

Mark Battin '68  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Vietnam Project  
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

LUCAS: So, I am C.C. Lucas. I'm a Dartmouth College junior in the Class of 2021. And I'm at home right now in Minneapolis, Minnesota, because of the Coronavirus pandemic. Today is June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. I'm interviewing Mark Battin, '68, who's in Staunton, Virginia, and we are conducting this interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. Thank you so much for being here and doing this interview with me. We really appreciate it.

BATTIN: My pleasure.

LUCAS: And to start off, I'd like to ask you to tell me where and when you were born?

BATTIN: I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1946, February 22<sup>nd</sup>.

LUCAS: And can you tell me about your family that you were born into?

BATTIN: Yes. Well, mother and father, Frank Battin and Martha Battin were my parents. And I have a sister, Deborah Huffard. Her name's Huffard now. And a brother, Peter Battin, who's 11 years younger than I am. So, a pretty normal family. We lived in Elyria, Ohio, 27 miles west of Cleveland, near Lake Erie.

LUCAS: Did you grow up there most of your childhood?

BATTIN: I did, first 18 years before I went to Dartmouth.

LUCAS: And what was that like living in that area?

BATTIN: It was a very solid family oriented place to live. I had wonderful parents. Oh, my father was in the export-import business and he had to travel a great deal. But, he was a terrific father, and both parents gave me good direction, with education being their top priority. And for 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades, I went to a private school on the other side of Cleveland, called the University School [Hunting Valley, OH], which was an excellent school, great background for going

to Dartmouth, and for the rest of my life really. That was a terrific school.

LUCAS: What was your experience? So, how did your experience at the University School, did it give you an interest in Dartmouth specifically or how did it make you feel prepared for, interested in going to college?

BATTIN: Well, the whole slant of University School was to get you ready for going to college, and giving you a terrific basis for doing well in college. Some of the best teachers I ever had were at University School. I went to public school, too, for kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and that was in Elyria, Ohio. That was quite a good school, as well, pretty good.

It was a different life then in Elyria. You didn't worry about—kids could just go out and ride your—I rode my bike a mile to school, and it was another mile down to the center of the town, and went to the YMCA, did sports and everything on my own with other kids, and the parents didn't have to hover over you or worry about you much at all. And I spent a lot of time—my grandfather had 27 acres in the woods near our house, and I spent a great deal of time in the woods and near the river there. I always gravitate towards water. I'm a water person, and I swam for Dartmouth for four years, and swam for my high school team, as well.

LUCAS: Yeah, it's my understanding that you have an ongoing interest in water, not just recreationally, but also in relation to conservation.

BATTIN: Oh, very much. Natural resources and conservation and clean water. And I'm involved now with the Valley Conservation Council [Staunton, VA], and we put easements on land, on farm, trying to keep farmlands in place, and trying to keep cattle out of the river, and a lot with reforestation and plan development for the area to preserve this historical and agricultural heritage here. And I did the same thing for many years in California, too, when I lived there.

LUCAS: Yeah. I'll definitely want to ask you about your time in California later on. So, how did your interest in Dartmouth specifically begin, when you were in high school presumably, because you would have had to apply to college during your senior year?

BATTIN: Well, the school very much wanted to place people in Ivy League schools, and other very good schools, too. They were terrific with that placement and preparation. And I toured a lot of schools before going to Dartmouth, but I loved the atmosphere at Dartmouth compared to more urban schools like Yale or Harvard, Princeton. I enjoyed beating them sometimes in football. But, the other thing, I just felt a real rapport when I went to Dartmouth. And I got early decision there, and I was pleased with that and took it. And Ohio was—I also loved to ski, and Ohio was very flat. And one of the things I really liked about Dartmouth was having the Skiway and all the great skiing around there. And I like winter and outdoor sports very much, and that appealed to me, as well.

LUCAS: So that was something that you were, like, you had familiarity with skiing and other activities before you went to Dartmouth or you got introduced to them?

BATTIN: I started skiing just when I was 16, so I didn't start when I was... I started my kids skiing when they were 3-1/2 or 4. That's a different thing. But, I had started skiing and I'm still skiing. I love doing cross-country, downhill, any kind. And I love the beauty of New England and...

LUCAS: So, do you have any memories of actually arriving at Dartmouth, what you thought of it before, and maybe when you got there and you were settling in that first term in, what was that, would that be the fall of 1964?

BATTIN: That's correct, the fall of '64. Yeah, I mean, my first memories were made going on the freshman hike at Dartmouth, the end of August at the time, and going up in the Presidential Range camping. And it snowed and my wash water froze. [laughter] I knew that it was going to be a long winter. And that was fine with me.

But, immediately I became a member of the swimming team, and that was my first strong circle of friends, I think, was through there, and with the freshman team we traveled a lot in New England. I enjoyed that. And the comradery of the team, and really good coaches. Karl Michael was the main coach, head coach of swimming, and he was just a fine, fine gentleman and a long-term Dartmouth coach. And Ron

Keenhold was the assistant head coach, and he was terrific, too. I think he eventually became the head coach.

LUCAS: So, you were on the swim team. What other components of your time there started to shape how you experienced Dartmouth? And it was really politically tumultuous years, for sure.

BATTIN: Yeah, it didn't become so politically tumultuous, at least for me, until the last probably two years, definitely much because of the reality of what was going on politically internationally, and the Vietnam War was taking hold. The first year or two I mostly just enjoyed being in college and enjoyed being at Dartmouth and experiencing the fine teachers, and realizing how talented my fellow students were, and the competition was stiff. The curves were tough. I had to work hard to keep up academically. And that's good. That's a good thing.

LUCAS: What did you study, or like to study?

BATTIN: Well, one thing I studied was Spanish, which—I had a terrific high school teacher in Spanish, and so I got advanced placement in Spanish and enjoyed it. And I majored in economic geography, a mixture of economics and geography, and industrial locations within the major of geography. But, loved history and the English courses a great deal, as well, and geology: earth formations and rock formations, learning more about that. The variety of the liberal arts program was fascinating to me.

LUCAS: Is there a particular class that you remember being really influential for you or for your interest in economic geography?

BATTIN: Yeah. It's kind of a basis for, in a way, for understanding how the world works, how conflicts develop and the fight; the importance of preserving natural resources and having the natural resources, and seeing conflicts erupt over those things. And I ended up writing one of my major papers over studying the Vietnam War and its origins and current happenings and the political influences involved in it.

LUCAS: So, beyond academics, Dartmouth between 1964 and 1968 looked really different from how it does now, but even from

how it did a couple decades later, because it was, well, for one, it was all male and had not yet become coed?

BATTIN: That's true.

LUCAS: Yeah. [both talk at the same time]

BATTIN: That's the major difference between then and now, a major difference. I actually wasted a lot of my time road tripping to— dating—girls' schools and things. It was a lot of fun, but it took a lot of time away that I could have been better spent in my academic pursuits.

LUCAS: Where would you road trip, which colleges and places?

BATTIN: Go to Skidmore [College, Saratoga Springs, NY], Colby Junior—it was Colby Junior College [New London, NH], which is now a coed college called something else. I don't know what it's called. Went to Smith [College, Northampton, MA] and Mount Holyoke [South Hadley, MA]. Loved going down to Boston for events. And—I guess those were the major ones.

LUCAS: Did you feel like a lot of people you knew also at Dartmouth road tripped to visit their friends and visit women at colleges? Or was that somewhat uncommon to sort of seek out...

BATTIN: It was extremely common, yeah. And then, Dartmouth brought in—women came up to Dartmouth for mixers in busloads, and I found that kind of very awkward, socially awkward, for both the women and the men involved.

LUCAS: Why?

BATTIN: Oh, I mean, the women were just, just arrived in the center of town and got out, and you'd go to the mixers without knowing—just in a very immediate and contrived way to meet someone, I think.

LUCAS: So, it would just be a group of women sort of shipped up to campus from different places?

BATTIN: Yeah, yeah.

LUCAS: And you would meet them at times?

BATTIN: Yeah. In a large group. And then there were often setup dates and things with women that, you know, somebody you never saw and then all of a sudden you're spending two or three days with them, you know, and sometimes it worked out, but often it didn't, so... Our daughter is also a Dartmouth grad, and I—we visited her a lot when she was on campus, and it just seems like a lot more natural setting, especially with men and women interacting now all the time, and that's the way life is now, in business and in life and in sort of every aspect of your life you're pursuing; it's coed and it isn't separate. And I think it was a great thing for Dartmouth to have gone coed. [both talk at the same time] That wasn't always believed, though.

LUCAS: I'm sorry, what?

BATTIN: Oh, I mean, there was a lot of apprehension about old Dartmouth's grads and—they weren't always in favor of that at all, of going coed. They wanted to keep the tradition just the way it was. They weren't for the change at all. But I think it's pretty much—I'm sure it's accepted now and appreciated now.

LUCAS: Yeah, I mean, Dartmouth went coed in 1972, and so it's been...

BATTIN: Was it '72? I thought '73. But, right around there, whenever it was.

LUCAS: Yeah, so it's been nearly 50 years.

BATTIN: Yeah. That really makes me feel old, of course, which I am old. [laughter]

LUCAS: Well, I want to ask you about, so you mentioned that a lot of people wanted to keep Dartmouth not coed, keep it all male, because it was part of the tradition.

BATTIN: Yeah.

LUCAS: Did you feel like tradition was a really big component of going there when you did?

BATTIN: Oh, very much so, yeah. I think Dartmouth, one thing that impressed me a great deal about Dartmouth is the strong

feelings that the alumni have for them, the college. Great memories, strong friendships made, and just appreciation of what a fine experience it was to have attended Dartmouth.

LUCAS: Did you experience any specific traditions, because you were in a fraternity while you were there?

BATTIN: Yes. SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon].

LUCAS: SAE, yes. So, that's a traditional community.

BATTIN: That, yes, and made fine friends there with whom I'm still friends, guys I'm still friends with. Kind of disappointed in the fraternity, the shape it's in now in Dartmouth. We were up there for the reunion, for the 50<sup>th</sup>. I went for the 50<sup>th</sup>, I went for the 45<sup>th</sup>. And the SAE house the last time I was there was in a complete state of disarray, and I think on the verge of being kicked off the campus and such, and the house was just in horrible shape. And we kept it in—although, you know, had some big parties, lots of parties there and good times, but kept it pretty much in good shape.

LUCAS: When you attended?

BATTIN: Yes, when I was attending. And when I went back for the reunion, it looked like they had a party six months ago and then nobody cleaned anything up. It was pretty gross.

LUCAS: So, yeah, one thing that we mentioned that I also want to touch on was the tone that Vietnam set in the country, but also how that may have infiltrated Dartmouth's campus, because it is, you know, it's a very remote campus up in New Hampshire, part of a very small town. But, there was no shortage in the second two years, or third and fourth years of you going there of activism and people being very vocal about the war.

BATTIN: Vocal one way or the other, extremely divisive, whether you were for it or not. And that was evolving as the war escalated. And it was divisive within my family, and it was divisive within a lot of the students' families, too, you know, when you went home, and what was going to happen after you graduated, too, what should have happened. And, I mean, '68 went from a couple hundred thousand to 500,000, I think it had escalated troops by about 200,000 just in that

year. And the reporting of it was constant, so it was an ever, ever larger thing on your, then on your mind.

And during our graduation, some of the parents walked out on it. And I know my grandparents were very upset when I wore a black armband in my recession for graduation, and the valedictorian, some of the parents booed him. But, I'm trying to remember his name. Jamie... Do you remember the man's name?

LUCAS: Jamie Newton?

BATTIN: I think so. I think so. But, gave a terrific address. But, again, you know, some people were upset; many of the people, parents were upset with it.

LUCAS: Why do you think there was—would you say there was a generational difference or just a natural difference between people in individual families? What would you say sort of you noticed about what in families towards the war?

BATTIN: I think it was a generational difference. Well, it was a big difference between points of view of students, but also of generations between parents and students, grandparents and students, and as is pointed out now, that there's a great deal of deception on the part of the government as to what actually was happening and what the motives were for the war. And as the students became more educated on what was happening, and the parents, then, there was a more uniting against the war effort and realizing there was an atrocious situation that was where it caused many, many deaths on both the sides of the Vietnam, the Vietnamese people and our own people. And that the government that we were backing, that our government was backing in the south was very, very corrupt, and I think there were very specific interests that were set to gain from it.

But, really we weren't defending anything. And supposedly the domino theory was a big one that was put out at the time, where if you let one country fall, then more and more Communism will occur and take over the world, certainly didn't occur. It was a lot of loss of life, a lot of destruction for no positive gain really. I really wanted to—I felt a need to serve, be in service to my country, but I didn't think that being a part of that war was a service, and I ended up serving in another way immediately upon graduation.



LUCAS: I wanted to ask about, yeah, so you ended up joining the Peace Corps. When you and your peers at Dartmouth began to realize that the war was actually escalating and US involvement was escalating, largely because of the Tet Offensive and what that showed was that the US was going to send more and more men, how did that affect you or your peers and your thinking about life after college, and the draft, as well?

BATTIN: Well, I wanted to go into business. I was accepted to several business schools and I was planning to do that, but couldn't do it because I was going to be drafted, and I didn't want to be a part of the war. And so, Peace Corps seemed like a positive route for me. And I think living out of this country for a couple years was very valuable as far as my perspective of what I thought of my country, which I think it's the greatest country in the world, but certainly has its flaws. And see how other people live and see how other people view us. But it sure... [both talk at the same time] What?

LUCAS: Oh, go ahead.

BATTIN: Yeah, and I got—I actually worked in planning and resource development and things in Venezuela, and got interested in that, communicating with a professor at the University of Washington and ended up going up there for graduate school after the Peace Corps. Urban and Regional Planning is what I studied up there.

LUCAS: And you developed these ties...

BATTIN: Well, I was working as a planner in a development in Venezuela, and it was an emerging democracy just as I entered the Peace Corps there. And so, they'd thrown out a long-term dictator and it was an emerging bureaucracy. And they had pretty strong income for their country versus the population, and they were trying to provide basic health care and infrastructure for the country, and to diversify from a solidly oil-based country to other industries, and also develop their education. So, it was a very interesting time, and they had a major planned city development called Ciudad Bolivar was just emerging as I was down there. That's how I changed from business school to planning school, but then discovered after that planning really wasn't my thing either.

LUCAS: So, okay, so just to bring us up to your time in the Peace Corps, did you have any preparation that you had to do once you decided to join the Peace Corps? What was the process of making that decision through actually being ready to go and getting assigned to Venezuela?

BATTIN: Well, I got married in the interim. I graduated and got married the next week, and went into Peace Corps training the week after that, and it was two months of training at the University of Arizona-Tucson, and then one month of training in Venezuela at the city of Matacanes. Or not Matacanes. Barquisimeto was where the training was. And then, they sent you out to whatever your assignment was.

LUCAS: What was Arizona like?

BATTIN: Well, newlyweds living in the ghetto, and lived in a house with a family, a lot of kids. We slept in a hallway basically. And had training six days a week. Language training was terrific. It was total immersion language. And then, the specific assignment was developing cooperative credit unions in these outlying villages, and so that training was in the evening. And then they also had two nights of training in tropical medicine, and they gave you a handbook on tropical medicine and a box full of drugs, and you took that out to your site and basically took care of yourself. And then they bussed you over to the university for shots. You had about 22 different shots before going. And they started out, there were 60-some people in the training. I think 28 made it to finish the training and got assignments. Lots of people dropped out.

LUCAS: Wow. Why did they drop out?

BATTIN: Well, it was very intense training, and then when you realized what it was going to be like, didn't like that. And they had psychiatrists or weird people, weird government psychiatrists watching you around the corner, [laughter] and they'd interview you for that. A guy stood up in the first meeting and said, "I know all about you young people now and what you're thinking and everything" and "I have kids your age. Of course, none of them talk to me." [laughter] "None of them talk to me anymore." You know, I mean, they were weird. I mean, it's the only job he could get probably. But, you know, they just kept cutting people, I mean,

certainly for language, because at my site there was nobody who spoke English for hours traveling time around away, and it was total immersion teaching and working in Spanish.

And we asked for a work situation be more different than, about as different as possible, and so we got one of the most remote places possible in Venezuela, and working with smaller villages from that one small village that were even smaller and further, only accessible by boat, a little 13-foot boat that I used on the open ocean to go from one village to other village. And they didn't really have ports. You just had to—I think I told you this before, but you'd just catch a wave and ride the boat in, and people would come and grab your boat out of the wave before the next one got it.

And I loved living—lived 50 yards from the Caribbean for two years. That was fascinating to me. And I got pretty good at diving and catching—spearing and catching my food, a lot of the fresh seafood. The people themselves were surprisingly not good at—they were afraid of the ocean, and not good at catching food from it, and not particularly good at swimming and diving and things like that. You'd think they would be. But, a lot of the kids suffered from lack of protein. It was like living almost a hundred years ago in time, really, no health care, very little... Say in the village of 1,500 people, there were one or two policemen, and whenever there was any trouble, the policeman would not be able to be found. It's a very violent place. And very primitive people would come, even more primitive people would come down from the mountains for these cockfights. They'd bring a little bit of money from their cocoa beans, chocolate beans and coffee beans that they'd grow or anything, get a little money, they'd get drunk and they'd have fights. And killings were very common.

LUCAS: Killings?

BATTIN: Yeah, yeah. With machetes, guns. Life expectancy there was about 35 years old. And there were pirates on the water. Some of the main industry of these little coastal places was running contraband from Trinidad, which was 28 miles across this real tough piece of water called the Boca that had terrific currents and waves and stuff. But they'd get whiskey and clothes and cheeses from boats just off Trinidad where they paid no taxes, and they'd run it into Venezuela at night. And the pirates would try to wait for the

contrabandistas, and then the Venezuelan soldiers would try to capture the pirates and the contrabandistas.

LUCAS: How much of this did you witness or how much did you hear about?

BATTIN: Well, I witnessed quite a bit. I almost got hung the first month that I was in business here running the coops, because the guy—education was almost non-existent, very, very low level of education, and I had to hire a guy to be my treasurer of this coop, because it's basically a bank of the people, a source of credit for very poor people who had no source of credit at all for maybe buying a fishing net or buying seeds to plant their fields in the mountains. And the first month, as soon as this poor man who, he had six or seven children already and he was only 30 years old, and he stole all the money from the coop. And so, the village was going to blame me, the gringo, for stealing the money. And, so there were rumors they were going to hang me for doing it, and so I got the treasurer to admit that he stole the money, and so we made a repayment program for him, and he still maintained—[laughter] he became my treasurer because he was the only person I could get to do the job at the time.

But, and then, another project is I was working—fishing was only hand line fishing. Commercial fishing was just a hand line in a little boat at night and stuff. And I had the idea of thinking they could do better with a net, so I got a net. And they were trying to... So, one village, several villages said I was cheating with a net, so there was a vendetta out to get me, the corporativista guy, for trying to cheat them out of their fish. My life was threatened for that. But, you could end up dead pretty easily, a lot of ways.

I dived with huge fish, too. They had reason to be afraid of the diving, because commonly I'd dive with lots of sharks and huge groupers. One time I was—well, I had this 13-foot wooden boat that I was on, I did a lot of diving in it, and a kid with me, and I dove down about 20 feet, 25 feet down, and I speared a red snapper and it went down into a cave. And I only had one replacement spear. I mean, I didn't have any air. I couldn't get any air because it was all free diving, and I only had one or two masks. So, I couldn't lose the spear and I dove down into a cave to get the spear, and at the bottom of the cave, this rock started moving all of a sudden, and I saw it was an enormous grouper at the bottom of the cave,

and it opened its mouth, and it was a huge thing, [laughter] and I scooted up through the top hole of the cave and the fish was after me, but he was too big to get through the hole that I got out of. [laughter] And I got back into the boat.

And other times I'd spear a fish and I'd get big barracudas came after me, and just two or three of them, maybe six foot long barracudas, and I'd be holding them off with the spear and getting back [laughter] and slithering into the boat before they... It was wild. I felt sort of invincible is what somebody, you know, aged 22 or 23 you feel that way. I could stay under... The best swimming shape, I was in far better shape for swimming there than I ever was swimming for Dartmouth. I could stay under probably three minutes at a time in these dives, and it was beautiful and wonderful. I digressed there. I don't know what I was talking about, so... I don't talk about it very much, but it was kind of an amazing... [both talk at the same time]

LUCAS: Oh, go on, yeah.

BATTIN: It was an amazing time, an amazing time.

LUCAS: Yeah, it sounds like you were in a variety of possibly dangerous situations and circumstances, but, I mean, that sounds like a very—you remember it as if it was thrilling. Did you anticipate having these kinds of experiences before you arrived in Venezuela?

BATTIN: No, no. I had no idea where I'd be sent because it was an urban... A lot of the people in the group got sent to inland places or big city environments, and I didn't want that. It'd be more of a bureaucratic thing. My situations more generally bringing very disparate groups of people together in a community, community building situation that it was very—at the end of the year and of the two years, it was extremely gratifying because the people were appreciative of me and made me feel that way, and the coops were working. And, you know, it was just basic, if a poor person didn't have—if their son or daughter got sick and didn't have 50 cents to get an antibiotic, the child would die. It'd die. When the flu hit these villages, people would just, they were just taking caskets through the town like mad, people just dying. Sort of like we saw in New York. It's not even funny, but six weeks ago, the way that kind of thing was at certain times got...

LUCAS: Oh, go on.

BATTIN: No, another time there's, you ever—this book called *Papillon*, [by Henri Charrière], the Frenchman who was in prison on Devil's Island south of Venezuela, is where the French had a prison there, and in the book, *Papillon*, it's called the Friendly People—or one of the chapters is called "The People of Urape" or "The Friendly People of Urape." That's where after his fifth try, Papillon escaped into Venezuela in this village of Urape. And then he went to Caracas and became a wealthy restaurateur, this Papillon guy. But, I was going to take a sort of a larger ship over to Trinidad for Carnaval out of Urape, and that was another place I was working with a coop there. But that boat was broken when we went to Urape to leave on it, and so I met this contrabandista off the plaza. "Yeah, I can get you there, you know. I can get you to Carnaval." And so, we left in the night in the back of his 16-, 18-foot boat, had two motors on it. We were going across, and there are big, big cruise ships coming through this 28-mile channel I was telling you about, at night, and freighters and huge waves, and the motor broke on this boat crossing in the night and started taking on water and dumping it out and everything. And finally got the motor started.

We got it off Trinidad, and we were a hundred yards off shore, and "this is as far as I go. Over the side." And two other volunteers and my wife and I went over the side and onto the beach in the dark, and crawled up to the road, and a car came along and said, "Hey, man, welcome to Carnaval! Get in the car." [laughter] And jumped in. They took us into the Port of Prince [Port of Spain, Trinidad]. We stayed in a hotel room, I don't know, I guess 17 or 18 people in this one room. And you took your hammock and you slept in the hammocks. You'd rotate in time. It was a 24-hour party, it was so friendly. And a big bowl of punch out in the end of it, end of the room overlooking the street, and they had 120 steel bands going through—all of it, it's just an amazing Carnaval experience.

But we didn't go through customs getting into the country, so we had to go out. We were very worried about getting out of the country and back into Venezuela again and home. So somehow we got through that. Didn't have any extra money really to bribe anybody, but... That was a scary, but wonderful wild experience, the music and cultural exchange

and all. I feel sort of guilty for risking my wife's life at times, I guess, like that, yeah, taking on something like that, in retrospect. But we made it.

LUCAS: Why do you feel guilty about that in retrospect?

BATTIN: Well, it was a pretty dangerous crossing to get to Carnaval. And who knows what those people—I didn't know those people were going to be so nice. You know, you hear about bad, but... Then, at the end of the Peace Corps service, which is really cool, is you could buy one plane ticket that if you kept going in a circle, you could go all around South America. So we went Colombia to Ecuador to Peru to Chile, and you had to do it within a 30 day period, and then took a bus from Chile over the Andes Mountains into Argentina, and then up to Brazil and Manaus from Rio [de Janeiro], and then went to Manaus, and then back to Venezuela. So, we got to see a bit of all those countries in that last 30-day period, and then traveled by tikibus up to Central America on the way home. So, saw so many different places, so many different cultures, and thought that I would return, and really haven't gotten back since then. The closest I got was Aruba on a windsurfing trip, and that was 20 miles from Maracaibo to Venezuela. But now you couldn't even go to Venezuela, it's such a failed state.

But ironically, just down next door to this house in Staunton, Virginia, an engineer lady from Venezuela bought the house, and she's from Puerto La Cruz where we used to go on R&R. Every six weeks or so, we'd go where our country director was. We'd go up and sort of go to a city, because in these villages there were no amenities really. No restaurants really, I mean, just food. And no movies or anything. But now I have Venezuelans next-door, and they're bringing some of their family members through and finding work for them and stuff. It's kind of fun. I still get to practice my Espanol. *No quiero olvidar la habilidad de hablar, por lo menos.* Do you speak Spanish?

LUCAS: When I was a kid I spoke Spanish, but I hardly know any anymore.

BATTIN: I try to keep speaking whenever I can. I don't want to... I love the Latin culture and Latin people, so much respect for the elders and family values and things. But I digress. I don't know, I'm sorry. It's a lot of fun thinking about it a little bit.

LUCAS: It's completely okay. So, specifically, and can you repeat the name of the village that you were based in?

BATTIN: It's called San Juan de las Galdonas. It's in the state of Sucre in the peninsula of Paria. It's the most farthest east peninsula of Venezuela. It's Peninsula Paria, and from the end of it it's only 28 miles across to Trinidad.

LUCAS: Oh, so very, very far out, Paria is.

BATTIN: Yeah. Oh, on a bus it took eight hours to get to Caracas, which is, once in a while I went to Caracas for meetings, or they have a kind of a re-education thing, you know.

LUCAS: So, can I ask about your job, which was basically...

BATTIN: Community development in general.

LUCAS: Yeah, community development. You were also a regional planner in some capacity?

BATTIN: Yeah. Well, just trying to get... There was no—to that from one, sort of the town, the first town was 18 kilometers away, but sometime that road would wash out in the wintertime, in the rainy season, and then it was only accessible by boat, and I was trying to get the road improved and get a sanitation program for having outhouses, and trying to get, develop a regional, or a clinic at least. There was sort of a dilapidated clinic, and the best they had was they'd hire a Colombian doctor who would come by boat once a month, and he'd give out—he got paid for each little village he served—and he'd give out 10 numbers. If the 11<sup>th</sup> person was dying, he's off to the next—he wouldn't care—he's off to the next village to give out 10 numbers.

LUCAS: What do you mean 10 numbers?

BATTIN: That's 10 appointments. 10 numbers. If you wanted to see the doctor, the once a month when this doctor came through the village, he'd give out—you'd have to get a number. But he'd only take care of a few people, because he got paid by the number of villages he serviced. And they couldn't even get Venezuelan doctors to do this job, to go to the outlying places like San Juan de las Galdonas. The next place was called Yaguaraparo, and next place called Unari. Irapa.



[laughter] Nobody's ever heard of these places. They're just dots. And then, the hill people. I mean, there were actually people eating people in the remote jungle parts.

LUCAS: People eating people?

BATTIN: Yeah, headhunters at that time.

LUCAS: Do you want to go into that a little more?

BATTIN: Yeah. I mean, there were—I mean, the indigenous people, some of them were headhunters, you know? And they'd do shrunk heads for trophies. And they were very, very primitive. No law and order. And, but because the jungle just... Venezuela has terrific natural resources, but it's very dense, rugged country south of the coast. Most of the population is along the coastal towns within 50 miles of the coast. There's so much, as it goes further south, down into Amazonas and other parts that were just relatively unexplored.

But, Venezuela's stuck on their oil and never diversified, and just half a percent of the people took all the money, and then they ended up with another dictator and he just promised to help the poor people, but it was a promise. And now they've got the successor to that dictator named [Nicolás] Maduro, who's just horrible. And millions of people have fled Venezuela now, especially educated people. They're way low on health supplies. Their food supply is very low. With oil being their main product, they had to just now get an armed group of ships coming in from Iran to bring gasoline to the country that produces oil, because their refineries don't work. It failed.

LUCAS: So, knowing all that about Venezuela, it's sort of constantly changing government at that time, and...

BATTIN: Well, when I was there, it was a growing democracy. It was relatively favorable to the United States. And one party lost and the next party was elected and came in. It was a miracle, people thought, that it peacefully changed hands. And through the '70s, it was developing as a democracy. And then, it just, the plans that they had didn't materialize, because there was so much greed at the top and corruption. So much potential, but never realized. And it still has a great deal of potential. And that's why the Russians are trying to

take control there now, and the Iranians are even trying to get influence, and the Chinese. Just like the Chinese are all over Africa, the Chinese would like to get a foothold into Venezuela, too, to develop the natural resources.

But this Ciudad Guayana was a planned city south of where I was, in the dense jungle, and they dredged the Orinoco River up to this mountain of iron ore. It's called Cerro Bolivar. It had 90% iron ore, and they developed a steel industry around it. But, some of the volunteers, Peace Corps before me, their job was to take these very primitive natives and try to move them from the land that they wanted to develop for their steel industry, the Ciudad Guayana, and make them into farmers, to change their lifestyle from being hunters and gatherers to farmers. And I mean, that really mostly didn't work. Mostly those people like that just go by the wayside and die off, a lot of them die off or disappear. But, that plan was largely done by planners from MIT, I think, MIT and Harvard. And it was a partial success, but I think that it's sort of not doing very well now. But it is a city.

But, changing whole lifestyles of these people from what they were, and the same thing, you know, is happening in the Amazon part of Brazil where they're trying to burn off the jungle to make it, open it up for farmers, and then they just push the indigenous people away or kill them off, just steal the... Brazil is in horrible shape that way now. And, you know, the Amazon, the preservation of the Amazon is so important for the rest of the world. It's the largest natural rainforest anywhere in the world, and it's being exploited, developed and opened up for massive ranching, cattle ranching things that are not really good.

LUCAS: How did you feel about, because you were, again, in a very, very remote and, as you said, ungoverned village and set of villages, how did you feel sort of knowing and realizing all of this about Venezuela, but in being in a place did you feel exactly you were in was affected by what you're talking about? Or did you feel like it was sort of good that it was so removed, in some ways?

BATTIN: Well, in some ways it's okay. I mean, people could scratch a living out of where they were. It's a beautiful place, and the ocean is beautiful. I mean, you can get a certain amount of, you know, reap a certain amount from the sea, and some basic farming, and fruits and coconuts. I mean, so many of

the young people would migrate from those villages and migrate to the large centers like Caracas, or the oil fields of Maracaibo. You've heard of Lake Maracaibo probably, haven't you, in Venezuela?

LUCAS: Yes.

BATTIN: That's a huge oil center. And then, but then, there's so much poverty when they get there, they realize that maybe back home was better. They weren't monetarily too good, but they could have a basic life and a family, and be around their parents and their grandparents. A lot of the people, the young ones who've migrated off, would come home for Christmastime and Eastertime. Those are the two biggest times when the families would get together again. So I think, I don't know what it's like now.

I also worked on the island of Margarita, off 50 miles—it's a Venezuelan island, pretty big, off of the shore of Venezuela, 45, 50 miles out. But it's a beautiful island, and it was discovered in the 1980s by the Germans to be a great place to windsurf. And, so they developed a bit of tourism around that. I don't know what the point was. What was my point? Now you can't go there anyhow. You probably can't go any place in Venezuela very safely now, especially, they hate Americans.

LUCAS: When you were there, did you feel like you got to know, because you've mentioned family values and returning to families a couple times now...

BATTIN: And respect for elders, too.

LUCAS: Respect for elders.

BATTIN: Yeah, and in keeping the older people within the household. I mean, you had a lot of generations living—I mean, these are just sort of connective houses, basic simple mud, hard-baked mud brick houses with wood frame, bamboo as the basic frame around which the mud was packed and baked. But, and they were connected. I mean, we had a mud wall on each side of the house that we moved into at \$16 a month for the rent. The house had been partially destroyed in an earthquake. That's how we got it. And so, moved in that basic house, and then took our hammocks in the boat and stayed in other little houses when I went up to the other

villages and had the coop meetings, and then would spend the night. I see my little dog looking in the door. He's wondering why I'm not letting him in. [laughter] But, anyhow, that's what that was like.

South America's a mess right now. Now it's the epicenter of the virus, and Brazil is the worst. And Venezuela's probably just as bad, but they don't report anything. Their health care system was just in the dumps before this, the virus hit. And Ecuador is hit very hard, I was reading. One thing, we did go to Colombia for R&R because it was so cheap, and it was before the drug trade really took off in Colombia, so it was very friendly, a beautiful place, and Colombia I think's a decent place to go now. I don't know with the virus, but... Had some friends who went there a year ago or so, and said it was very nice and friendly, and safe. We made \$106 a month for the two of us. That was our combined salary.

LUCAS: Do you mean between you and your wife?

BATTIN: Yeah.

LUCAS: And what did she do?

BATTIN: Well, she was supposed to work in this rural housing program, and help the women to get accustomed to the new houses that the government was going to build, but her job never materialized. So, she worked with me, and that was very, very frustrating for her and for other wives in the group, because they thought they were going to have a definite job, and she's a very talented person and industrious person, and that was frustrating. And she was a big help for me. We both worked with a lot of dropout kids from, there was a public kind of school that was really just maintaining order, and some of the brightest kids would just get kicked out or drop out. So, we taught reading and writing and Spanish in our front room, and basic math, beginning math and things like that. So, we both did that.

And went—as soon as young girls would become childbearing, from childbearing age, puberty, they would start having—they didn't understand why they would have children, but they'd immediately, you'd see these young girls, just child after child; women in their 20s who looked like they were 50s, you know, looked old, and they'd already have...

And they would ask us about, start to hear about birth control, but we weren't supposed to mention it.

LUCAS: You weren't supposed to mention it?

BATTIN: No, because it was ostensibly a Catholic country, and it would be birth control was not supposed to be mentioned. But, we did anyhow somewhat. She advised ladies on that, you know, pills could be possible, or abstinence, anyhow, just yeah, avoidance of getting that syndrome. That was some maternity care a little bit, you know, whatever way she could be helpful, try to. But it was frustrating generally for the women in the groups.

LUCAS: Was that the main frustration, you think, or the main factor that made it frustrating, being child bearers really early in life and without [both talk about the same time]

BATTIN: Oh, without a future. I mean, these women, and a lot of—they had a custom of a man having one wife, and then others would [inaudible], his machismo would show by how many other women he could get and how many other women he could get pregnant. I mean, it really wasn't good that way. Oh, a young woman's future could be just set so early and determined, and the future totally cut off. Women were just relegated to just survival.

LUCAS: What was it like to witness that, you and your wife?

BATTIN: It was sad to see bright young women relegated to a life of poverty, and a short life probably, because a lot of them would die in childbirth, too. But, a really interesting aspect of it was to see the amazing mixture of cultures of those coastal people. I have a picture maybe of this one family, where the man is very, very black, and his wife is lighter brown, and they have eight kids, going from jet black to a girl who's blond hair and blue eyes. And beautiful mixtures of very attractive, a lot of them were very attractive people through the mixture of bloods. Trinidad was like that, too, mixture. So much of the population in South America is mestizo, mixture of blood.

LUCAS: What was it like being there, you and your wife, as Americans, North Americans, United States?

- BATTIN: Well, they didn't know us from Martians. I mean, they didn't know us from a Russian. These people were so—they'd never seen anybody from anywhere really, from other places. The difference between an Englishman or a North American or a Russian or a French person was all just foreign to them.
- LUCAS: And what was it like for you to [both talk at the same time]
- BATTIN: But, there was much more anti-American feeling in the big cities, and that was the nicer part about being in an extremely remote setting.
- LUCAS: Did you feel like there was something that you gained by losing that being recognized as an American affiliated with the United States, anything like that? Because you're saying you had more anonymity.
- BATTIN: Yeah. And there wasn't that much—in other parts, especially in, say, Maracaibo or in Caracas, the bigger cities, there was quite a bit of anti-American resentment, resentment towards Americans. Like the Rockefellers owned a lot of grocery stores, the biggest chain of grocery stores in the country, and that was Rockefeller-owned money. And only the wealthiest people could go to those, could afford to go to a store like that. And the American money controls a lot of the Venezuelan oil development, from pumping it to refining it to shipping it.
- LUCAS: Did you have any contact during or after your time in Venezuela with members of the Peace Corps who got sent to different areas, ones that would have been more anti-American?
- BATTIN: Yeah. Yeah, the ones that were in the bigger cities. A lot of them were just teaching English or teaching sports or something.
- LUCAS: How did you communicate with them?
- BATTIN: Well, I'd see them at conferences occasionally. You know, they'd have get-togethers where you get out of your place. Everyone could... Those long bus rides I was talking about, the eight-hour ride to Caracas, five hours to Puerto La Cruz, which was where our area rep was; it was kind of a nice place.

LUCAS: Did you, so being in this remote place, again, I'm guessing, and what was your connection to the news, current events in the outside world?

BATTIN: Well, I got—*TIME* magazines would come about two weeks late, you know, two weeks after anything happened. And that's how I got the great draft number. I mentioned to you before I was going to be drafted out of the Peace Corps to go to Vietnam. But, I got number 285 in the ping-pong ball draft pull. And I heard about that two weeks after it happened. But, that's how that worked.

LUCAS: Do you want to explain the significance of that?

BATTIN: Oh, it was sort of, so that was about 1970, for the draft they decided they were going to figure out who they were going to draft by when your birthday was. So, they had, I guess, 365 numbers, and they picked them out. And if they picked number, you know, the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, they'd pick you out as number 1, you'd be drafted first. My February 22<sup>nd</sup> was number 280, so they probably would never get to 280. So, different people got different numbers in that ping-pong ball draft pull from the draft on, from that time on to whenever they stopped doing the draft. So I didn't get—when I finished the Peace Corps, I could go to graduate school and not Vietnam.

LUCAS: So, and when did you end your time in Venezuela with the Peace Corps?

BATTIN: 1970, middle of 1970, I think. Let's see... the beginning of '71, I think.

LUCAS: The beginning of '71?

BATTIN: Yeah, I was two years and three months, I think, in the Peace Corps.

LUCAS: Why did your time end? Had it always been arranged that way?

BATTIN: Yes. That was the time of service, that you decided to serve. And at that time I was ready to do something else, to come back to this country. And I hadn't seen my family for years,

so... And no time during that time did I come back and visit or anything.

LUCAS: What was your return like and where did you go?

BATTIN: Returned to Ohio to my family, and my wife, she was “the girl next-door” I married. So her family was right there.

LUCAS: Oh, really?

BATTIN: Yeah. I knew her from Sunday School, and so... and our back yards touched. So, but as I think I mentioned, too, that there were 12 groups in our training group, and 11 out of 12 got divorced after the Peace Corps.

LUCAS: 11 out of 12 got divorced after the Peace Corps?

BATTIN: Yeah. I think it was because of the stress, or we got married too young. I don’t know. But I’ve been married to Sugie, my lovely wife now, for 37 years.

LUCAS: Can you talk about that stress more?

BATTIN: What?

LUCAS: Can you talk a little more about the stress that couples had?

BATTIN: Yeah. Some of the people just couldn’t relate to the Venezuelan culture. There was another couple, well, the couple that was closest to us was in the next town where we went once in a while for groceries, and it took hours and hours to get there. But the wife—I think they just hated the culture. The women were—well, there was so much machismo, too. I forgot about that. Women were treated—I mean, they couldn’t go out separately, or they would be, you know, get catcalls and pinched and whistles, and treated with disrespect mostly. Just there’s a coarseness of some of the people had, but this couple just practically retreated into their footlockers. They just had a—both of them just sort of just had to be dragged out of the country. They only lasted... They just didn’t like their job and they didn’t like the people, and they just were removed after about six months, I think, in the service. They came in the second group of coop people six months after we had been in country, and they lasted six months and then they were taken out.



Some people just couldn't—some people were just... especially single volunteers, which is tough, very, very lonely by yourself in one of these places. Some of them just couldn't stand it. And some of them were afraid, I think, of their surroundings. But it was stressful for... And I guess, if you're in an environment where there was a lot of anti-Americanism in the bigger cities, that was another reason for stress.

LUCAS: Yeah. Did a lot of... Oh, were you going to say something?

BATTIN: No. Well, it was a great time for reading. I probably mentioned that, but I think I read more books in that time down there than I did in four years at Dartmouth. Had a lot more time for reading. No other, no TV or anything like that. We did get a little news from shortwave radio from islands up in the Caribbean. We'd get the BBC sometimes.

LUCAS: What kinds of news would you hear over the radio?

BATTIN: World news mostly, you know, other countries reporting on what was happening, as far as the US, what was happening in the US, but what was happening in their particular country or what was happening in Europe.

LUCAS: Do you remember hearing anything surprising?

BATTIN: Oh, yeah. The Vietnam protests, because we were in training when there were huge riots at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, August of '68, and heard a lot about that. And different offensives, different escalations of the war, the bombing, the stopping the bombing and resumption of the bombing.

LUCAS: How did you feel hearing those things?

BATTIN: Just demoralizing. And I feel badly now about, I had a couple of friends who went and served and came back. And I had some who were killed. But, you know, I feel I was sort of arrogant or condescending to them about "how could you go and do what you did, you know, kill people the way you did?" And I don't know if I said I did something more worthwhile, but I might have given off that attitude. I know one or two friends particularly that way that alienated, differing outlooks on their experience versus mine. But, God...

And then, other people just, well, between my junior year and senior year at Dartmouth, I started a program, an exchange program, with two of my friends between Dartmouth and University of California-Santa Barbara, so the spring of my junior year I went to UCSB. And then I got a job with the Insurance Company of North America in personnel, and I was interviewing people, and it was kind of a great job really, [laughter] interviewing a lot of beautiful women.

But, men also returned, soldiers from Vietnam, and just how just shell shocked and crushed they were from that experience, and how ill equipped they were to jump back in. Returning from the Peace Corps, just switching from that, I had trouble really physically and mentally jumping back into the culture, too. I think, I'm 6'3" or 6'2", and when I returned I weighed 148 pounds. I swam at Dartmouth at 165, 170. And I was sick for the whole first year. So, I was really weak coming back into the country, physically, and had an assimilation problem, but not nearly the difficulty that so many returning Vietnam—soldiers who had fought in Vietnam, American soldiers returning, had and still have and so many were not able to really return and reach their fullest potential that they might have. I think it destroyed a lot of men's lives, probably a lot of women who served, too, in varying capacities. It really took its toll.

And today, you know, the fighting in Afghanistan and fighting in Iraq, that's devastating, well, physically and mentally, because so many returning soldiers from that. So, you got a lot of homeless people from the Vietnam era and a lot of homeless from more contemporary returnees, too.

LUCAS: Do you recognize any differences or similarities between veterans from more recent wars and veterans, and also people like you, returnees who had been abroad during Vietnam? Do you see those younger people and recognize any common experiences?

BATTIN: Yeah, I mean, I see the commonalities of just the brutality of having fought in both of those wars on the people who... a lot of drug dependency, I think, as a result perhaps. Yeah.

LUCAS: What was your experience like personally re-integrating?

BATTIN: Well, I didn't know exactly, or I didn't know what I wanted to do exactly, where I wanted to be. And my marriage was

falling apart. That was the most—you know, shortly after returning, it had been a year-and-a-half or so, got a divorce, and that was the most... I'm a real upbeat person, love life, and that was, for about a year I was depressed, and I decided "I don't want to be that" and got over it. But, that was one of the hardest things I ever went through was getting divorced in a changing time.

LUCAS: Did you continue to live in Ohio?

BATTIN: Did I? Not very long, because I guess we were there a month or so, and then starting graduate school. I think we got home in about July, and then started graduate school. And she was finishing her undergraduate school at the University of Washington. So, we both went out to Seattle then. Yeah. Just dove into academics for a while.

But, ran into a bunch of friends who were interested in education and alternative communities, and became part of a group that formed a group in northern California. Bought a very remote ranch. I guess I was going back to the remote, always ended up being way out, and bought this remote ranch with 12 other people in northern California, and formed our own community. It's still going.

LUCAS: Still going?

BATTIN: Yeah. Raise cattle and horses and organic produce and... but it was a logged over place. And worked together for 10 years and paid off the mortgage on the place. And did a summer camp and school, and formed a press. A lot of the partners were interested in actually writing books, and they did, and we had Island Press that came out of that, and publishing local authors, and became sort of a... Humboldt State Forestry Department, the head of the Forestry Department did classes at the ranch, and made ours a basis for studying, and an Environmental Psychology Department. People came up from Sonoma State University and did classes there. It's been a center of learning. And rebuilt the place. And I was part of that for 30 years. Raised horses and cattle.

LUCAS: Do you think that those pursuits were influenced by your experience in the Peace Corps?

- BATTIN: Yeah. We all had a common interest in education and environment and looking for different ways of humans treating other humans, yeah, getting closer to the earth. It's been a game preserve for all those years. It's been an amazing place for wild animals.
- LUCAS: When did your interest in water and land conservation...
- BATTIN: I mean, it started at Dartmouth, I think, you know, earth studies and natural geography and... I mean, I've always been an outdoor person and spending lots of times in the forests and the river, in the water, out of the water, under the water, catching things, observing things. Yeah.
- LUCAS: You were in California until about what year?
- BATTIN: We moved here in 1992, so I was in California from '71 to '92. And then, both our—we sent our daughter to Dartmouth from Virginia. Then she married a Dartmouth guy from the Bay Area, from San Francisco, from the East Bay. And now our daughter's lived there and our grandkids are in San Francisco. Sort of ironic.
- LUCAS: And that ties you to California.
- BATTIN: Yeah. Roads lead back. But I got down to San Francisco because of a bad horse accident. I got to be a cowboy on the ranch, you know. Bought the ranch, it came with 50 cows and nobody knew how to take care of them, and open range and some horses. And I knew about horses. But, a horse fell on me horribly in '73, and the right side of my body was crushed pretty badly. And I was delivering horses back to the town, rode 22 miles delivering horses down, and about five miles away from the ranch on the way back, the horse fell and crushed me. And so, I had to get back on the horse and rode it into the river, and this guy pulled me out of the river. And they tried to take care of me at the ranch, and it was worse than they thought. The next day or two they took me down to a little hospital in Willits [California], and too bad for that. So they took me down to Children's Hospital in San Francisco. I was in intensive care for about a couple weeks, two or three weeks, and I had no health insurance. And I got out of the hospital and had a full body cast on, and I went...
- So they dragged me over to these friends who were forming a band and they had an apartment, and they were playing

music all day and I'd lay around. And I got a real estate license and went in, got a—and so, recuperated, got a job, and ran into a Chinese guy who was a swimmer for Cornell when I was swimming for Dartmouth. We became great friends and business partners, and formed a company that we did a lot of rehabbing of old buildings in San Francisco. And you could buy these buildings for almost no money down. And I used partially kids from the mountain from our school and other friends and crews, and we'd rebuild the buildings and refinance them, get another building. All of a sudden, you know, I paid all my money back to the hospital and started rolling. [laughter] Life was...

And I had a wonderful life of living in the Bay Area part of the time doing projects, and then working on the school and the ranch, and school and the camp and stuff at the ranch, and then all the projects up there. And I had another 80 acres that I'd bought for almost nothing up above that was logged over, had no water, and I built a house up there. Just did a horizontal well into the mountainside. I read something about developing water in dry land from the University of Arizona Dry Land Studies, and did a horizontal well and developed water there. And with a portable saw, built up, did a cleanup cut on this 80 acres up there and built a starter building, another little farm up there. But, trying to develop sustainable life from living off, with the natural resources, but not abusing the resources from a variety of small projects with the horses and the cattle. And I raised fish in a pond dug out with a big bulldozer that came with the ranch. We fixed up a 1946 bulldozer. But, it was back and forth. It was really cool between... a nice time, but life got just out of hand there. [laughter]

LUCAS: Life got out of hand?

BATTIN: Well, yeah. It was crazy good. [laughter] I was making money in my sleep. But, stuff was appreciating so fast and... Yeah. Fell in love again, got married again. I got married in the '60s and the '70s, and then in the '80s. [laughter] The second marriage didn't last very long. We were opposites. She worked for the Director of the San Francisco Opera, and she was a musician, a wonderful woman. Had a great time with her in the city, but I was really a cowboy at the time and had city business. [laughter] And I was pretty out of control. But then, so I met my lovely wife Sugie through my sister in New York. I'd sell a building and cash up and then I'd go to

New York and see my sister, and then I met Sugie, and spend all my money and then come back to the West Coast. We were quite different, but finally really, got married in 1983. Do you need a break from all this BS of mine?

LUCAS: No. I just live in a noisy neighborhood, sorry.

BATTIN: Sharing your office with your father?

LUCAS: Yes. Yeah, we're sharing a table right now. Sorry about that. And then, so why then did you move to Virginia?

BATTIN: Well, because we thought---I'd been in California for a long time and thought Virginia—she was from here. Her parents and family and everything from generations are from here, the Staunton area in Virginia. And my parents were on the East Coast. My sister and brother were on the East Coast, and her sister. You know, thought it would be a good place to raise kids, and a little more stable than marvelous Marin. [laughter] And very good values. And I was ready for a change. And moved here in '92. But, that time in California was a lot of fun, and then here's... and both kids were born in Marin County. And Frances was born in 1985 and our son was born in 1988.

LUCAS: What's your son's name?

BATTIN: Son's name is Mark, and daughter's name is Frances. And Frances is an '07, Dartmouth '07. I had more fun probably going back visiting Frances when she was in college than I did even in college myself. Every time I came back to Hanover, you know, to see old friends and renew acquaintances and share memories and things, and then, meet her friends. So many of her best friends that she made were at Dartmouth, and the big nucleus of her friends migrated to San Francisco, and so she's got this whole nucleus of gal friends and guys, and they're all now sharing their kids together. And it's really nice to see. And I've known all of her friends from Dartmouth since she was there, too, so it's great for me. Her friends are long-term friends of ours, which is really cool.

LUCAS: How do you feel like that fits into the relationship you maintain with Dartmouth?

- BATTIN: How do I feel? Oh, it just makes it much stronger. It's really fun, yeah. And she married a Dartmouth guy, too, which further strengthens it.
- LUCAS: You mentioned that you went back for your 45<sup>th</sup> reunion and your 50<sup>th</sup> reunion.
- BATTIN: Yes. And I think I went for the 25<sup>th</sup>, as well.
- LUCAS: What do you remember from those different points in time, reconnecting with people from the Class of '68?
- BATTIN: What do I remember? I remember just everybody who came back was just really open to seeing everyone else and hearing, listening to what everybody else had done, and happy to see each other, learning from one another. And a lot of comparisons. I mean, I enjoyed going to the symposiums we had, talking about, listening to their experiences about that same time period as just graduating and what happened to their lives, and how the war affected them and what their decisions were.
- Yeah. If the war hadn't happened, my life probably would have gone a lot of different ways. And I wouldn't trade what I did and got to. I got to live about three or four different kinds of lives in one life. And, you know, I got to be a cowboy and I got to be a teacher and I got to be a fisherman and I got to be a skin diver, and I get to be a real estate broker and a builder, and a dad. You know, lots of different things.
- After my first marriage broke up, a guy and I just decided we were going to learn how to sail, and we went to Florida and ran into this old friend who was living on a beat-up sailboat, and just letting it rot. And we each bought a quarter interest in it for—we each put a thousand dollars in, you know, and we bought sailing books and fixed up the boat and sailed the boat in the Bahamas for about six months. And that was an amazing experience, too. Got to be a charter boat captain. Almost sank it a few times, especially learning, you know, just sailed right into a northern. And we were just hemming and our boat was ready, we were going to cross over the [inaudible] from Fort Lauderdale no matter what. "No, the weather's gonna blow, huh? No, we don't care. We're gonna sail right into it." We made an eight-hour crossing into a 38-hour crossing, and huge waves, throwing up and [laughter] trying to read the sailing [books], *What do you do?*

We would read the sailing books while throwing up and it's the first crossing. [laughter] Barely making it. And learned a lot about it, and tremendous diving.

And, I mean, people joined us. After we made it safely for a while, they would come on and join the boat for a week or two. My brother joined it, my sister joined it, and all these other friends came. That was an amazing experience, too. Sailing the *Red Eye* through the Bahamas, running it aground several times. Diving with huge sharks. Awesome experiences, just... diving into these caves that would just be covered with lobsters, wall-to-wall lobsters, and diving shipwrecks with big hammerhead sharks in them, bull sharks and blue sharks.

LUCAS: And you could see it all?

BATTIN: Oh, it was crystal clear. I mean, the visibility in the Bahamas in certain areas would be 120 feet. You could dive down in these caves. Amazing. Met all sorts of people, interesting people through doing that. We were at this, out in the Azumeds, and this big boat came in and anchored, and it was John Warner, who was the Secretary of the Navy at the time, and he became Senator Warner from Virginia for a long term later. But, his wife was Cathy Mellon at the time, and she had her two kids, and we took them diving. And that night there was a little club and they had a party for us that they rented the club for that night, a little party for us. And I took John Warner out diving, and we got to call my grandfather from the boat, you know, from the Secretary of the Navy's boat and stuff. And they flew him out at 5:00 am, and Cathy and the kids stayed at—they stayed on for a couple days playing with us.

And so, about six months later I read that Cathy and John Warner had gotten divorced, and so, I told my friend Ashley that they'd gotten divorced, and he invited Cathy to the ranch, our ranch, and they fell in love and got married. And she did a lot with the ranch with developing it, helping us develop projects and kids. And one of our students married her daughter. Ashley, yeah, she and Ashley were married for about five years. Ashley's on his fifth or sixth wife now. And he got a giant ranch—when they got divorced, he got an airplane and he got a giant ranch in Colorado, and he got an even huger ranch in Argentina, and a million dollars in cash to pay off his debts. That was pretty wild.



LUCAS: Do you think that you would have had either the sense of adventure or run into so many adventures had you not had that original experience with the Peace Corps in Venezuela?

BATTIN: Yeah, I think my life would have been much more ordinary, I mean, not ordinary, but just planned out. I think I probably would have gone to graduate school, gotten an MBA, then I would have gotten some kind of corporate job probably, and “Bob’s your uncle” and there you are, you know? [laughter] I don’t know. So, I’m happy with my life. Life is even more interesting to me now than ever, with our son just getting married to this great girl, and they live down in Raleigh. They just came in for a surprise visit about a week ago, and we hadn’t seen them for a couple of months since the virus hit, you know. And that was great. And our daughter had this second baby, and wonderful husband. And our family’s growing. We got really nice friends here and they have outstanding kids that we’re close to their kids. So, life is ever growing and ever expanding.

We’re getting to travel a little bit down in these—since we’ve both are retired now. Got to go to Portugal and Spain last November. I’m glad we got a trip in before the virus. And then Frances had us out to California for Christmas, so we were at her house, and our son and his new wife came out for Christmas, and so we had the family Christmas together. So, at least we had solid time together. Now with this electronic way of communicating, we’re still close, and get through the virus and moving on and having more fun.

LUCAS: And you mentioned your son. He works in public health, or did work...

BATTIN: Well, not our son. I have a nephew who is working on the Indian reservation. That’s a good memory you’ve got. My nephew. My wife’s sister and husband had kids just about when we did, so they have a son and daughter, and the daughter just graduated electronically from the Kennedy School at Harvard in Public Policy. She’s cool. And then, David, her brother, is an ER doctor and is now living on the Navajo Nation, and they had the highest infection rate in the whole country as of a week or two ago. And somehow he has met a really neat lady who’s just starting her residency in the Bay Area this month, but she was working on the reservation doing some sort of medical work, and somebody

put them together, so they're kind of... I don't know, he's committed to the reservation for another year and she's starting reservation [residency] in the Bay Area. But they love hiking and they're both extremely enthusiastic medical professionals. He's just a lot of fun anyhow.

All these kids, you know, just keep you going. And he loves the sailboats, as well as hike and so... It keeps you moving, keeps you active, and it makes life extremely exciting. There's our second dog that's taking a check to see what I was doing in here. [laughter] Because we have lap doors over here to this room. So, "What's he doing in there, huh? Is he all right?" [laughter]

LUCAS: Yeah, my dogs are not in here right now, but often they are. Well, one last thing I want to ask is, yeah, because you seem very hopeful, which is excellent, how do you see all these experiences that we've talked about, how do you recall Vietnam as an era in especially, given these like waves of hard times that you've been processing? And talk about that a little bit.

BATTIN: Well, how do I... I mean, I think it was a very, very dark moment for this country. And just a tough moment now. But I'm so hopeful that our democracy will rise and move ahead. And through this protest movement, I think it's something we have to face, this racial inequality, and the realization that the country is a growingly more diverse country, and we've got to really resolve this problem with inequality and we can do it. And we are so divided as a nation, and vent about it, and we need to come together again. And our country seems to come together in the most difficult times. My dad was a tough World War II veteran, and my wife's father was a, yeah, he was a D-Day veteran, so a lieutenant over the boats landing on Omaha Beach. And the country grew from that experience. There are good and bad times, and I think we're going to overcome this and come together and move ahead in the future. We've got to, and I'm going to do everything I can to help with that... and make the most of what we've got as a country. We've got wonderful resources, and human resources, and young people like you, with your education and enthusiasm and energy. And our kids. Make it better for the future, that's my hope and that's where I'm putting my efforts.

LUCAS: Is there anything else that you want to mention or talk about that we haven't covered before I end the interview?

BATTIN: I don't think so. I think I've talked far too much, [laughter] much more than I should have.

LUCAS: I don't think so at all. All right, well, thank you for talking with me today. I really appreciate it, on behalf of the Dartmouth Vietnam Project.

BATTIN: Thank you for talking with me and thank you for listening with me and putting up with me, and good luck to you and you in your future.

[End of Interview.]