came there were from all sorts of American and British backgrounds. You know, embassy people, US AID people, private, like petroleum company kids, and then there were kids from all over the world like English

language or English speaking African countries and so their parents wanted their kids to go to preschool in English, then even people from other countries who wanted their kids to have an English experience. So, then the year after that we wanted them to have the French experience. We eventually moved them into the international school; we kind of fought a battle over that because, remember we said the mission groups sometimes would say, “Everybody’s going to do this and everybody’s going to do that.”? They gave us kind of a hard time and we had to fight a little bit to be able to get our kids to go to the international school.

DePue: Now the international school, again, is the instruction in English?

Jeanne: Yes. It is an American recognized school, certified by America. It’s part of an international school system; the curriculum is American and the books and texts are American. The staff—sometimes they would bring in Americans, sometimes they would hire Americans or English speaking people. Actually there were British people, Canadian people, some Zambian—a Zambian woman who was a native English speaker was a teacher—so they had them from all over the world. And it’s fabulous. It’s a wonderful experience. I got elected to the school board there, so I really helped develop it. We moved on and built a new campus and it was attached to the American Club. Then eventually, again, I got the preschool absorbed into it. After we lived in England, when we came back to Senegal, I then applied for a job and worked there. I have to say, that is one of the most fantastic places I ever worked because you would have an interesting class of kids. They came from all over the world. At one time I had a little reading group: I had an Iraqi kid and an Iranian kid sitting at the little table next to him and their countries were fighting, but the two of them were learning to read together.

DePue: Wow.

Jeanne: So, it’s pretty cool. Yeah, you would have kids who were from every, you know, every country imaginable, and the common thing was they were learning English, or learning in English.

DePue: Okay. I’m struck that as you talk about Senegal, as you both talk about Senegal, it sounds so different from your experience in Cameroon.

Jeanne: Well, for major reasons. We had started to realize that we were not willing to live so far away from our kids as we were going to be expected to in Cameroon. We had started to say to them, “You know we can put up living with here, we like it here, we love these people, but it will be too much to ask us to live this far away from our children. We need to move somewhere. We want to serve you, but we want to live somewhere closer to our children.” That’s what we had been, you know, going around and around with in Cameroon and then the fire kind of just took care of the question. But the huge difference was, in Senegal we had our kids living with us and, you know, we had other kids who were in the same boat we had wanted to avoid, where they were living away from their parents.

DePue: But I'm also hearing it wasn't nearly the struggle for survival that Cameroon was.

Jeanne: Oh, no. If you are willing to pay, I mean, you could go to markets and you could shop and buy all of your goods in open air markets. We were too lazy and we liked—like we wanted our ham slices and we wanted cheese and we wanted yogurt and things like that which you could buy at, they had grocery stores—that the merchandise came right out of France. A little bit was imported from America. So, like you could get Kellogg's cereals for 10 bucks, a small little box, or something.

DePue: So it was expensive?

Jeanne: So you paid a lot for having that luxury of European type foods, so.

DePue: Okay, let's shift gears here and go to England. What caused the decision to go to England, Jon?

Jon: Well, missionaries in our church are kind of like academics in that once you've spent six years overseas in what they used to call "the field". I mean, in the area that you are assigned to, you earn a sabbatical every year if you want to use it. Well, with the four years there and the two and a half years that I had had previously in Cameroon—we spent, by that time, four years in Senegal and two and a half in Cameroon—I was eligible for a year of study. I decided that it would be helpful to study Islam, since all of the people I was working with, or many of the people we were working with, were Muslims. We could have gone to America and studied in Massachusetts or somewhere, but there was a program at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, England where they have a center for Christian-Muslim dialogue or study. They have a master's program where, in 13 months, you pass three comprehensive exams and write a dissertation and get a master's degree in Islamic studies. First I thought I would just attend classes, but then I decided, well I might as well work for the degree. So I applied and went there. Basically we applied and went there because we wanted to live in Europe again. We were more interested in living in Europe than in returning to America for a year. The agreement was that, upon completion of this year of study, I owed the mission two more years of work at least. That would be the time then when our oldest son would be ready for high school, so it just worked as a scheduling thing for us.

DePue: So you were already thinking at that time that you do the year in England, you do two more years in Senegal, and you wanted to have your kids, by the time they reached high school, in an American school in the United States?

Jeanne: Well, here's the thing. There were no American high schools at that point, though now the school the kids were at does have a high school, but we were going to be facing that issue of having to send your kid away. Now that's a lot different when they are in high school than it would have been when Matthew had just gone off to kindergarten, but that's what we would have had to agree to if we had decided to stay there longer. And, I'll tell you, when we were missionaries we would come home every other year for leave. Part of one of the things they would offer us as

missionaries would be like a retreat and a chance to get together with other missionaries from around the world who were also on leave. They would bring in speakers and they would also have services, like they would bring in psychologists --you could have your kids tested if you were concerned about whether or not they were staying up with their American counterparts or, you know, were they falling behind or were there any kind of special problems with their learning. As I met these people and talked with them about their experiences with their children, I discovered that if kids were overseas as little kids and came back to America, they made an adjustment really well. If they were in high school when they were overseas, they came back and they felt like international kids, not Americans, especially, like if the first time they came to America to study was as a college kid. And missionary kids usually end up asking to live in the international dorms and truly feel like international students, not Americans. And, Jon and I thought about it. We made the choice to go overseas. Our kids got dragged; they didn't make that choice. And if we got home in time for them to do high school in America, they would then have a chance to be acclimated back into America and could really feel like Americans. They could make the choice later on in life: do they want to be a person who lives overseas or do they want to be an American?

DePue: Okay. Very quickly then, Jeanne, why don't you tell me a little bit about your accommodations in England.

Jeanne: Oh, well, it was a very interesting place. We lived in the Methodist Overseas Guest House.

DePue: And this was Birmingham?

Jeanne: It was in Birmingham, England. Selly Oak Colleges is part of the University of Birmingham major campus and so Selly Oak Colleges was like an international housing complex. It was an apartment building all geared for international students, so there were single rooms and then there were family apartments. We had about as big an apartment as you could get, but it was hardly big enough for five of us. You walk in and there was a little hallway. There was what I would call a one-butt kitchen. One person could stand in that kitchen and cook. You know, in apartments in England people go shopping almost daily to buy food. You don't have these giant American refrigerators, so you buy what you need for the day or a little more. So would have this under-the-counter refrigerator or a small little oven, a small little stove, your sink and some storage for dishes and things.

DePue: A lot less room than you had in Senegal.

Jeanne: A lot less room, yes, but hot and cold running water. You didn't have to boil it and filter it. We had a bathroom. Their water closet or their toilet is separated from their shower or whatever. We had a front room, dining room, study, all that, and it was combined into one room. We had the boys stacked up on top of each other in a little bedroom. Then Jon and I—our bedroom had, let's see, it had our bed in it, it had a dresser for us, it had a desk for him to study at, and it had a deep chest freezer

in it, so we sat there with the hmmm, humming of our freezer in there. We were Americans and bought food in bulk and then stored it there.

DePue: What did you do for school? Did the kids go to public schools there?

Jeanne: Well, it was interesting. Yeah, the kids went to public school. We got there in time for the school year, which started there in September. Matthew was going to go into sixth grade, and at the end of fifth grade in the English system you take a test. On a certain day in England, all fifth graders take the test whether you're sick or not, there's no make-up day. You go and take the test and that test determines whether you go to the high school; it's like junior high/high school, that is going to send you towards a career or send you towards college. He missed the test so there was no making it up or taking it afterwards. If you don't pass the test and get to go to the college bound high school, then you have to go to the career high school. Well, Matthew had to go to that high school. He got there, and after a few weeks I started getting phone calls from his teachers, going, "We don't know what to do with him," because he was obviously, you know, he had a good education already and he just was running circles around his peers. So, they ...

Jon: They take the top 15 percent or so and they send them off to grammar schools, they call it, that prepare them for college.

Jeanne: They were really good. Now he was good because like, for instance, he had studied geography, but that was American curriculum. So here he had English geography to learn and it was English literature instead of American literature. There was some new different curricula for him. They did study religion in English schools. They actually have an assembly, like at the beginning of every day, which is based on religion: some days it's Muslim, some days it's Christian, some days it's Jewish, some days it's whatever; but I kind of liked that. It was more of an inspirational pep talk type thing every day. And then the other two went to Rattlebarn Elementary School.

DePue: What a wonderful name.

Jeanne: Uh-huh. And ...

Jon: Dickensonian.

DePue: Yes, it is.

Jeanne: And it had, you know, a head teacher and it had, again, teachers. Ryan was in second grade and Michael was in fourth grade. Ryan was struggling a little bit with his reading. Again, being a teacher and being a special ed teacher, I was in there collaborating with his teacher and we designed a curriculum for him. They quickly adapted to the English, you know, curriculum and were really enjoying it, but we found out that there was like a huge bully problem in England. Actually, they have a bully hotline. Back then, in 1990, they had a bully hotline, national bully hotline, for kids to call. The problem my kids came up with is they couldn't tolerate seeing

kids being bullied. There was a strange incident where Michael finally went up and held the bullies arms behind his back and told him he wasn't going to allow him to bully other kids anymore. The bully didn't like that, so he got his dad to come to school. His dad came marching into school and found Michael the next day in school and tried to bully him in the hallway. Of course, I found out about that so I was working in a different school and I went up to the headmaster there and I said, "Are parents allowed to come into school and bully kids in England?" He goes, "Absolutely not." So I got permission to go there and after school I stood there—of course, it was obvious I was that American kid's mom as soon as I opened my mouth and talked—so the bully came over to try to bully me. I handed him over to the head teacher there and said, "I think he's got a problem you need to deal with him about." But a couple of days later the international kids all walked over to this elementary school together and the parents of the kids took turns walking the kids over and the majority of the kids were white. There were a few kids from other races in that group.

DePue: In the international group?

Jeanne: In the international group. And a couple of days later—as it happened, it was a black father who was walking with the kids, only he was a little bit behind them—a carload of the bully's older brothers and the bully's parents pull up to the kids and start, you know, hassling the whole group. They didn't realize that the father was with that group of kids. He comes running up and he tore a branch off of a tree and goes kind of after the people who were in the car. So eventually we had to have the police escorting our kids home just because Michael wouldn't let the bully bully other kids.

DePue: It all started with that.

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: Well, good for Michael, huh?

Jeanne: Yeah (laughing).

DePue: I suspect you were pretty darn proud of him?

Jeanne: Yes.

DePue: Well, all of that going on while you're just trying to learn about Islam.

Jon: Yeah. And Jeanne should also tell you about the school she taught in.

Jeanne: Yeah. I had a very interesting job. I've always been attracted to teaching people with emotional problems or social problems and that's another long story. But, I signed up with substitute service; it's a national educational system. They don't have states and so I signed up and they assigned me to the nearest place you live, which, of course, was Birmingham. So I had the Greater Birmingham area to

respond to substituting. So, the very first day I went in as a sub, I went to a school. The head teacher was gone and the assistant head teacher had moved up to take her spot and I was going to sub for that person. I walked into the room and the teacher goes, "Okay now, what are you prepared to teach?" And I said, "I'm prepared to teach whatever you want. I've taught all sorts of grades. I'm special and regular. You know, you just tell me what you want me to teach and I'll teach it." She goes, "No, that's not how it works here. You bring in the lessons." And I go, "How can I do that if I don't even know what the kids did yesterday and what they're supposed to do tomorrow?" She goes, "Well, that's the way it works here." So you come in and you bring your own work for kids when you substitute in England. Luckily I can teach off the top of my head and I did have a bag of tricks I had carried with me, so I taught that day. Then I went home and called the sub service and I said, "You know, whoa, I had no idea this is the way it works. I guess maybe you need to give me more information from now on before I go in." They said, "Well, we do have a special ed school. Would you be interested in that?" and I said, "Sure." So they said, "Well, call this number." So I call Mr. Clark, Mike Clark—he's the principal there, or the head teacher—and we're having a phone conversation and he goes, "Do you know what kind of school this is?" and I go, "I heard it's special ed." And he goes, "Well, yes, for socially maladjusted kids and kids with emotional problems." And I go, "Oh, I've got that kind of certificate; I love those kinds of kids." He goes, "Really?" And he goes, "Would you be willing to come out here?" And I said, "Sure." And he goes, "I've never had anybody willing to come before." (Jon and DePue laughing). And then he goes, "I've never had a sub stay longer than noon. In fact, I've had most subs come and go, stay for a couple of hours and then they leave." And I went, "Oh, it can't be that bad." And he goes, "Well, I'll tell ya. Every morning when I pull in I judge what the day's going to be like by counting how many people are on the roof." And I went, "Oh, okay." So, essentially this was a school—it was a series of cottages—and some of the kids were residentially placed there and some of the kids were from the community and came in just for the day. They were truly socially maladjusted kids and some kids with behavioral disorders. And we would come in and literally you would lock yourself into the room with the kids. I would put the key down between my shirt and my bra and hang it down there, because nobody would go looking for the key in there. The windows were nailed so they would only open up a fraction of an inch so you could get a little air in, and we talked. Now I loved that population of kids and I loved there and I stayed after noon and after I had been there a few days the head teacher said, "I've never known anybody like you, and I've never ..." And it turned out I was the only certified special ed teacher at this whole school because they just didn't have ... I think there might have been somebody else who had some background in mental retardation. So, it was wonderful. He made the deal, "Would you like to come and teach here all the time?" and I said, "Well, I really had hoped to take some time off when people come to sightsee and what not." He said, "I'll tell you what; any day you want to work I will hire you, as long as you just let me know ahead of time and want this week off or want those days off." So, it was like the perfect teaching job. I could work when I wanted and didn't have to work when I didn't want to. Eventually I gave workshops for the city of Birmingham on

special ed and on the American education system and so, yeah, it was a wonderful experience for me.

DePue: Okay. We're going to take a very quick break and then we'll go back to Jon and you can talk about Islam.

Jon: Good job.

DePue: It's very challenging. Okay, here we go.

(break)

DePue: Okay, Jon, if you could tell us a little bit about the school then?

Jon: Okay. The school: there were probably 20 students, I don't know, maybe 25, 30. About half at least were Muslim kids; not kids, adults from various places. It was a graduate level school. The faculty was about half Muslim and half Christian. The director was a Dutch guy who was, I guess Christian—I don't think very serious about it. The African Islam guy was, oh, good grief, what was his name?

Jeanne: The who?

Jon: The guy who taught African Islam, the Swedish guy. Sigvard van Sicard. Sigvard van Sicard, who was my mentor, because I was studying—great guy, and his wife was very nice. They were very nice to us. I just was having a mental block as to his name. He had grown up as a missionary kid in, I think, East Africa. He was Swedish, but he spoke English and had studied Islam in Africa. There was a guy who taught History of Christian Thought, called Christian Troll, who was a Jesuit, a great guy. I had to take Koranic Arabic from a Pakistani gentleman named Ibrahiima Surti, who was a Muslim. Basically the way the program works is, you take classes for nine months, but you get no grades. You just study stuff and then you write papers, little papers, and you talk about stuff and present stuff. I had to pass three comprehensive exams: one in Koranic Arabic, the other in African Islam, and the third in Islamic thought, or in Christian seminaries we would call it systemic theology. Koranic Arabic was a learning experience, as far as I was concerned, in how not to teach and how not to learn, but it was, I guess, good to be taught in that kind of pedantic, basically repetitive fashion. Arabic is a difficult language because the alphabet is so unfamiliar; you don't have the normal alphabet, so you have to learn this weird alphabet.

Jeanne: That is how Koranic schools work.

Jon: And you have to write from right to left and pronunciation is somewhat different. Of course, Surti was not a native Arab speaker; he was a native—I suppose, Parsi, or something speaker—whatever he was speaking in Pakistan.

DePue: What was it especially that you didn't like about the nature of the instruction?

Jon: Well, because he was just saying the Koran teaches the Koran. All wisdom that anyone ever needs is in the Koran. We will use the Koran to explain the Koran. Basically it was just like they were teaching little—what they call the talibé out there in the middle of Africa. “Repeat after me, da-da-da, da-da-da, da-da-da, da; da-da-da, da-da-da, da-da-da, da.” And he would try to throw some grammar and stuff in there, but, you know, I had a German major and then I learned French. We tried to ask grammatical questions and he didn’t care about grammatical questions. In fact, I don’t think he had a clue about approaching a language in an analytical way and saying, “Here’s how this verb tense works. Here’s how you construct this.” He just basically wanted us to learn a bunch of vocabulary and be able to translate passages from the Koran, read them and translate them from Arabic into English.

DePue: Do you think he was also doing a little bit of evangelizing there?

Jon: Well, he might have thought he was, but certainly not effectively.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: I mean, if it doesn’t work I guess it’s not evangelizing.

Jeanne: But that is exactly how every person learns Arab, or the ... you know.

Jon: That’s how it’s drummed into Muslim –these kids in Africa will go out there and they’ll sit in the evening for hours and write and write and write the same thing and repeat the same thing. They may have no understanding of what they’re actually saying and they can recite the Koran. I mean, I think that there are people who can recite the whole Koran and not translate it from Arabic into their language.

DePue: So, not truly understand what it is saying?

Jon: Yeah.

Jeanne: Exactly.

Jon: But then a lot of them would understand the words, but then the interpretation of the Koran is a complex thing. They’ve taken this and they’ve made it literally God’s words, the sound of God speaking. So, it’s such a holy thing. For example, when people say you don’t take a Koran and mistreat it, you’ll be offending Muslims, well, you are. And it’s only God’s word in Arabic. There is no translation of the Koran. Any translation of the Koran is no longer the Koran. Muslims pray in Arabic, because that’s the language God speaks; that’s the language he revealed himself through the prophet Muhammad.

DePue: So a much more didactic approach to learning? Or maybe that’s the wrong word.

Jon: Pedantic I would say.

DePue: Pedantic.

Jon: Literalistic. No, it's like people who would say, "You will memorize the King James version of the Bible, because that's what God talks and no other version is good."

DePue: But that particular class wasn't to teach you about ...?

Jon: That was to teach me to pass a test, a written test in Koranic Arabic. The end result of it was I drilled and drilled and drilled. I memorized roughly 50 pages of handwritten Arabic and I passed the test with flying colors.

DePue: One of your other classes though was basically teaching you, for lack of a better phrase, Islamic theology?

Jon: Yeah. And that was Christian Troll, who was, you know, obviously a Jesuit. He was a German. And that was super and it was simple.

DePue: What was his last name?

Jon: Troll. T-r-o-l-l.

DePue: And what was the essence of what you learned there?

Jon: I learned that systematic theology for Muslims and Christians is basically the same.

DePue: In what respect?

Jon: In terms of the issues you address. Is God one? Well, of course, Muslims come up with a little different answer to that than Christians. Christians say, "Sure, but ..." The Muslims don't have the "Yes, but." Is God sovereign? If God is sovereign then where does evil come from? What is the nature of sin? Are people sinful? And Muslims and Christians come up with different answers. And then, "Where does authority lie within Islam and where does authority lie within the church?" That's where you get into this big deal between Sunnis and Shiites: who is the right spokesman for the Islamic community?

DePue: Um-hm. Did you talk quite a bit and learn quite a bit about the differences in Islam?

Jon: Sure.

DePue: The mystics and Sunnis and Shias and Sufis.

Jon: Yeah, the Sufis, sure. We learned that there are, for example, four different schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Muslims are fond of presenting themselves as one, as we agree about things. But obviously, the more we learn about them and, unfortunately,

in modern history we are learning plenty about them, we find that they are pretty divided, just like Christians are pretty divided.

DePue: Did it help learning about Islam? Did it help you when you went back and dealt with Muslims on a daily basis?

Jon: Sure. It always helps learning about the people that you're dealing with and it was interesting to me. I mean, I'm interested in how religion works. I'm interested in how theology is structured. I'm interested in how people ask questions about God, about how they pray, about what their concerns are. It is a sign of respect, I thought on my part, that I would take them seriously enough to study their religion. And it also taught me another thing: when people ask me to come and say, "Will you come and explain Islam to us?" I'll say, "No. Find a Muslim. I'll come and talk to you about what I've learned about Islam, but I will not speak of another's faith as if I could explain."

Jeanne: As an expert, yeah.

Jon: I am no expert in their faith. So, I think that's it helpful to have ... for example, they wanted me to come to Jacksonville and I did. I said, "Fine, but bring some Muslim doctors; you've got plenty." And so they got a couple of Muslim doctors and we talked about Islam and Christianity and the dialogue between the two faiths, or the differences between the two faiths. The other thing that helped me there was, you know, we had African priests, a Nigerian and a guy from Zaire, that were really good friends of ours, especially the Zairian. He became a really good friend. So, we were meeting Africans and talking to them, but about different things than we were talking to them about in Senegal and we became very close. I met Asians, Christians and Muslims, and I learned that there was a lot of difference, generally, between how people from Indonesia look at Islam and how people from Malaysia look at Islam, at least as they were typified in that group.

DePue: Do you recall any of the specific differences in those two?

Jon: Yeah, one or the other—I think that the Malaysians were way more hard line than the Indonesians. Then we had a guy from Taiwan, or a Chinese guy. I don't know. He was Chinese Christian, and he was just unbelievably hard line Christian. We had a South African guy who was an imam and he had been educated in Pakistan, so all of the Muslims had to respect him because he knew the Koran better than any of them, because he had had it beat into his head in these Pakistani madrassas. But then he went back to Cape Town and he got involved, heavily involved, in the antiapartheid struggle. He was colored. He wasn't black, he wasn't white, he was Asian Indian, so he was colored. He got thrown into jail. The colored Muslim leaders came and they were just having a fit with him. They said, "What are you doing? You're embarrassing your Muslim brothers. You're not supposed to cause trouble with the government. We don't care what happens to these black guys. We're colored, we're okay, leave us alone." He said, "You're just causing trouble. You're supposed to be in support of your Muslim brothers. Look, my Muslim

brothers, forget it.” He says, “My brothers are the Catholic priests here in jail with me. That’s who my brothers are.” (laughing).

DePue: Well, here’s the question I’ve been dying to ask you right from the very beginning. What do you think, having lived in Senegal, having lived in this country that is predominantly Islam, having spent a year in school, with what’s going on now in the world, especially in the Islamic world?

Jon: I think fundamentalist religion is a very dangerous thing.

DePue: And you’re not saying that about just Islam?

Jon: I don’t think that the solution to fundamentalist Islam is fundamentalist Christianity.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: I think religious intolerance and hatred caused in the name of God is a very destructive and dangerous thing. We certainly recognize it more neatly in others. Certainly I think what’s being done in the name of Islam is terrible. Something’s got to stop it. I don’t think religion is meant to inculcate hatred. There’s something wrong with a religion when in Bagdad they find 20 people with their heads cut off in the name of God.

DePue: Well, did you see any of that when you were in Senegal?

Jon: No.

DePue: I’m thinking primarily of the Saudi influences there.

Jon: When we were in Senegal the Saudi influences were largely a joke. Nobody was taking them very seriously. When we went back 13 years later, they weren’t such a joke anymore.

DePue: What had changed?

Jon: American had started fighting Muslims; 9-11 had happened; there had been a whole ramping up in the conflict between Islam and Christianity, or Westernism and Islam. Things had become more desperate for Muslim countries and they’d sought ... Osama bin Laden was unknown. We left there in 1992.

DePue: Yeah, he was an unknown throughout the entire world.

Jon: Sure.

DePue: Nobody in America even knew who he was at that time.

Jon: Sure. I mean, it was a different world. And the problems never got better; they just kept getting worse. In most places in Africa things haven’t gotten better since 1992 when we left there. They’ve gotten worse.

DePue: This might be very unfair for me to ask, but why do you think they've gotten worse?

Jon: Largely because of—well, AIDS has made things tough for a lot of—I mean, a huge loss of educated people. They educated people who could travel. In many sub-Saharan African countries were also males who were very sexually active and not big on either celibacy before marriage or fidelity within marriage and it's taken a huge loss.

Jeanne: Or protection.

Jon: Yeah. Well, they didn't know they had to be protected. Even afterwards.

DePue: Yeah.

Jeanne: Well, even after they knew they were not ...

Jon: Mike said he has to get on a bus in Zimbabwe. He says if there were 15 people on that bus he'd look around and probably 12 of these people are HIV positive.

DePue: Now this would have been what year? Just a couple of years ago?

Jon: It would have been more than a couple of years ago. Five years ago.

Jeanne: Yeah, he probably went there about five years ago.

DePue: After 9-11 though?

Jon: Oh, sure.

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Jeanne: While he was in college.

DePue: Yeah.

Jeanne: I mean, there are villages there where the only people who live in villages are grandparents taking care of their grandchildren, because their own children—that whole generation is gone.

Jon: Things get worse because African governments are ridiculously corrupt and they run their countries into the ground. It used to be all of these countries became independent in about 1960 to 1970. It seems like a big year for independence was 1965. Well, by the time we were there, which was 25 years later, they were starting to say, "You know, it's getting a little hard to blame the French for all our problems." (laughing) "We used to be able to blame everything on what Colonialists had done to us, but it's pretty hard to do that now." The Senegalese

now will tell you, you know, “We keep electing these people and they keep ripping us off and it’s kind of hard to even know what to do.” They don’t know what to do.

Jeanne: But there are things like—back to the AIDS—we knew somebody who came over and was working with some health organization. They were studying the problem of prostitutes and AIDS. Prostitutes were legal and there were actually places where they were encouraged to live. They were supposedly checked by doctors and like, certified as healthy, but everyone was totally ignoring ... I mean the person we knew who was researching these people knew most of them had AIDS. The government’s stance was, “There isn’t AIDS here. What are you talking about? Nobody has it.” So, like, just denying the problem, let alone trying to do something about it.

Jon: And I think that it’s ...

Jeanne: It’s bad for tourism.

Jon: ... it’s a rough thing in this world to be poor. Many people in Africa are poor and they’re poor because they don’t have access to resources for whatever reasons.

DePue: Yeah. This is going to sound very simplistic probably, but my understanding of what the Saudis oftentimes in these countries are trying to do is they’re bringing in fundamentalist Islam, Wahabism. Part of that is blaming Western culture and civilization for many of the problems that these societies are having.

Jon: Yeah, and it’s also saying that if we did Islam perfectly, then we would have perfection, just as John Calvin would have said if we did Christianity perfectly, Geneva would be perfect. It’s a totalitarian system. Any totalitarian system will tell you, if you just do it right everything will be perfect, because we will bend human nature to God’s will.

DePue: And what I think I hear you saying is that when you left in 1991-1992 ...

Jeanne: 1992.

DePue: ... that kind of a message wasn’t finding much of an appeal, but it is now?

Jon: It’s finding more appeal now, I think, just because the way women were dressing; many of them were dressing in more conservative ways. I mean, I’m struck by the fact that this really, really smart woman that worked very closely with our son wouldn’t shake our hand.

DePue: When was the last time that you went back to Senegal then to make these kinds of comparisons?

Jon: Well, we left in 1992; we went back in 2005, in August of 2005.

DePue: And you went back because?

Jon: Our son was working in Dakar—in fact, just five miles or so from where we lived, at the most—with a group called Geek Corps. They were trying to do internet technological development for West Africa, and was there for three or four months. Then he became country director in Mali and spent a year and a half or a little more doing that. So, we went back because he had a nice apartment for us to stay in and we wanted to go back and see Senegal. He was there and so we were able to notice that many things had changed and many things had stayed the same. Everybody was running around with a cell phone.

Jeanne: The first big discovery we made was it was not at all hard for us to go to Cameroon when we were 27 years old. It wasn't even very hard for us to go to Senegal to live with 3 kids when we were 35. But going back to Senegal when we were 55, we felt like we couldn't tolerate the heat and it was so hot and humid. Of course, we didn't have our own place, we didn't have a car, you know, you were a tourist. But we expected to go back and just fit right in like we never left. We found out we were older and it was hard to go back, physically and emotionally.

Jon: In much of the world, I mean, people are looking for something that works and if capitalism doesn't seem to work for them ... For a long time the hope was socialism. I mean Asia and Africa went through this, "We're going to socialize everything. That'll work." Well, that didn't work and so now Islam in many of these places. Christianity is firmly identified with European capitalism as a foreign religion and Islam presents itself in Africa as an African religion, although Israel is hardly further from Africa than Saudi Arabia. But basically it's kind of the same neck of the woods. And they try to present themselves then as a third way, something authentically African, that will grant them nobility and purpose and direction. Sometimes these Islamic brotherhoods in Senegal—for example, the Tijanis, that I wrote my dissertation about, and the Mourides—are pretty effective organizations for helping people. They get people together. They said America--big cities in America—whenever you are buying souvenirs, like in New York City from these Africans, they are Mourides. They send them over, they live together, they sell things cheap. Washington, D.C., where they are selling, you know, cassette tapes and movies and cheap watches, they're all from Senegal and they're all Mourides and they're all making money.

DePue: And from what I understand as corrupt African nations go, Cameroon and especially Senegal are not nearly as corrupt.

Jon: No, Senegal is the shining star. They have elections and presidents lose and leave office and the next guy comes in and takes office.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: Leopold Senghor was their first president and he's the only African, or at least was the first African, elected to the Academie Francais. He was a noted poet and a Protestant, of all things. I mean, he was a Protestant. Could you imagine this? So much for religious intolerance.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: You know, his son or his grandson was the guy that we used. He was a notaire, like a real estate lawyer, and a real good friend of the pastor there. Abdou Diouf, when we were there, was the president: an elegant, sophisticated, distinguished guy. He was kind of an African Giscard D'Estaing,, I mean, tall, slender, and his wife was Catholic. Then they elected Abdoulaye Wade now, who is old, old, and really crazy, but a very distinguished opposition politician, obviously smart. He's way old now; he's way up in his 80s, but he's a dynamic guy. But they can never kind of get ... the question is, is it corruption? I mean it sure smells like corruption to us. When you take the government's money and give it to your relatives ...

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: ... is that corruption? Well, Americans do it too, but just not to such an extent, you know?

DePue: They just hire their relatives (Jon laughing) to work on their staff.

Jeanne: Well, like in Cameroon ...

Jon: For example, our mayor would never hire his cousin to be the lawyer for the city of Springfield.

DePue: Oh, absolutely not, no.

Jon: That would not happen.

Jeanne: In Cameroon, we could do nothing without, you know, having to work the system, you know, whatever it was. In Senegal, we had incidences like I've told you about: the mailman problems in Cameroon. Well, one time I went up to get mail from the mailbox for the missionaries in our post office in Senegal, right there in Dakar itself. I think there was something like 179 Christmas letters and cards for all of the missionary group and every one of them was slit open. So I went up to the post office guy and I said, "Well, look at this, isn't this amazing, every one of these letters is opened," hinting like, you know, you've stolen out of every one of these. And he goes, "Yes, we were just sitting around talking about how corrupt that American mail system is (DePue laughing) that every one of these ones was broken into." So, you know, they knew I knew, I knew they knew, and there wasn't a thing I could do about it, but the system was working. I mean, we just told people don't mail us anything obvious in Christmas cards and things.

Jon: I don't look back at Africa and think this is just a sewer of corruption. I mean, that wasn't the reality of it. Cops would pull you over for "speeding", standing on the curb and they'd wave you over to the curb. I'd say, "How do you know I'm speeding? How are you going to stop me if I don't stop? You don't have a car?" And they'd say, "Well, I'm hungry." And I'd say, "Oh, okay. Here's two bucks. Go have some lunch." (laughing) It was not a bad thing, it was fine.

Jeanne: It's just the system, how it works.

Jon: And it's about relationships, you know. Relationships are a precious thing. They are the most precious thing. That's what I've learned from Africa and the thing I like most about what I've learned in Africa. For example, in our classes, when we would have disagreements between Muslims and Christians, the disagreements--I was always surprised--were very seldom between Muslims and Christians. There were some liberal Muslims, believe that, and then there were liberal Christians like me. Then there were fundamentalist Muslims and fundamentalist Christians.. Every time we got into some disagreement about interpretation of anything or the ethics of anything or whatever, the arguments always broke into the two camps, with the conservative Muslims and conservative Christians siding together and the liberal Muslims and the liberal Christians siding together. It was more a frame of mind than a particular religious ideology. It was how you approached religion rather than what the religion was.

DePue: Um-hm. Well, how would you describe the characteristics of those you call the liberal Muslims and liberal Christians? What was different than how those two conceptualize religion?

Jon: See, I think that, as a liberal, I would argue this: I think that I believe more in God than the conservatives do. I'm going to leave some of these decisions up to God. I'm not going to judge who's going to hell. I'll let God do that. And I'm not going to think that I have to wreak God's judgment on this earth in the name of God's truth.

DePue: Are you defining conservative in both of those camps as people who are certain about what the Bible and the Koran say?

Jon: Who are most certain that the Koran and the Bible both say one and only one thing to have one and only one answer to every question that can be posed.

DePue: Okay, okay. Um, gosh where should I go from there? There were problems, I think, about the time you were there, with Mauritania, with some conflicts between Senegal and Mauritania. Do you recall any of that?

Jon: Yeah, some time while we were there. Yeah. This is one of these stories of unintended consequences. The Senegal River valley up in the northern part is the border between Northern Senegal and Southern Mauritania. People who lived along there and farmed along there, it's a little like the Nile, except it is not navigable. You can't go upriver at all. But, it will inundate the river banks with the spring rains and then they'll farm that. It's not quite a delta, but at least a strip of land along each side that's good for farming. People have lived there and farmed that; mostly they are Pulaar speakers on both sides of the river called Haal-pulaar and they're dark skinned African people. Well, then Europeans and Americans and people came in and built these dams to develop this river to help with the agriculture process to improve the economy. They'd grow lots of tomatoes and

stuff, so that this river valley land became more precious than it had traditionally become. In Mauritania the Moors themselves are lighter skinned Arabic speaking people. I think they speak a dialect of Arabic called Haslnia. They decided, "Well, we want this land, this river valley land." So they came through and they kicked out these darker skinned Pulaar speaking people that were Mauritians and sent them over the river into—I mean they had to flee into Senegal. And they also started attacking the Senegalese people. This is interesting. Mauritanian people would go from Nouakchott, Mauritania, or from Mauritania, to Senegal and set up little stores. They would lend everybody money, little bits of credit, and then they would collect their money at the end of the month, or something. They would make money because they didn't have relatives to support there. They would keep their stores open all of the time. They knew all of the people that shopped from them. They would isolate themselves in Senegal and make money and that's what they did. Well, they didn't like doing manual labor and stuff, so Senegalese people would go up and work in Nouakchott—I've never been up there—doing manual labor, fixing things as carpenters and mechanics and technicians and stuff like that, and they would do the same thing. They would live up there and they would be able to save up some money because they didn't have all of their relatives around. So, it worked out fine. It was a symbiotic relationship. Well, when this conflict started then along the Senegal River valley, people in Nouakchott started killing Senegalese people that were up there. Then when the Senegalese people heard about it, in Dakar and other places where the Mauritians were, they started killing Mauritians. So all of a sudden we had what they call a *couvre feu*.

Jeanne: Well, they had a state of emergency where we were curfewed. We couldn't leave our home after six at night until six in the morning.

Jon: I don't know if all of this was at the same time. I think it was. I mean Well, what happened is, in Dakar they declared a curfew from six at night 'til six in the morning and they say, "If we see you on the street between six at night and six in the morning, the police will shoot you first and ask questions later," just to put a lid on everything. There were, I don't know, 15 Mauritians killed in one of the markets, so people just took them out in the middle of the market and killed them. There were dozens and dozens of Senegalese killed up there in Nouakchott. Well, they had an international fairground, they called it, in Dakar and it was like our fairground only smaller, but a nice place. It had a nice defined perimeter, a fence, around it. So they took about 8,000 Mauritians and put them in there and then they took the Senegalese military and they lined them up around the outside of this ground ...

Jeanne: To protect them ...

Jon: ... not facing in, facing out.

Jeanne: To protect them until they could fly them out for their safety.

Jon: Yes. And they told the Senegalese people. The Senegalese people were running around burning tires and yelling and screaming and ...

Jeanne: It was frightening.

DePue: But figured the only way to diffuse this is to get the Mauritians out of town?

Jeanne: Yes. So they exported them all, plus the Senegalese were being deported out of Mauritania.

Jon: Yeah, the French set up—and I think the Americans were involved in this too—what in French they call it a pont avion, an air bridge. They just flew cargo planes, these twin engine propeller driven cargo planes, old planes, back and forth between—and it's not very far—from Dakar to Nouakchott. They'd fill it up with Mauritians in Dakar and drop them off in Nouakchott, and fill them up with Senegalese and flew them back. And so they just emptied both countries out of their respective nationalities and until things cooled down.

DePue: It sounded like the two governments at least cooperated at that level.

Jeanne: Well, I think they were at different times and I believe the Mauritanian Senegalese fight—war, problems, whatever, you want to call it—occurred. Mauritania is kind of an artificially set up country and it was designed as a buffer zone between white Africa north of the Sahara and black Africa south of the Sahara and it had a mixture of black Africans and white Moorish people.

Jon: Like Darfur.

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: But I also heard ...

Jeanne: But it was designed as a buffer country and like he said, with that nice land down there being ... Slavery I should also say was still legal in 1980. It was outlawed ...

DePue: In Mauritania.

Jeanne: ... in Mauritania in 1980. So that's kind of the mindset of what was going on there and the blacks were the slaves and the whites were the slave owners.

DePue: Whites or would we consider them Arabs?

Jeanne: Arabs, but, um, they're white compared to Africans.

DePue: Sure.

Jeanne: What happened is, they would load up a Moorish or Arabian or white Mauritanian family, they would bring them into a black family's compound and they would load up the black Mauritians into the truck, unload the white ones and say, "Here's

your new house, here's your new gardens, here's your vegetables, here's your rice fields ..." or whatever it was that that person had. They would take the blacks and they would bring them to the river and they sent them across the river. Some people actually were sent across the river naked or hardly clothed, certainly without any of their possessions. They were happy and delighted if they had their family.

DePue: Um-hm.

Jon: So when that happened, we ended up running our mission with the Red Crescent, which is the same thing as the Red Cross, only with Muslims it is called the Red Crescent. So the Red Crescent and our mission were running this refugee camp in N'dioum with like 3,000 people. We got money from somewhere and I'd buy tons of rice and tons of dried fish.

Jeanne: We got money from the Lutherans, the LWR.

Jon: Lutheran World Relief?

Jeanne: Yeah, uh-huh, and our mission. I mean, our headquarters ...

Jon: Oh, okay. And so we were responsible for awhile. I don't know what eventually happened with this.

Jeanne: About 10 days until the ...

Jon: Until the United Nations High Commission for Refugees got there.

Jeanne: We were able to come in and it took them about 10 days ...

Jon: Or longer than that.

Jeanne: ... for them to come in with the whole schmear. You know, the tent city and the doctors and ...

Jon: Because along the Senegal River there they had all of these refugee camps. I was up there with this one and it was an interesting thing. They were living in these blue tarps, but you have all of these romantic notions, like helping poor people is cool and they'll be so grateful and I'll be the great rescuer. Well, we'd go out there and they were complaining about the food and it was hot and it was awful. What would happen was, here I show up and they haven't had anybody to yell at all day long so now is their opportunity (laughing).

DePue: (laughing) You were useful in that respect.

Jon: I know, and one guy I met ...

Jeanne: He'd say things like, you know, he'd hand a bunch of men a bunch of brooms and say, "Okay, now let's clean out this area,. Let's sweep this," and they'd hand him back the broom saying, "Men don't sweep." You know, like ahhh.

Jon: But I met this one guy and he had been in the Mauritanian army or he was a Mauritanian military officer for 25 years and he was hard. This guy was riding around with me because he was kind of in charge of a bunch of stuff . We were driving along the river valley and he was one tough customer. You know, I wouldn't have messed with him for anything and he was way older than I was.

DePue: Um-hm.

Jon: And I said, "Well, you know, what do you guys need? What are you doing to do? How can we help you?" and he said, "Give me guns." He says, "I have a family. I have a house. I have cattle. It's all right there on the other side of the river." He says, "I know how to get back my farm. Just give me a gun. That's what I want." And, you know, that's how I guess conflicts continue.

Jeanne: Well, that's not how we helped, yeah.

Jon: And we fed them.

Jeanne: Yeah.

Jon: Back to this thing with Mauritania and Senegal; when these things happened—I'll I never forget, Abdou Diouf, the president—with Mauritanian Senegal said, "*Nous sommes condamnés a vivre ensemble*", which means in English, "We are condemned to live together." What he was saying was, Senegal and Mauritania have to figure out how to work together. We don't have any other choice, so we're in a fight right now, but this will not be our long term relationship. We will work out an agreement. They did, and they have.

Jeanne: There were several times when we ended up where there were like national curfews and things like that. The whole time we lived in Senegal, the southern part of Senegal was in a civil war with the rest of Senegal. They were trying to secede from the nation.

Jon: Some of them were.

Jeanne: Yeah, some people down there were and some were not. We actually went down there and traveled and saw, and it wasn't a problem. You would be told exactly what areas to avoid and then you could go around.

DePue: I don't know if it was you or if I read someplace, but Mauritania, at least at that time, and I suspect now also, was an Islamic Republic?

Jon: Yeah, it was and is, I'm sure, an Islamic Republic.

DePue: So quite different in terms of their Sharia.

Jon: Sharia, yeah. And given the choice, I mean, well ...

Jeanne: We would never have been allowed to be missionaries there.

Jon: Yeah. You just couldn't be. People go into Mauritania and help, but that's what they do. For example, in Senegal, regardless of how effective we were in being a "church", our name was always the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Senegal. That was the name of everything we did. And that's the name we put on our buildings and on our center. We didn't want anybody to say, "Oh, we didn't know you were a church? We didn't know you were Christians?" We were very up front about that. Well, in Mauritania you don't do that sort of thing. You go in, you help people and you hope that it does some good, but it's a very difficult place to work. It's just a terribly difficult place to live. I would be very happy to live in Senegal. I don't think I would ever seriously consider living in Mauritania.

DePue: I'm going to completely change the tone of the discussion right now, because I think you got involved in a couple of other things in Senegal, more as hobbies than anything else. I wanted you to talk about that Jon; and Jeanne if you've got some words on that too. Now the two I'm thinking about in particular, and you correct me if I'm wrong, are carpentry and sailing.

Jon: Yeah, well I didn't do a lot of carpentry, but I did have some tools actually and I gave them to this Senegalese guy—I keep forgetting his name—and he built some of the furniture we have in our home now.

DePue: So a very talented guy?

Jon: Yeah. In Yeumbeul we found that all of these people could do things; they just needed people to hire them to do it. This guy, and I'll think of his name as soon as you're gone, anyway, was a really, really good carpenter and he taught other people how to be carpenters. Since I brought over ...

Jeanne: From hand, hand tools.

Jon: ... these tools, these great hand tools I had, it quickly occurred to me that if I kept them and didn't use them, living where we did right by the ocean, they'd just rust and be good for nothing. So I gave them all to him to use while we were in the country. He built things with them and as a result he built some of the furniture and stuff we have in our house and then I would give him tools.

DePue: Was he making his living not just building things for you, but professionally?

Jon: No, that was his living, sure. And then he built stuff for our center and, for example, when we needed tables built with metal legs and stuff, there were all kinds of little welding shops all over the place. People were desperate to learn a skill and to make a living. You think you're going to go over there and have these religious

discussions, and I suppose at some level you do, but what everybody wanted was a job and a visa to go to the United States. That's what they wanted. They wanted the chance that we have and I don't blame them.

Jeanne: But he spent a lot of time visiting him in the shop and working side by side.

Jon: But we also bought a sailboat. There were these American German guys and they had this sailboat and I knew they were leaving. They wanted \$4,000 for it. Forget it. I offered them, I think, \$3,000. They wouldn't take it. So finally, the day before the last guy was leaving the country and the other guys had already left, I went up to the guy and I said, "Hey, I'll give you \$2,000 for your boat." He said okay. So, (laughing) then I had this 25 foot sailboat, which I knew nothing about. I'd sailed the Hobie Cat catamaran in Lake Poinsette in South Dakota.

Jeanne: Go back to that statement where I said, "If I had known my life would depend on his sailing skills" (DePue laughing).

Jon: Yeah, but you hardly ever went out on it.

Jeanne: Yeah, that was smart.

Jon: Anyway, so I got this boat. It was in this yacht club that cost me like \$40.00 a month.

Jeanne: Well, describe the yacht club please.

Jon: Hann Plage. It was at a backwater so since the waters were rather stagnant it was quite dirty,. But it was okay, it was fine.

Jeanne: Yeah. I would wonder where the smell was coming from and I discovered that raw sewage was just coming out pipes and being dumped into the water, so.

Jon: Yeah, but you get in your boat and you go out to sea a mile and it's wonderful, so.

Jeanne: So you would have to get on the boat, carefully making sure you didn't touch the water. A little rowboat would take you out to your sailboat.

Jon: Oh, it wasn't nearly that bad.

Jeanne: Oh, it was. And then you would get on your boat and go out into the clear nice water.

Jon: We kind of learned how to sail and Matt, Mike, Ryan, and I really liked it because the fishing was great. This boat had like a bathroom in it and a little kitchen in it and beds in it and you could out ...

Jeanne: Slept five.

Jon: ... and anchor out at night and catch fish and ...'

DePue: Were the boys going out by themselves or did you have an African with you?

Jon: No, I quickly decided there was this guy I knew named Diate who was a fisherman. I knew him from going out fishing with him right by where we lived. He was a great guy so I started always taking him with us because I didn't want to be on that boat by myself with three kids. Whenever we would toss them in the water ...

DePue: And, Jeanne, you didn't want that either did you?

Jeanne: No, no.

Jon: ... We'd tie a rope on them and put them in life vests and throw them out. They'd just drift around and we'd pull them back in. Diate was born in that ocean. I mean, he could swim like a fish and knew everything, so it was just a lot of fun.

Jeanne: Yeah, he knew the water, he knew the currents, he knew like what to do when a great big freighter or something was in the vicinity.

Jon: As far as family stuff, we spent a great deal more time as a family doing things as a family than Americans do traditionally. This being overseas didn't distract from the quality of our family life; it enhanced the quality of our family life and I think it was one of the great bonuses. There were fewer distractions. I mean, we knew lots of different people and we did lots of different things, but there weren't this huge range of activities. We weren't going to cousins' birthday parties and weddings and all kinds of stuff that other people were doing, because we weren't around.

Jeanne: The Marines who guarded the embassy had a barracks that they lived in called the Marine House and they sponsored the local Boy Scout troop, so our kids could do that if they wanted. They took karate lessons. Off and on, depending on who was stationed in Dakar. For a while we had some guy who was, like, an Olympic level track person living there. He developed a track program for kids, so for a couple of years they got to do track training and track activities. There was always soccer, organized soccer, and, you know, the school activities like birthday parties for the kids in your school or in your class at school and things. But, it was by no means as much as occurs for kids here, where, you know, they go to 15 different classes and lessons during the week or practices or whatever for their sports or activities.

Jon: I mean, our kids missed out on some things. They didn't learn that being with their parents and their brothers was just terrible, and something that was just a shameful thing to do. And the other thing is, they came back to America and they didn't realize that they were supposed to feel like they were, denied opportunity or persecuted. They just never got around to feeling sorry for themselves and I think that that's because they had a different experience.

Jeanne: When they came to Springfield and went to school, after a few days my kids were all having a conversation that they pulled me into concerning the fact that there were actually kids who don't do their homework. They couldn't believe it, because in the culture at the American school everybody, you know, everybody supported

the schools and every kid did their homework and every kid worked hard and studied for tests. They were just shocked that there were kids who didn't do that.

DePue: That could make the front page of the newspaper around here. (Jeanne laughing). Was there TV for them to watch growing up?

Jeanne: Oh. We bought a TV off of Americans who were leaving Senegal and they ripped us off.

Jon: That's the biggest rip-off we've ever had in our lives.

Jeanne: Oh, yeah.

Jon: That, and the car we bought in England.

Jeanne: Actually, every time an American left they would usually sell their stuff to other Americans. Actually, this is interesting: if you are asked by the American government to work overseas in a country, then you are an American. If you are an American citizen and working overseas, but not working for the American government, you are not an American when you are overseas; you are unofficial American. So the official Americans when they leave ... They had had embassy privileges and they would have been able to shop at the commissary. They would get frozen turkeys sent over for Thanksgiving and maybe if you were lucky they would get a second turkey and give you one or they would sell you a turkey if they were leaving or whatever. So, it was a huge thing for us when somebody would leave. They would invite me over to buy out their freezer or buy out their storeroom of food, because it was American food, like Oreos, Mars bars, and Kraft macaroni and cheese!

DePue: But, I mentioned TV because I figured that maybe the kids weren't afflicted by watching too much TV.

Jon: No. We didn't watch Senegalese TV.

Jeanne: We had videos and VHS tapes. There are a few tapes the kids claim that they can tell you every line.

Jon: Ryan watched this movie called *Tank* so many times that I'm sure he can tell you everything that ever happened in that movie.

Jeanne: And some Michael Douglas series of movies.

Jon: Oh yeah, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, no, no, no, no ... it was *The Jewel of the something*.

Jeanne: *Jewel of the Nile*. Yeah.

DePue: *Jewel of the Nile*.

Jon: Yeah. It was not the *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; it was the Michael Douglas rip-off of that.

DePue: Yeah.

Jeanne: Anyway, so there were ...

DePue: James Garner in *Tank*, I believe.

Jon: Yes, James. Oh, he loved that movie.

Jeanne: *Stripes* was big. (Jon laughing). People would send us tapes. Then the American embassy again had a video club and they would let unofficial Americans rent tapes from there. Just like at the American club we had, unofficial Americans could join that and unofficial Americans could use the library like a lending library. So, we had access to American trashy books and American best sellers that were out. We had access to movies, probably maybe three or four months after they came out in America.

Jon: I don't think we experienced any particular disadvantage in living in Senegal at all.

Jeanne: When the Challenger blew up, of course it made American TV. Somebody in America taped it and sent it to one of the official Americans. That official American allowed all of us unofficial Americans to pass that tape around between us, so we all got to see that newscast. So that's how we

Jon: And Senegal had one TV station, but we never bothered. It was expensive to buy a TV and we didn't want to watch the stuff they showed on it.

DePue: It was in French?

Jon: Sure.

Jeanne: Well, they had like one or two, you know ...

Jon: It was in French and Wolof.

Jeanne: ... one or two stations that were, you know, like the Senegalese beauty contests.

Jon: What's going to change all of that is what Matt is involved in now, which is internet.

DePue: And satellite dishes and cell phones.

Jon: Yeah. Cell phones are already changing everything.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: I mean there were telephones, but now all kinds of places that will never have had telephone lines will have telephone service.

DePue: Sure.

Jeanne: For instance, one of the differences between Senegal and Cameroon, is that we had a phone in our home and we used the phone to call around in the country, and would probably call our families maybe once every week or two, so.

DePue: Well, we've been talking quite a bit about Africa, but I think it's time to get you back to the United States. You've already given me a good idea what brought you back, the timing of coming back to the United States. Jeanne, why don't I bring it back to you again. The decision to come back to the United States specifically was tied to the kids' school?

Jeanne: I think the bottom line was we really felt that they needed to have an American high school experience so that they were successful in college. They were already acting and feeling and thinking like Americans, so that they would be successful in an American college and could decide in the end to live in America, be an American, or could choose, you know, to live overseas, whatever.

DePue: So, Jon, then you approached the mission office and said, "I'm ready to come back home?"

Jon: Yeah. We told them that at the end of this particular term, we would be returning to America. You get a month of, kind of paid leave time, for every year of service, or readjustment time; we would have been paid for up to six months. You're paid until either you use up your six months, because we'd been over seven years in that particular stretch, from 1985 to 1992, and you maxed out at six months. When we were coming back we knew we were going to be coming back, I guess, in June, right?

Jeanne: Well, actually I think we had pretty much kind of started to firm up our thinking when we were in England and so, we came back and started to make decisions that we needed to before the two years were up and we would be going home. For instance, that's when I applied to the international school, because though the preschool was a job I loved, I wanted to have a regular teaching experience that I could say the last two years I've been teaching in an accredited school, so that I could get a job when I came back rather than say, well, I haven't worked for 15 years or something.

Jon: And so it was basically ... and as far as leaving Senegal and abandoning ...

Jeanne: We came here.

Jon: It's not like when you left Poli and you figure that nobody would ever go back to Poli, because it was so hard, because that's basically what they thought. Where we

were living in Dakar was an attractive place for somebody who wants to work overseas, so we figured that it won't be a hard spot.

Jeanne: The work would go on, yeah.

Jon: We had started something effective and so it was like a professional decision. It wasn't: I'm abandoning my calling to serve God or something. It's just that this makes sense for us at this time.

Jeanne: It was great for us.

Jon: And then the big question is: What's going to happen when you get back to America? You know, twice in my ministry I've left one job or call, as we say, and not had another one.

Jeanne: Lined up already.

Jon: The recommended way is you leave the one you've got after you've already got the other one in your pocket, you know. If I wanted to leave my congregation here I would interview at other congregations. Once one of them called me to be their pastor and I accepted that call, I would inform my present congregation and I would leave. It's pretty hard to interview from West Africa, so you leave and you wonder what's going to happen. We did that twice.

DePue: You knew at the time you were coming back, well at least I've got six months of paid time.

Jeanne: Yes.

Jon: Yeah, but that was going to be very awkward, because we would be in the middle of a school year then after six months. Jeanne had decided if our kids started school, we would be probably living with my parents in South Dakota. If the kids started school in South Dakota, she wasn't pulling them out in the middle of the school year.

DePue: So, the clock was running and you had how much time then to find a new call?

Jon: About 90 days max.

Jeanne: Well, okay. He notified the bishops again. We did that, you know, here we are coming back ...

Jon: Well, no. We notified one bishop, because I was still assigned to this synod.

Jeanne: Yeah. He was assigned to ... so we actually made a trip to Springfield here.

DePue: The Central Illinois Synod?

Jeanne: Central ... yes. We were home on vacation, and notified him that we were coming back in a year and to please consider us for any openings that would be available at that point. I was interested in coming back to Illinois, first of all because my family is here, but second of all my teaching certificate is valid here. That was the most interesting place to me to come to.

Jon: And what was helpful was that although we didn't know that bishop at all—while we were gone overseas the whole ELCA thing happened with the formation of a new church—the bishop was from the old LCA, so I had never had anything to do with him.

DePue: Okay. Let's run through that quickly. The Lutheran Church of America and the American Lutheran Church joined together to create the ...

Jon: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: And the vote took place earlier than that, but anyway, the merger took place in 1988. So we had this new church body. So the new bishop didn't know me from a hole in the ground.

DePue: The bishop was?

Jon: John Kaitschuk. So we went and met him. He was kind of less than encouraging, but the assistant to the bishop was the former assistant to the bishop of our former bishop and his name is Al Zenker. Well, that's not saying anything. That's only being mildly descriptive.

DePue: Go ahead, Jon (laughing).

Jon: So what happened was this: Al, unbeknownst to me, called my folks about a week before we got back from Africa. We actually got to South Dakota on the third of July, so on the sixth of July I called Al, because my folks said, "Hey, this guy called and wants you to talk to him."

Jeanne: Well, wait a minute now. Like Jon said, I had said, if we're going to South Dakota and my kids start school in Sioux Falls, I refuse to pull them out. You know, if I have to, I'll live in an apartment with the kids and Jon will go off and start a church, you know, go to wherever his job is. So, between the third and the sixth, I went out and bought big old rubber tubs to store clothes in and started kind of trying to set up house for my kids, because I never thought anything would occur very quickly.

DePue: And you're living in his parents' house?

Jeanne: We were living with his parents in a house in ...

Jon: Which would have been a difficult situation.

Jeanne: ... in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

DePue: Because they were older and kind of set in their ways by that time too.

Jeanne: Well, and let's face it, these are, let's see, what are they, uh, fifth, seventh, and ninth grade rambunctious boys?

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. It would have been a very challenging situation. Coming back from Africa is like, you know, jumping out of a plane: you hope there's something down there where you land, because you just don't quite know.

DePue: You hope that the parachute opens.

Jon: That's right. I guess you've done that so you would know the feeling. By that time you just hope. Well, Al Zenker called and he said, "Look, there's this church I would like you to interview at." He said what happened was, before I came to Fairbury the church in Fairbury, the congregation, had had a big fight. A big one. And assistant to the bishop Zenker had been sent down there to referee. He said, "It was one of those times I should never do this and I don't do it much, but I just blew up. I just thought, 'You got to quit doing this, you guys are just way out of line and it can't be this bad and why don't you calm down,'" he said. So then you went there and you were there for five years and everything was just fine. Then he said, "Then you told me you were leaving, I couldn't believe it. Everything was fine. Why were you leaving?" but you were going to Africa. So we went to Africa. So, long about the time we were getting ready to come back to America, Atonement, here, went through a big fight. A pastor left, another pastor came. During that transition period a lot of people became very upset with one another, much to the shock and dismay of everybody, because it's a small church where people ...

Jeanne: Tend to get along very well.

Jon: Where a bunch of wonderful people had become very close to one another and thought they all liked each other, would all agree about things. So when the fight got going it was very personal and very intense. And Al came out here and he said, "It reminded me of those fights in Fairbury." (Jon laughing). So Al said, "Well wait a minute, Berg's coming back." (Jon laughing). He said, "I thought, well you got along with them in Fairbury; maybe you can get along with them in Springfield." So, that's why he said he persuaded the bishop that they should have me interview here.

DePue: Talk a little bit about the interview process.

Jon: Well, the interview process is whatever the people in the congregation want the interview process to be.

DePue: Who was in the committee?

Jon: Members of the call committee, the church council, some people from the church council and some people from the call committee; a representative cross-section of the congregation. Pretty much at Atonement, anybody who wanted to be.

DePue: Okay. You would prefer not to go through any names right now?

Jeanne: It was actually a wonderful experience.

Jon: Rich Frankenfeld was the president of the congregation.

Jeanne: The Frankenfeld's were the people who were kind of responsible for helping us see what was going on in town and took us out for dinner and answered questions. We all came down, they put us up, they gave us a tour of town. We had the actual interview. I have to say, one of the important things for me was, I got the choice of going shopping or being in on the interview, which gave me the idea that I was going to be allowed to be my own person and was not being interviewed for what I can do for the church, too, which I really appreciated. I felt really good about that. We had the interview and then I think the next day we saw the parsonage. Actually we were able to kind of go to the schools and interview the different administrators of the buildings our kids would go to and talk about the educational system. So we had lots of information to base our decision on.

Jon: It should be said that when I heard that the interview was in Springfield, that was wonderful, because we wanted to live, we would prefer to live, having lived in very rural Africa, relatively rural America, very metropolitan Africa, we wanted to live in a more metropolitan setting rather than ... and partly because Jeanne's experience in the small town was ...

Jeanne: There aren't a lot of jobs for teachers.

Jon: ... that education and that for teachers, that jobs are really hard to get.

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Jon: And she would have a better opportunity in a system. So, we were thrilled that we had an opportunity to interview in Springfield, because in this particular synod of our church, there aren't very many medium-sized cities. I mean, there's Bloomington, Champaign, and Springfield.

DePue: Yeah.

Jon: And that's pretty much it. So, it was a great opportunity as far as we were concerned. What I recall about the interview was that it didn't last very long. The previous pastor that had been an unhappy fit here came from a church background that had a more authoritarian, strong pastor model of leadership. The LCA traditionally had that model and the ALC tended to be much more strongly lay led. I

was of the ALC background. I think that it was a culture clash in leadership styles, along with the fact that this pastor that they had had for 10 years had left and they were still upset about that. So, it was kind of an inevitable and unfortunate conflict, but what it taught the congregation was what they didn't want from a pastor, I think, as much as what they did.

DePue: So, they had a pretty clear idea of what they wanted?

Jon: They had a pretty clear idea of what they didn't want me to say, I think.

Jeanne: And what would have excluded him.

Jon: Yeah. Things like, "No, no, the pastor's in charge." My model is that this church belongs to the membership of the congregation. This is not a model that many of my colleagues share. I mean they just disagree with me about this. Happily, it is the model of this congregation, so my particular style ...

Jeanne: Really works here, yeah.

Jon: ... is comfortable with them and I think we were able in the interview to communicate the fact that we would be delighted to be here. We didn't see anything particular to be upset about or worried about as far as coming here.

DePue: And how long did it take before you heard the decision?

Jon: Well, we heard that they were going to make the decision ... that they were going to recommend that the congregation vote to call us ...

Jeanne: Before we even left.

Jon: Rich told us that at breakfast the next morning because they had a meeting after the interview. It was another one of those things where basically they said, we made it clear that, you know, when can you start, and my answer was something like, "Uh, Monday?" (DePue laughing).

Jeanne: Well, we found out when ... well, we had one problem. First of all, our stuff was coming by a slow boat literally and wouldn't even hit America until August, so we wouldn't have our belongings until August. We found out when was the very last day that Matthew could come and start participating in soccer practice and still be on the team, so that was our deadline. They actually had a couple of extra ... like they had a congregational meeting like on a Wednesday or something just to speed up the process. They had to have so many meetings and ...

Jon: They had to wait 10 days before they could do something, but they did everything in an expedited a fashion as possible.

DePue: They had to wait 10 days because that's what the church constitution said?

Jeanne: The church constitution said, yeah.

Jon: They claimed that meeting and a vote or something.

Jeanne: But, like they had one meeting in the middle of the week, I remember, because that was so they didn't have to wait the two 14 days, two weeks.

Jon: Yeah, but I mean they were absolutely as accommodating as could be and I remember the interview as a thoroughly ... I mean it's kind of intimidating, because you hope you don't blow it and not get the call, but ...

DePue: Well, I wasn't here at the time, but knowing the personalities involved and talking about this afterwards with lots of different people, there's no shortage of leadership and there's no shortage of shy unassertive people in this congregation.

Jeanne: Um-hm.

Jon: Yeah, I mean, this is a terrible place to be the pastor if you are threatened by competent people, but if you think competent people are wonderful and love to watch competent people do their thing, it's a great place to be the pastor. If you think you're going to have to run everything, forget it. Peggy Stroh, who has died – I'd been here a year or two –and she said, "Pastor, you're going to do just fine here." She had great insight into this congregation and she said, "You don't think you're a hot shot administrator. Whenever we get a pastor who thinks he's a hot shot administrator, then we might have trouble, because we all think we're hot shot administrators." (Jon and DePue laughing). "But you don't seem to care about administration at all, so I think you'll work out just fine."

DePue: And I suspect Peggy was a top notch administrator and certainly Ray was.

Jon: Oh, she was an academic administrator, she was assistant, what? Assistant Principal at ... what was the school?

Jeanne: Yeah, at the adult learning center.

Jon: Yeah.

DePue: Lawrence?

Jeanne: Lawrence.

Jon: At Lawrence Adult.

DePue: And how long did it take you, Jeanne, to find a job?

Jeanne: Well, as Jon said, we had six months. We were salaried for six months. To make a long story short, his salary overseas—some of it was assigned in his name for social security purposes, and some of it was assigned in my name for social—so his salary

was split between the two of us. So, when it came back to coming to America, he got six months, I got six months on my part. If he started to work he lost his salary. If I started to work I lost anything left of those six months. We decided that since he was working, we had a place to live, it wasn't crucial that I start working right away, that it would make sense for me to first of all make sure that the kids were doing well in school. I would have a chance to volunteer, I would have a chance to try going to different schools here, kind of getting the lay of the land and having more knowledge about what I would like to do or where I might want to teach. As it happens, the head of special ed was a Lutheran; Mary Lokan at the time was the director of special ed and she kept putting out, "I have places for you. Do you want to come and work?" After that six months, which was the second semester of the school year, I did start doing some special ed part-time work. I had a student at Springfield High who was very learning disabled and had some severe emotional problems. I tutored him one on one and then did kids who were expelled from the schools because they had brought a weapon to school or had threatened students or teachers at school and were special ed and needed an educational program. So I was the special ed educational program for a bunch of kids like that for that semester. The year after that then I decided I would go full-time and applied for a full-time job and started working in the school district as a special ed teacher for a classroom of emotionally disturbed kids at Springfield High.

DePue: Okay. I think I will leave this story to conclude right there. That takes us up to about 1993, basically.

Jeanne: Um-hm.

DePue: What I would like to finish with though, is just some general questions and let the two of you reflect on what you've learned through your life, especially in your experiences in Africa obviously. So let's start with this one. Jon, I'll let you answer first, but I'd like to have both of you just kind of mull these things over. Your biggest accomplishment? What you are most proud of as a missionary in Africa?

Jon: That I fell in love with Africans. I never thought Africa had anything in particular to offer. The reason I went there was because I hadn't been there and I found out that I loved that place and those people and it's a big surprise to me. I mean, I guess my biggest accomplishment, if I were to think of it in ... maybe that I have a friend named Sam Dansokho that I consider to be like a brother, that we just get along. We don't have ... there's no particular reason that we should. I guess as far as a professional accomplishment, it's very gratifying to have ... I mean, the accomplishment in Cameroon was that we survived and that we kind of thrived. I mean, and we made all kinds of adjustments, we went through all kinds of major life changes, we had our first kids and we weren't bitter and afraid. We weren't afraid. I mean, I guess we don't get afraid much. I mean, of big things. In ministry, the biggest frustration is most of the stuff you spend fighting about doesn't matter at all. When it gets down to the really big things, it's always people, you know. People deal with the big stuff and it's the little details where people get on each other's nerves and, so. As far in Senegal, it was a big professional

accomplishment to start something from scratch and to conceive of an idea, to gather information, to design an idea. It was just like the opportunity of a lifetime, to have some money, and all we're supposed to do is help people, but help people in a meaningful way, and in an effective way, and not to get them to do certain things, but to listen to them and to respond ... to take them seriously. One of things I really believe is that people are the experts on themselves and you pay attention to them and figure out what's going to work for them. What works for them might not work for other people, but you've got to start with at least what is meaningful for them and we did that in ... I think that we treated the people in Senegal and in Cameroon with a great deal of respect and I think that that was important. I'm grateful that we did that. That we didn't think ... we didn't go there with the idea that we're more important than you are, we're better than you are, we're bringing you important things and you have nothing to offer to us. We just went there to be there and to learn from them.

DePue: And, Jeanne ...

Jon: The central lesson I learned, that I didn't know, was how important relationships between people are. That taught me more about that than other places have. I think it's because, so often in Africa, when you are really dealing with Africans at an African level, they don't have all of these resources, they don't have all of this stuff, but they do have relationships. Basically that's what you work with, that's the bedrock of getting anything done. I learned how much you need other people and I wasn't raised to think you need other people. I was raised to think it's okay for other people to need you, but it's not the same as needing other people.

Jeanne: I, of course, learned all of those things with him. But my role there was different. I always tell people that if my profession is teaching, then going overseas was, for my career, professional suicide, because then there are huge blocks of time that I was not teaching in a certifiable professional institution and gaining points towards retirement. However, I wouldn't trade it for anything. I also tell people I took my retirement years and did my retirement traveling and had my retirement life in between my career, at the beginning and end of my teaching. I came there as a helpmate for Jon, to enable him to do his work. There were very little times that I was, like, considered employed or that I had a job outside of this. I was a housemother in Senegal, I also ran the guest houses, so I did have a couple of official jobs, but for the most part I didn't have any official job. I was his helpmate and I was trying to help us, like he said, survive and thrive. The most important thing I've ever done in my life beyond that is to raise my children. So the most important thing I've learned from there is my relationships with my kids and all of the experiences and, hopefully, I haven't made a lot ... we haven't made a lot of mistakes with them and that we were able to give them—I don't want to say privileged—an unusual or a life full of experiential learning and wonderful chances to get to know people from other cultures and other countries and feel comfortable in other countries. I guess one of the important lessons is, America's way of life is a way of life, not necessarily the best way or more important way. I look at my children and I am proud of the fact that I really see that thinking in them, so.

DePue: And, any lessons or any experience that surprised you?

Jeanne: I have never been somewhere where I was so interested. Every day I woke up and there were interesting things to learn, you know, from the most simple experiences. Though I was surprised to be able to find how far I could dig in and pull up strength or pull out, “Whoa, okay, what do I do in this circumstance?” I know that I go through life and I’m sure that I think about some things differently than other people and I’m sure sometimes people go, “Whoa, where is she coming from with that?”, but I don’t know.

DePue: Well, let’s take it back to you again, Jon. Spent your life being a minister. Perhaps, when you first started doing this, it wasn’t necessarily what the model was when you were going to seminary, or maybe even what you were thinking of. How is your view of Christianity, and of being a minister, changed?

Jon: Well, I believe it more than I did, because I guess externally observed Christian institutions can seem like places filled with judgment and narrow mindedness, but my experience of them has not been that. I have been grateful for that, because I would have thought if I had to come in and reinforce everybody’s prejudices in order to be successful as a pastor, then I would probably not be any good at it, because mine wouldn’t align with theirs, I suppose.

DePue: I’m surprised to a certain extent, because that’s not my perception of things. I grew up in probably very similar circumstances when I was growing up, but certainly my experiences in adulthood have been completely different in that respect.

Jon: Yeah, I found that the church was way more. Well, I guess, when I’ve been in churches I’ve found them filled with real people doing important things and I guess that’s why I like them. But I keep thinking about all of the people I know who don’t go around churches and they all think we’re supposed to be way ... I found ministry I guess to be interesting. I guess because I think people are interesting and I believe that—a quirk of my personality has always been that if you think something’s really ultimately important, I guess you should do that. Somewhere along the line I was convinced that Christ was ultimately important; if anything’s ultimately important it is Christ and our Christian faith. And so I guess I thought I should do that and what you do, I guess, is to be a pastor. I guess you could do other things. So I studied it and I thought about it and I participated in it, but I found that the doing of it has been all about being with people. That’s the part I like, so luckily I’m paid to be nice to people and I think that that’s a good thing. I thought of going into law and at a certain level I’ve thought that if I’d become an attorney I would be, at least sometimes, paid not to be nice to people (Jon and DePue laughing) and I hate to think what I might have done. (Jon laughing).

DePue: Well, see now they might have a different perspective of what being a lawyer is.

Jon: That’s right. I’m sure they see it as a much more noble profession. So, some day I’ll die and I want to look back and think I did something that I found fulfilling, that

was meaningful for me and perhaps for others with the time that I had and I have found this to be meaningful for me. Other people do other things.

Jeanne: I just go, we're really lucky. We were lucky to find somebody who was willing to do this adventure with each other. I mean, I'm just thrilled that we've had the life that we've had and that we've had a few bumps in the road like fires and what not, but you find out that your stuff isn't very important. You get out your kids, that's the important thing, and I just feel privileged that I can work with people who right now are not making the best choices in life and try to help them, give programs where we can give educational opportunities to kids who aren't making the good choices and ...

DePue: That you can connect with them or you can relate to them in different ways than most because you've had all those years in a completely different kind of environment?

Jeanne: Um, well, I'm not put off by people who don't think and act exactly like I do and I'm not afraid of people who make different choices than I do. I'm, in fact, interested and intrigued and want to know how they think and why they do what they do and see what I can do to help or what I can do to improve things for them.

DePue: Okay. We've had close to eight hours. I think we've had over eight hours of all this and that's quite a bit. I think it's been a fascinating discussion listening to the two of you. I'm not sure if I contributed much, but Jeanne, any final comments or reflections on going through this experience around your life or anything that you'd like to tell your sons or anybody else who would be listening to this?

Jeanne: Well, to my boys I say thanks for hanging in there with us. I have to say I feel wonderfully supported and I feel like what's gone around has come back now and they are a real blessing to us. I'm glad that I feel they are positive about the experiences they were forced to have because of our choices. I love it when they—most all of them are very much into doing and giving for other people and so I'm proud of them, so. I guess, I also would like to thank my family for having put up with us in our, you know, "Oh, guess what, we're taking your grandkids to Africa again. Sorry, if you won't see them very often." It was for a good cause.

DePue: I'm sure they were supportive most of the time, if not always.

Jeanne: Yes, yes.

DePue: Jon?

Jon: Oddly enough the motto of this particular congregation here at Atonement Lutheran Church is "Blessed to be a Blessing." That comes out of a Bible study they've done. I think that we have been really blessed and I think we've had the opportunity sometimes to be a blessing in the lives of other people. I'm much more aware of how much and how often other people have been a blessing in our own lives and it's not because ... I'm grateful that we've had the opportunity to follow our own

curiosity, that we've been free to do things with our lives we wanted to do. Many people never get those kind of choices at all. We've had all of these opportunities and I think that we've taken advantage (of them). When somebody said, "Would you like to try this since you never have?" we have been inclined to say, "Yeah, we'd like to try that," rather than, "No, we don't want to do something we haven't done." I'm grateful for that, that we were born to take risks and we took them and we lived to tell about it. (Jon laughing).

Jeanne: Yeah.

DePue: Very grateful.

Jon: It's nice. I'm happy to be sitting here not dead yet. I'm very thankful for that.

DePue: Well, in essence, your job is to do exactly what I'm going to ask you to do now, but this one's for posterity perhaps. If you were to give advice to anybody who would be listening to this somewhere down the road, what would that advice be?

Jon: Well, as a Christian I would say, "Believe in God so that you don't think you are God, and that will eliminate a lot of mistakes. Take advantage of the opportunities that God gives you because, certainly, people listening to this in America are the privileged. We are the privileged and we should both use those privileges, and I would argue, in the service of others in the name of God."

DePue: Jeanne?

Jeanne: I was just going to say, be a blessing for other people. Figure out what you can do and share that with others. Also, like Jon said, listen to other people and hear what they need and they want, not what you think they need and they want.

DePue: And with that, we'll conclude. Jon, Jeanne, thank you very much.

(End of Interview)