The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR PEGGY BLACKFORD

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bissau, Guinea-Bissau Chief of mission	1995-1998
Diplomat in Residence City University of New York (CUNY)	1998-2000
Short term assignments for State as retired annuitant lots of travel and theater	2000-2017

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 28th of November, 2016 with Peggy Blackford. I'm doing it on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. You go by, I assume, by Peggy.

BLACKFORD: I do; that is my name. Mother wanted to name me for my Aunt Margaret but she didn't like the name Margaret and opted instead for Peggy which is a common nickname for Margaret.

Q: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

BLACKFORD: I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1942.

Q: Well let's start sort of with your family on your father's side. What do you know about the Blackfords?

BLACKFORD: Family history always suggested that father's side of the family came over from England, just before or just after the Revolution and settled around Maryland and the DC area. They were mostly merchants, small businessmen, medium size farmers though my grandfather was prone to say they were horse thieves sent to the penal colony in MD (but I suspect that was because it aggravated my grandmother who always bragged her family had arrived on the Swan, though once she called it the Stork. There was a colonial ship called the Swan that sailed between England and Virginia a number of times in the early 1600s so I suppose it is possible). My grandfather's father was a jeweler in Georgetown and I always attribute my love of jewelry to that heritage. According to my grandfather though, his father was a difficult man, who was very religious, and allowed nothing but Bible reading on Sunday. My grandfather, who was always quite irreverent, quickly tired of that and left home at the age of 12 and went to work in Washington, DC holding horses when riders couldn't find room at the hitching post. Apparently, this was an occupation for young boys around the late 1800s. One of the people whose horse he used to hold was Teddy Roosevelt. Teddy invited him home occasionally to play with the kids in the White House. When Grandfather grew up, he became a salesman and went to live in a boarding house which was run by my

grandmother's mother. She became a boardinghouse keeper after she separated from her husband who was the supervisor of the waterworks for DC, and an alcoholic. I found his obituary which reported that he had been found in a snowbank and died of exposure at a fairly young age: I assume this was the result of his drinking.

Q: So, I take it that your grandfather met your grandmother, his wife at the boardinghouse?

BLACKFORD: I assume so as well but nobody ever told me that; that's something interesting I only learned on ancestry.com. According to the census report my grandmother and my grandfather were both living at the same address. He was shown as being a boarder and she as the daughter of the house.

Q: Well, did you have any contact with Grandmother or Grandfather?

BLACKFORD: Oh yes. All my grandparents were around when I was born. My father and grandfather were in business together and my parents and I lived in a very small apartment over the business where they moved when WWII broke out and permanent housing became very hard to find. My grandfather Blackford was a special favorite of mine because although he came to the business five days a week, he was semi-retired and spent most of his time playing with me.

Q: How about your grandmother?

BLACKFORD: My grandmother was a very unhappy woman. She was nice enough to me. But she was mean to my mother putting her down as just "a little farm girl" and she was mean to both my father and my aunt. Apparently, her father's position and that of her grandfather, who was a prosperous farmer, meant that she spent most of her girlhood in relatively high society in Washington. However, when her mother decided that she couldn't live with an alcoholic anymore and separated this caused a great scandal and seriously impacted her social status and her marriage prospects. She never felt that she got what she was entitled to and she was never satisfied.

Q: Well did you sort of sense that? Well, let's talk about your parents first. What were they up to, your father first?

BLACKFORD: Well, my father was a small businessman. He was a very, very bright man but he, like so many bright people, got bored in school, got so-so grades and never went to college. He could easily have been any kind of engineer. He built our house. He did all the architectural plans, all the wiring, and all the plumbing. We had to get an electrician, plumber to signoff, but he did all the work himself. The bread and butter of his business was licensing scales. Big industrial scales have to be inspected regularly and my father performed these inspections. He also sold a lot of what was called special handling equipment. He sold casters for every conceivable type of dolly and moving equipment. Sometimes he invented systems. I recall there was a company in the neighborhood which manufactured towel bars; my father designed and constructed the

assembly line for the industry. His greatest accomplishment was during World War II when he was declared a vital industry because he invented and manufactured special parts for aircraft carriers. The big plus for me was that he was not drafted and unlike many children born during WWII, I got to see him every day.

Q: How about your mother? Where was she from and what was her sort of education before they met?

BLACKFORD: Well, my mom really was a little farm girl and proud of it. She grew up in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. I don't know if you are familiar at all with New Jersey; most people just sort of pass through it on the train or I-95. They miss the most beautiful part, the northwest, which is full of rolling hills and is still quite rural. Three-quarters of the family was of German ancestry. They came from the Palatinate in Germany which many people left in the early 1700s because of famine and insecurity. These are by and large the people who became the Pennsylvania Dutch. My part of the family skipped Pennsylvania and settled in Hunterdon County instead, in and near a town called Oldwick, and most of them stayed in the same area for the next 200 plus years. The other fourth of the family, was Dutch, real Dutch. Most of them settled in New York or northern New Jersey nearer to New York City and were more affluent. Ancestry helped me trace that line of my heritage back to the only famous ancestor I lay claim to, Claes von Rosenvelt, the first of the American Roosevelts. No one in the family ever mentioned this so I suspect they never knew, or maybe they just didn't want to admit it as they were dedicated Republicans. My mother's parents were both born on farms near Oldwick and became farmers themselves. But, as you may know, after World War I, in the early 1920s, there was a recession which hit farmers particularly hard. Many went out of business; one of those was my grandfather who gave up farming in 1924 and moved to Somerville, New Jersey, going to work on the assembly line for Mack Truck where he stayed until he retired. None my grandparents had more than an 8th grade education but they all loved to read and did so all their lives. This influenced my view that one's level of education often had more to do with opportunity than intelligence.

My mother was an only child. My grandmother was the homemaker. My mother graduated from high school in Somerville in 1925, the first in her family. She then went to what was then the New Jersey College for Women, now Douglas College, a part of Rutgers University. It was there that she met my Aunt Margaret who was in the same class. Both women were the first in their families to graduate from college and subsequently obtain Master's degrees. Aunt Margaret introduced my mother and father. I don't think it was love at first sight though since they didn't marry until 1941, more than 10 years after their first meeting.
Mother graduated in the auspicious year of 1929-

Q: Oh yes.

BLACKFORD: -and went to look for work as a teacher. At that point in time women had three career choices. You could be a secretary or a teacher or a nurse. Luckily my mother always adored children, and she always wanted to be a teacher. She got her first job at the

State Home for Girls, the girls' reformatory in Trenton, New Jersey as an English teacher.

Q: Well, did your mother talk about her experiences teaching young girls, well women at the- in the prison system?

BLACKFORD: Well yes. She only stayed one year but she said it was a very easy job because the girls had very few privileges and just the threat of losing them was enough to maintain discipline and she enjoyed the job. I think one of the most interesting things that happened to her at that time was that she met the matron for the African American girls who was Mae D. Holmes. Mae D. lived in New Jersey for some years but by the time I was born, she had moved back to her birthplace, North Carolina, where she became a leader in the civil rights movement. She was the first African American that my mother ever knew. You didn't meet a lot of African Americans in farming country in New Jersey and not very many in college either, though Mae D. was a college graduate from one of the traditional black schools. That early friendship formed mother's ideas about race relations in this country. Mae D. always stayed with us when she visited NJ and she was one of my favorite people.

Q: Let's talk about you as a kid. Did you grow up in Trenton?

BLACKFORD: Yes, until I was old enough to move away as I was anxious to do. Not that I didn't have a very happy childhood but I was not a suburban child. I loved big cities and my mother took me to New York from the time I was very young. She loved New York too; she loved the theater and all the arts and she made sure I was exposed to all those things. I was very, very happy to move to New York as soon as I graduated from college.

Q: Well let's talk a bit about growing up in Trenton. In the first place, did you have brothers and sisters?

BLACKFORD: That's kind of a long story. I did get a brother when I was 19 but I didn't acquire him in the usual way. I grew up as an only child. But my mother always adored children; there was always space at our house and our table even when we lived in three rooms over the business as we did for the first 13 years of my life. I would come home after school with friends and ask can they stay for dinner? The answer was always yes. When I was 19, I met this nice young man at a summer school course and he was having a lot of trouble with his family and would come home with me and have dinner and hang out and then he'd go home at 10 or 11:00 at night. After a while he'd stay over for a day and pretty soon he lived with us. And so that's how I acquired a brother and, in due course, a couple of lovely nieces. It was a very good deal on my part because my brother and his wife were very devoted to both my parents and when I was overseas it was nice to know that there was always somebody more than ready to take care of them if they got into trouble.

Q: Oh yes. Well now, as a kid were you much of a reader?

BLACKFORD: Oh yes. I was always happy with a book. Books, animals, and the theater, those were things that I loved and still do to this day. I could be happy all day by myself if you gave me a book. I could always amuse myself. My mother used to tell her friends that one of the things she liked best about me was that I never whined "Mother, I'm bored."

Q: Well now, what sort of books would your read?

BLACKFORD: Oh gosh. I was a girl so I loved horse books but as it turned out I didn't really like horses nearly as much. After one threw me twice in 10 minutes, I gave up learning to ride. I loved the atlas. But mostly I liked fiction; it's still my preference to this day, especially mysteries and thrillers. Occasionally I read non-fiction but I like to be entertained and non-fiction is a bit too much like studying.

Q: Well talk a little bit about the atlas.

BLACKFORD: Ah. Well, I don't know where I acquired it but it was probably one of those cheap atlases. But I know I was always fascinated by all the different colored spots on the maps where you could go. I wanted to travel so badly. Nobody I knew in my family ever traveled. My father never wanted to travel. Before going into business for himself, my grandfather had moved the family constantly whenever he got a better job. My father said they had moved something like 12 times as he was growing up and he never wanted to go anywhere else again. My mother would have loved to travel but graduating as the Depression began followed by World War II, left her little opportunity to do that sort of thing until she got much older and she came visit me and many of the students we hosted when she was Chairperson of the Experiment in International Living in our town. Now as I said I never knew anyone in the family who traveled but I knew about Uncle Lucian who wasn't really my uncle; he was married to my great-aunt, and died before I was born. Crucially however, he was a member of the Consular Corps and perhaps had the greatest influence on my choice of career.

Q: Ah.

BLACKFORD: He was American consul to Haiti and then in Perth, Australia. So, when I was a kid, and I wanted to go everywhere on the atlas, and I was crazy to work overseas, my family knew that there was a job like that, and told me about it.

Q: You know, that's remarkable because my great-grandfather was consul general, it was a political appointment, in Vienna during the time of Franz Joseph. I didn't know about it until after I'd written a book, a history of the American Consular Corps. I mean, being a guy, I didn't spend an awful lot of time asking my family about history. This was left kind of to the women of the family and all and so I was oblivious to this. But it's interesting.

Q: Well would you sort of imagine about going to places or reading books?

BLACKFORD: Oh yes. When I got to high school I wanted to learn languages and I wanted to go to Paris more than anywhere else in the world. I knew how to get around Paris long before I ever got there. I wanted to go to Montmartre, climb the stairs to the Sacré-Coeur, walk along the Seine. I read lots and lots of books about Paris, some fiction, others non-fiction. I was kind of disappointed when I did get there on a trip the summer after my freshman year in college. The French that I had painstakingly taken three years in high school, and a year in college did not impress the French at all. I would say "*Bonjour*" then they'd look down their noses at me and say, in perfect English, "What may I help you with?"

Q: I think, I'm told that that's changed quite a bit.

BLACKFORD: Oh, it has; it's very different from that first visit when I was 18. I served in Paris much later and although my French wasn't all that much better, they were so much nicer. I was part of that wave of young Americans who went abroad not that long after World War II when we had money. We had never been abroad and were kind of loud, we traveled in packs and so many Europeans, especially the French, resented these kids who hadn't suffered the privations they had and yet had so much more than they or their kids had.

Q: Yes. It's this period that you're talking about when you might say anti-Americanism, social anti-Americanism was riding high.

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: Well back to your time in Trenton. Where did you family stand politically?

BLACKFORD: Politically they were Republicans; they didn't like Roosevelt or Truman. although I think their allegiance to the GOP changed later in life after Nixon and Watergate. But they were fiscally conservative and for that reason, the GOP suited them better. Mostly, however, their concern was for what was going on locally. They were both big community activists. My mother was a member of the PTA (Parent Teacher Association), president of the PTA, president *emeritus* of the PTA, member of the League of Women Voters. She was the first college graduate and the first women ever to be elected to the local board of education. My father was a founding member of the Kiwanis Club. He was very instrumental in establishing adult education at our high school. He was a member of the township committee. He was mayor of our town twice. They were much more concerned about our community than they were in what was going on nationally. As the saying goes "all politics is local". It certainly was for my parents. I think I should clear up something. I did not grow up in Trenton *per se* but in a little town or rather a little township just north of Trenton called Ewing. Today Ewing is an actual place with a zip code but at that time Trenton was our post office, and Trenton was where kids went to high school. But Ewing was independent of Trenton which turned out to be a good thing when the '60s came along and Trenton, which had been quite a nice small city, experienced rioting, looting and an exodus of the middle class. Trenton fell on hard

times. Though it has improved a little in recent years until oh, I don't know, 10 years ago it was the only state capital in the United States that didn't have a hotel. When I was born it was still the days of "Trenton makes, the world takes." Trenton was a very important industrial city from the late 1800s through World War II. Roebling had his factory there and invented and produced the cables that allowed us to build the Brooklyn Bridge and all the other suspension bridges that exist today. It was the capital of American porcelain manufacture, everything from American Standard to Lenox which made china for the White House. We had four department stores, several movie theaters.

Q: As a kid was it kind of fun to go downtown? I mean, were there things to do?

BLACKFORD: Oh yes. We liked the movies. We liked to go shopping, mostly window shopping. The only chain department store in Trenton was Arnold Constable which was a branch of a New York department store now long defunct. The others were all locally owned but they were very nice department stores.

Q: Was it- could you go sort of downtown at a fairly young age?

BLACKFORD: Yes. As kids of 10 or 11 years we'd get on the bus, we'd go downtown, we'd go shopping, get on the bus, come home. Certainly, not anything you would do today.

Q: You say movies. What sort of- were you much of a movie fan?

BLACKFORD: Oh, I loved the movies and I still do. As a kid, I was crazy for any movie that had an animal in it. Speaking of animals, everyone in the family, even my grumpy grandmother, loved animals. We had a dog, we had a cat, we had a pigeon, we had turtles, we had guppies. We lived in a three-room apartment.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: Well, the pigeon did live in the shop downstairs not the apartment.

Q: Well in school what sort of things really grabbed you in elementary school and what sort of things you didn't care for particularly?

BLACKFORD: Oh well, I was a typical girl, I guess. I never cared for math, I didn't care for science but I loved English and language arts, social studies.

Q: What was sort of the race situation when you were in grammar school?

BLACKFORD: Ewing Township had a population when I was growing up of somewhere between 10 and 12,000 people. The African American community was no more than 10 percent of the population. There wasn't much in the way of mixing but there wasn't a lot of strife either. It was quite a heterogeneous population in many other ways. There were lots of people whose families had come from all over Europe, especially Italy and Poland.

There were lots of Catholics, most branches of Protestant and a substantial Jewish population as well. Most everyone was working class or lower middle class. I can't think of anyone I would have considered rich.

Q: Did you go out for any particular activities?

BLACKFORD: Well, I was never at all athletic. One of my limitations was that I was born with what they call lazy eye, amblyopia, and it means that one of your eyes sort of sits in a corner and doesn't focus. So, you don't have any depth perception.

Q: Oh.

BLACKFORD: Now today they correct that by patching your good eye when you're very young. And we did try that but it was too late by the time my mother learned about this treatment. We went to New York, we saw a specialist every couple weeks for months. I loved it. New York that is, not the doctor. My mother felt guilty because she was taking me out of school so we always did something special like go to the theater or the zoo. A visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see the Egyptian section was one of my favorites. But we never did get my eye fixed; it doesn't work to this day. I detested any kind of game because I was always bad at it. You cannot hit a ball if you don't have depth perception except by sheer luck.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: And it wasn't a rich community. The school didn't have a swimming pool, we didn't have a gymnastics program. We didn't have some of the athletic things that I might have been able to do, but I could go out all day and roam around in nature and have a good time.

Q: How about music or theater?

BLACKFORD: Oh, I always loved any kind of performing art though I had no talent at all. My mother was very fond of music. We had lots of classical music playing at home and she started taking me to concerts when I was young. We were fortunate to live where we had a lot of excellent summer theater. I don't know if you're familiar with St. John Terrell's Lambertville Music Circus. It was the first tent summer theater in the round. It was just 10 miles or so from our house so we saw production after production after production of every musical ever written. We were near the Bucks County Playhouse which is another extremely well-known summer theater in the mid-Atlantic region. But we also would go into New York. The first New York show I ever saw was "South Pacific" and I think I was maybe eight.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: And there's a great story about that. When I moved into this building in New York City almost 20 years ago this lovely neighbor down the hall came to visit me

and welcome me to the building. A real New Yorker. I asked her what she had done. She said, "Oh, I was in show business." Well I had to learn more and it turned out she was one of the nurses in the original cast of "South Pacific." So, nearly 50 years later I met her for the first time.

Q: One of Nelly Frobisher's gang.

BLACKFORD: Yes, exactly. She was a good friend to Mary Martin. You couldn't have asked for a better neighbor. Mother loved good food so when we'd go to New York after we'd seen a show, we'd always go out to a nice restaurant before we got the train home. We ate lots of French food. Mother and I had a deal that if I wanted to try something new she would order chicken so that if I hated what I had ordered, we would switch and I'd eat the chicken. And my mother always said, "I ate a lot of chicken because my daughter liked everything. She liked the *escargots*, she liked the frog's legs."

Q: Oh boy. Well, in a way you're really getting pretty good exposure to things we'd later call sort of sophisticated.

BLACKFORD: Yes. Not bad for the daughter of a little farm girl.

Q: And it could be done you might say, ___ it's not the wrong term but on the cheap and that it could be done by people coming from not a wealthy environment.

BLACKFORD: Oh exactly. We didn't have a lot of money. We weren't poor but I think there's a lot to be said for growing up in that era. Nobody was very rich and there wasn't a lot of concern as there is these days with what brand of this you had and what brand of that you had and having to keep up with the Joneses.

Q: Yes. Well let's say when you were a kid, I always like to capture this because it's so different from today, but were you sort of the way so many kids were, playtime was almost feral.

BLACKFORD: That was very much the case. We lived, as I said over my father's machine shop and I used to go play in the shop. How they were comfortable turning me loose in the machine shop I don't know. But I can remember my mother coming to get me for lunch and I would have sat in the chain hoist and pulled myself up two stories to the ceiling and she would just come by and say "Peggy, time for lunch, please come down, dear". I would get myself down from the chain hoist and I'd go have lunch. Out in back it was kind of a wilderness and I would go and play out there. There was a small grove of oaks and my father hung a hammock for me, I spent hours and hours in the hammock reading. My mother had a police whistle and when it was time for meals, or when it was time for me to come home she would blow the whistle and I'd come in. There was so little supervision it was wonderful. The area we lived in was not residential but was probably zoned commercial/industrial. My father's business and our apartment were located on a very busy four-lane highway. Across the street was a Cadillac dealership and my favorite place, a porcelain manufacturer. Now I didn't care a bit about

the porcelain but Mac, the night watchman, had a lovely ginger cat and whenever possible I'd get someone to take me over to the plant so I could get in a little cat petting. When she became pregnant, I campaigned relentlessly till I had a small dusty yellow kitten of my own.

Q: I assume that like so many of us you kind of made up your own games.

BLACKFORD: Oh absolutely. There wasn't a lot of structure to our games. There were no classes in tai chi or karate, no soccer games. Play dates consisted of being dropped off at a friend's if you couldn't walk or ride your bike there by yourself. I did get swimming lessons at the YMCA. I also tried to learn to ride a horse but as I mentioned before, the horse had other ideas. Mostly I played with my best friend, Carol, who was Italian American. I used to go to her house regularly. She had the typical Italian American family of the time. Her mother had six or eight siblings and her father had six or eight siblings and the cousins came, and it was total chaos. I always thought it was just the best of all worlds because I'd go over and hang out and have this giant family; I was just another one of them. And then I'd say, "Mom, can we go home now?" I'd go home, where it was nice and peaceful, and quiet.

Q: I'm 88 now so I come from a different generation but one thing that all the guys and obviously the girls went for were dancing classes. I mean this was ballroom dancing.

BLACKFORD: Oh yes, I did that when I was 12 or 13. I liked to dance. It was something athletic you could do even if you couldn't see worth a damn.

Q: Yes. You know, looking at it now did you see any, you might say defects in the system or things that you weren't doing or should have done or was it just pretty much gee, this is great?

BLACKFORD: If by that, you mean how was my personal world, I can't imagine having a happier childhood. I had two great parents; an extraordinary mother and a very kind, supportive, father. He was maybe a little remote; dad old style. His job was to make money and mother's job was to do everything else.

Q: Absolutely.

BLACKFORD: But he was never mean. Everybody always encouraged me to do whatever I wanted, be whatever I wanted. I wouldn't say my father was exactly a feminist. His wife wasn't going to work because, you know, wives didn't work, but if his little girl wanted a career, now that was something entirely different. Whatever his little girl wanted to do she could. They always told me to do what I wanted to do. If you mean, did I see that life could be unfair, certainly. On a personal level, I could see that not all my friends had what I did. My friend, Carol, for example, lost her father to a heart attack at the age of 39 when Carol was only 14. In a moment, she lost not just a father who was the light of her life but also her financial security. As a teen, she had to work most days after school, and every summer. Now I did that too, but I did it because I wanted to and

the money I earned I could spend on any frivolous thing I wanted. Not that I was rolling in cash at minimum wage of 75 cents an hour. On the other hand, Carol put her earnings in an account for college and when it was time to go to college, I went away to a private university and Carol stayed at home and went to a State school.

If you mean did I see the injustices in the world around me, the answer is also yes. As you may have gathered, my mother had a very active social conscience and the times I grew up in were by no stretch of the imagination politically correct. Ethnic, religious and racial slurs were unavoidable. Many of my mother's friends had attitudes that did not match her own. She was not usually confrontational but tried to lead by example in the belief that honey usually trumped vinegar. I remember a conversation I overheard the summer before I entered third grade. The school system had just hired our first African-American teacher and I would be in her class. Several of my friends' mothers expressed their concern. Mother, who was always the leader of any group, said she didn't see what difference the teacher's color was. Wasn't the important thing if she was a good teacher? Mrs. Bowers was a good teacher and that was the last I ever heard of the subject.

Q: Well were you aware at that time of sort of the glass ceiling?

BLACKFORD: Certainly, not as aware of it as I was later once I graduated from college and realized that everybody still wanted to know how fast I could type. I did know that there were things that women didn't usually get to do. But I also had an aunt who was quite unusual, the one who went to college with my mother. She studied physics and she became a high school physics teacher. But she didn't really like children all that much so she looked for other opportunities. And one of the things she did was she flew as a test pilot for Grumman during World War II.

Q: Good god.

BLACKFORD: I don't mean new experimental planes, that was a job still reserved for men, however; women pilots were routinely used to test new planes as they rolled off the assembly line. Somebody had to take them up and do a quality check before they sent them to the boys overseas and she did that. And she was a terrific photographer. She did that. Her husband worked for TRW; she worked for North American Rockwell or maybe vice versa. But they both worked on the Apollo moon shot. So, she got to do most of what she wanted even when it was something that women weren't supposed to do. I could see that there were ways to get where you wanted to go.

Q: Well did you have much contact with your aunt?

BLACKFORD: No, she got married at the age of 40 (also unheard of that that time) when I was about six, and they moved, first to Texas then to Colorado and finally to California. I only saw her once in a while, but I knew about her from the family.

Q: High school; where'd you go to high school?

BLACKFORD: Ewing Township. When I was born, there was no high school in Ewing Township everybody used to have to take a school bus and go into the city of Trenton to Trenton High School but when I was going to elementary school, the community decided it was getting large enough to have its own high school and it was completed by the time I graduated from sixth grade. At that time, there was no junior high and I attended the next six grades at Ewing High. It was a good education; that was when the public-school system in this country was generally excellent. And unlike today, the arts were considered an essential part of the curriculum. I have no complaints whatsoever about my education.

Q: Can you think of any teachers that really impressed you or their memory lingers on?

BLACKFORD: Oh, there were quite a few but perhaps one of the most impressive was Bill DiGeorge, who was our social studies and history teacher. Even when we were studying the American revolution, we would spend 5 or 10 minutes every day on current events. Miss Pinaro taught both French and Spanish. She switched back and forth between both every day. I find this impressive as it usually takes me a week or two to get my tongue going in the right direction.

Q: When you were in high school what were you, did you- the equivalent to a major?

BLACKFORD: Well we didn't really have majors. The kids who were college bound all attended the same classes together, some of us leaning more to the liberal arts and others to math and science. And the kids who were going to go to business school or go into business or administration or something like that went in the second tranche. And then you had the kids who were going into the trades. It was a rather rigid social system. Although I certainly would have liked the system if it was a little less rigid. I did not like home economics. I probably would have been happier learning how to fix a car than learning how to sew and it would have been way more useful.

Q: Did you, I mean was it expected from your parents that you were going to go on to college?

BLACKFORD: Oh yes, always. There was never any question about that.

Q: How about the world? Were you sort of aware of things that were going on, Cold War and all that?

BLACKFORD: Well I was too young during World War II to keep up with the news. I had never known anything else. That was the way the world was, you know. My father worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week. My first real memory that I can date must have been V-E Day because I remember yellow daffodils and I remember there were sirens and church bells. So, it must have been the end of the war in Europe rather than the end of the war *per se* because we were out in the garden and it was spring.

Q: Well what about the Cold War, about the Soviet Union?

BLACKFORD: We did have those duck and cover drills. I don't know, I didn't take them very seriously, it didn't seem very real to me. And knowing what we know now, they were pointless. Really, crawling under a desk would protect us in a nuclear attack?

Q: Well it gave you something to do.

BLACKFORD: I suppose. I don't think I was that tuned in. I don't think that kids were that tuned in and parents tried not to express their fears around their children. If you read the newspaper you read "The Trenton Times," which was at least 90 percent local news, not international issues. To this day I'm pretty sure that's what "The Trenton Times" covers. Most people didn't have a television till the mid to late 50s and there was no CNN. The national news was 15 minutes once a day. I don't remember my parents sitting around the kitchen table and talking about nuclear war or the Berlin blockade or other such issues. As I said, they were really much more concerned about what was going on in Ewing Township, what should they do about the contract for the sanitation workers and should they build a new incinerator or get a contract with the trash removal company; these kinds of things.

Q: Was there talk about sort of Italian crime, mafia and that sort of thing?

BLACKFORD: Not much. The trash thing did come up. Of course, New Jersey is notorious for the trash collection being a mafia controlled business and my father, when he was mayor, made the decision to put in an incinerator instead. He was not terribly popular with some people for a while but there was never any real threat.

Q: Did you find yourself dragged into local politics at all?

BLACKFORD: Not really. Certainly not dragged. Occasionally I'd go out with my mother on election day when she volunteered for the League of Women Voters and make sure that people who hadn't voted had a ride to the polls. I think I campaigned some with my mother when she ran for the Board of Education. She went door to door to just about every household in the community and sometimes she didn't have a baby sitter so I went too, though I was only 7 or 8. Some years later when my father ran for Township Committee, I went to my share of firehouse dinners and posed with family for campaign materials.

Q: What about at the high school, what was social life like then?

BLACKFORD: I didn't have much myself. I had learned to read by age four, and insisted on going to school though I wasn't old enough for kindergarten in the public school. My parents sent me to private school for two years; however, first and second grade were combined and by the end of first grade I had mastered most of the second-grade subject matter already. My mother said, "she's going to be bored" so for second grade they sent me to public school where the curriculum was a bit different. For that reason, I was always about a year younger than most of the other kids. I graduated from high school

when I was 17 years and a couple of months and I was always a little socially awkward. My best friend, Carol, who was also a little socially awkward, sat right next to me in class and we were besties through elementary school and high school. We remained lifelong friends although our lives were very different. She stayed in Ewing Township and got married, had kids, but we were friends till the day she died.

Q: Well was there much dating at all?

BLACKFORD: Yes, there was quite a lot of dating. There was a lot of going steady. Not me, you understand; I was too young. I didn't really understand how nice boys were until I got to college. Before that it was sort of a status symbol; you wanted a date for the prom and it needed to be a boy. It wasn't till college that I began to take a real interest in the opposite sex.

Q: What subjects did you like in high school and did well in?

BLACKFORD: I did well in all the social sciences and languages, skills that were very useful if you join the Foreign Service. I did not do well in math and I did not do well in science.

Q: Sounds like the prime qualifications to be a Foreign Service officer.

BLACKFORD: Exactly.

Q: Well when you graduated and you were pointed towards college where did you go?

BLACKFORD: I went to Syracuse University. The summer between my sophomore and junior year, Mother and Carol and I went on a trip to visit colleges and see a little of the country. I checked a whole bunch of colleges off because they insisted that you have a second year of algebra and I was not taking a second year of algebra. We went to Syracuse, we went up to Middlebury; I thought I might like to go to Middlebury because of the language program but I wasn't accepted. We visited some of the Seven Sisters, Smith and Wellesley and Mount Holyoke, which did accept me. Of course, we visited Douglass College, my mother's alma mater. I think my mother would have liked me to go to Douglass but it was not quite 30 miles away from home and I didn't think that was far enough. I was really looking for a big college because I had gone to small high school; there were 170 in my graduating class and it just seemed very claustrophobic. I wanted a place that was big and Syracuse certainly was big. There were 1,700 in my graduating class. The Maxwell School is there which has an excellent program in international relations.

Q: Well why did you want a big school?

BLACKFORD: I guess I wanted more diversity before it became a catch phase. I found it stifling to know everybody in my class, to know all about them and vice versa. I wanted there to be more people around. And I liked the anonymity. I love New York City both

for the hustle and bustle and for the fact that if you want to be alone, no one will bother you.

Q: Yes. You were at Syracuse from what year to what year?

BLACKFORD: I entered Syracuse in 1959 and graduated in 1963.

Q: Where stood sort of the revolutions of, you know, the '60s?

BLACKFORD: It was a little early for that. We were very big into folk music, you know. We sang a lot about revolution but at least in the beginning we didn't do much about revolution. We were very pro-free speech in the aftermath of the McCarthy era. Many of the folk singers we idolized, like Pete Seeger, were still being labeled Communists. On one occasion, we crossed a line of picketers protesting his appearance in Syracuse. As time went by, the civil rights movement grew of more and more concern to us, but we were a bit early to oppose the war in Vietnam. At one time, I must have known every verse ever written to "*We Shall Overcome*" though.

Q: Well singing was really important. It was the heyday of folk music

BLACKFORD: Yes. I fell in with the crowd that had guitars and knew all the folk songs. Considering I can't carry a tune or play a chord, they were all very nice to me. We were very bohemian, if a bunch of white, middle-class kids could ever be bohemian. To be fair, at least half my folk singing friends were the children and grandchildren of Jewish immigrants who settled in New York and led the fight for unions in the early 20th century and opposed fascism in the 30s, well before it was fashionable. They had been raised to be concerned about social and economic justice. The father of one of the boys had been in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and fought in the Spanish Civil War. We all knew the words to "*Viva La Quince Brigada*".

Making new friends with new ideas and outlooks was one of the best things that happened during the four years at Syracuse. To this day, 50 plus years later, my college roommate is my best friend. The other extraordinary thing that happened to me was that I spent the second semester of my sophomore year in Guatemala. That was so different and I learned so much, not at school but in the outside world.

Q: How did that come about? And then let's talk about what you got out of that.

BLACKFORD: As you know travel was very important to me. I'd been to Europe for my grand tour in 1960 and that was my first experience overseas unless you count crossing the border into Canada which hardly seemed very exotic. Europe was a bit more exotic but still a mostly familiar environment. However, when Syracuse decided to do a semester in Guatemala, I was excited by the idea of traveling to quite a different culture and living there rather than spending two or three days as had been the case of my "If it's Tuesday" tour of Europe. I was told that Syracuse picked Guatemala because it has one of the best Spanish accents in Latin America but it probably was not a very wise choice

because it wasn't all that safe a place. They were on the slippery slope to a civil war which lasted for 40 years. Ours was the only semester in Guatemala ever offered.

Obviously, I wanted to improve my Spanish; that was a principal goal of the semester. And my Spanish did improve to what the Foreign Service Institute once dubbed "abominable fluency". It seemed I could talk to anybody at a rapid pace but my grammar was just awful. I'm sure you know that your friends rarely correct your grammar unless they truly can't figure out your meaning from context so my student friends did little to help me in that regard. We attended Guatemala's major school, the University of San Carlos, where we took courses in Spanish literature and Latin American history. Of course, this being Latin America, the University seemed to be on strike or vacation half the time. Most of what I learned during that six months had little to do with school. It was the first place I'd ever been that had such extreme poverty. People lived in huts without running water or electricity, children visibly suffered from malnutrition with swollen stomachs and that kind of reddish hair that kids get when they haven't had the right things to eat. Much of population was indigenous. Many people didn't speak Spanish, they wore native clothing. To this day, you can often identity what village a person comes from by the pattern of their clothes.

I think one of the more interesting things I learned about my country and Guatemala was the racism that existed. We were often criticized by the Guatemalan students, quite justly, for our civil rights situation. But I began to see how much worse it could be and the degrees there were. I noticed that the Guatemalans, the students that I hung out with and accused the US of racism, talked about the Indian Guatemalans as if they were sort of a lower species. And so, I would say, "we have a lot of problems but you have problems too. I mean, look at the way you talk about the Indians". And they would reply but "they're Indians." They didn't even know they had a problem.

The other issue that the Guatemalan students would raise with us from time to time was democracy versus communism. The three days I spent in Berlin while on my "if it's Tuesday" tour of Europe the previous summer had left me with what I thought was a powerful argument on the subject. This was 1960, just 15 years since the end of WWII which left most of Berlin in rubble and a short time before the wall was built. You could travel without restriction between the Western and Eastern sectors of the city. You could still see some of the damage in West Berlin but there was construction everywhere, there were restaurants, clubs, shops, color, bustle. I was shocked when I came up out of the underground in the East. You would have thought that the war had ended yesterday. Blocks and blocks were still nothing but rubble and most telling was that I never saw anyone smile in East Berlin, they barely even raised their heads. I thought it was quite an indictment of the communist way of life.

While in Guatemala, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to travel all around the country. My boyfriend had a car and a reasonable amount of money and he took me everywhere, the old capital of Antigua, the market in Chichicastenango, the Atlantic Coast, the Mayans ruins at Tikal and my favorite place, the most beautiful place I have ever been, Lake Atitlan. Guatemala City also had its attractions. There were lots of nice

restaurants and clubs where you could go dancing almost any night. There were several movie theaters which showed current movies in English with Spanish subtitles. To this day, whenever I hear the theme to "Never on Sunday" or "the Magnificent Seven", I am back in Guatemala. Funny how music does that sometimes. My roommate and I lived in a boardinghouse and were very free to come and go as we liked.

There was also a guy who lived in the boardinghouse who was Cuban; he had left after Castro took over. This was 1961 so it was very close to when Castro took over. He was very anti-Castro. He and a lot of his friends were being trained at secret bases in Guatemala run by the Americans-

Q: This came as part of the Bay of Pigs group.

BLACKFORD: Exactly. This was about the same time I really learned how we had meddled in Guatemalan history and overthrown a man who was elected to be president of Guatemala, quite legitimately elected to be president. He was a little too leftist to suit the US Government however, and we had pulled off a coup, not exactly what I thought we should be doing.

Q: Yes. I think it was particularly as early on and we were thinking the CIA was sort of toying with the idea that they could do anything they wanted.

BLACKFORD: Shaping the world to meet their requirement.

Q: Yes. And I don't think they've ever completely learned their lesson but-

BLACKFORD: No, I don't think so either.

Q: Oh boy. Well, did that make you, you know, your experience there do you think you were looking at the world quite differently when you got back?

BLACKFORD: Yes, I do. Before I went to Guatemala, I believed that my country at least since WWII, generally tried to do the right thing. And afterwards it wasn't that I loved my country any less but that I could see the forest, the trees, and the leaves a lot more clearly.

Q: Did you find that this sparked your interest in Latin America more?

BLACKFORD: It did. I would have loved to serve more than I did in Latin America but it didn't work out that way.

Q: Let's talk about the courses you were taking. Sometimes the hardest year is the first year because you have compulsory courses.

BLACKFORD: Yes. I did all right except for the first semester when I had a lot of fun but almost lost my scholarship. By the next semester, I had things under control and I was

on Dean's List every semester for the rest of my college career. Although I was required to take a science the first year and science was not my forte, I took geology and I liked it. It was a bit like geography. Everything else was straightforward. There was English, a strong suit, French and Spanish. And what else did I take? Some sort of social science, US history, economics. One of my favorite courses was comparative religion which I found fascinating. It covered all the major religions and some minor ones, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto among others. I found that to be very useful in my life and in my thinking about religion.

Q: Well what about the world? I mean, how were you getting your information about what was going on in the world?

BLACKFORD: College was this blank spot because there was no television in any of the dorms. There was no radio. There were no newspapers. You would have had to go to the library to get the newspaper and you were already too busy reading the stuff that was required. Occasionally you heard some news by word of mouth but that was about it. The only thing that I was acutely aware of was the build up to the Bay of Pigs invasion and that was because of my experience in Guatemala where there were so many Cubans, some of whom I knew, in secret camps.

Today there are so many more ways to get information. We didn't have any of those kinds of resources when I went to college. There was no 24-hour news channel like CNN and hard as it is to imagine, there was no internet, no access to information any time of day or night at your fingertips. I just tried to keep my head down and do my work.

Q: When you were in college what were you looking at or were you looking ahead or just-?

BLACKFORD: I always wanted to join the Foreign Service so I majored in International Relations with a minor in Spanish. When I graduated, however; I realized that while I might pass the written exam there was no way in hell I was going to pass the oral exam. I was not mature enough. I was too shy. So, when I graduated, I moved to New York and started looking for a job. My, that was depressing. Everywhere I went they wanted to know if I could type at least 40 words a minute.

BLACKFORD: *Q: How did you do in that?*

BLACKFORD: Very poorly. I was never a good typist. I was so grateful when computers came along because now I can type maybe 60 words a minute without worrying about errors and then just quickly go back and fix everything and go on.

Q: Yes. Thank god for spell check.

BLACKFORD: Well, spell check is great but one of my real irritations has always been people who rely on spell check and never proofread. You wind up with so many errors.

Then for *than*, *form* for *from*. Words left out of a sentence. Words left in a sentence after it's been edited. And so forth.

The first place that was willing to hire me was a market research company and they were doing interviews on the street. So, that's what I did for a year and a half. Oh, I hated it.

Q: What were you-

BLACKFORD: You had to try and get these people to stay to view an advertisement and give you feedback. They were shopping, they were busy, they didn't want to be bothered. And it was like a 15-minute process.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: It was really hard work.

Q: And you were a pretty shy person I take it?

BLACKFORD: Right, right. Well I wasn't quite so shy after I finished working for them. But then I took the Civil Service exam and I was interviewed by the Internal Revenue Service or, as my father always called them, "the enemy". IRS hired me to work as a revenue officer, the person who collects overdue taxes and makes sure that returns have been filed as required. On the one hand, you were a bill collector but on the other, there were myriad legal and accounting issues to consider. The easy bills were taken care of in the office but revenue officers actually went around knocking on doors. Some of these doors belonged to individuals, but the key for IRS was making sure that businesses which had withheld income tax and Social Security from their employees sent these funds to the government on a quarterly basis. A lot of businesses which were struggling would use those withheld wages to pay other bills instead. Those were the ones we would work hardest to collect. That knocked most of the shyness out of me but I was still terrified of public speaking. IRS gets big kudos from me on that score; they had a training course for trainers. It was a one-week course. At the end of it they turned me into a ham. You want me to talk? I will go anywhere, give you a speech, no problem. It was a wonderful training course. And I became a trainer for the new employees at the age of 26 or 27, after 2 or 3 years on the job.

Q: How long did you- were you giving the course?

BLACKFORD: The IRS system worked like this. They brought in a group of new employees who were sent to a six-week training course off-site. The trainers taught the course. There was lots of role play, lots of group discussion, problems to solve. Very hands on. After that the group came and worked in New York office as a group. They were assigned the simplest cases and the trainer became their supervisor. After six months, this group would go back to the off-site for another six weeks to cover the complex legal concepts that they needed to learn to handle more difficult cases. The trainer again would go out and teach that course and then this group would be dispersed

among the 10 or 12 regular groups of revenue officers. Then it would start over again with a new training group.

Q: I do try to pick up how organizations operate and that's what you're telling me which is- I hadn't realized it worked that way.

BLACKFORD: I found training at IRS so much better than training in the State Department. I just couldn't believe when I came in and we sat through that A-100 course. Talking head after talking head showed up for an hour and explained each bureau's mission but didn't involve you in the process. I felt I learned virtually nothing.

Q: How did you find the people coming to the IRS to be trained?

BLACKFORD: Well they were quite a mixed bag. Some of them of course, were new college graduates but interestingly, some of them were people who'd been RIFed (Reduction in Force, that is, let go for budgetary reasons) from other agencies so they were very diverse. There was one guy in my group who was 55. I don't remember what agency he'd been RIFed from but he wound up starting over at IRS. He seemed to be amused by being supervised by a 26-year-old woman. One of the people that he'd been trying to collect from came in and started giving him a hard time and said, "I want to see your supervisor." He said "oh, sure" and he brought him into my office and the guy just sort of sat there and gaped.

One of the things I learned from this experience was that I derive a great deal of satisfaction in seeing the people who work for me do well. There was a woman in one of my training groups who had very little education. She hadn't been hired to be a Revenue Officer but had started as a file clerk somewhere in the bottom of the organization, worked her way up little by little. She was running rings around the new employees when it came to dealing with people but she had a total blind spot when it came to computing interest. This was required because when you collected overdue taxes, you were also expected to collect interest for the period the taxes had been overdue. If someone offered to write you a check for the $215 they owed, you had to tell them not only do you owe me $215 but it's been six months that you've owned me $215 and at six percent interest it's blah, blah, blah. She was panic stricken trying to do this very simple math computation. It didn't even matter if she got it exact, you had leeway. Maybe if you were collecting $600,000 you'd better get it right but mostly we were talking pretty small amounts here. I worked with her and worked with her and built up her confidence. I told her that although the college kids could do the interest, I assured her that she had other talents and would in time learn to do the interest. Before she'd go out we'd compute interest on all her accounts just in case somebody wanted to pay her. She quickly learned to do computations when she was not under pressure. It was a thrill to watch her become confident, develop into an excellent revenue officer, and get promoted. I've had that same experience time after time in the Foreign Service and other places where somebody just needs a little help and you give it to them and they bloom. It's like you have the best rose garden around.

Q: Did you have any stories about some of your experiences when you got into collecting and all?

BLACKFORD: Oh, I've got stories, yes. They had a few women revenue officers already working who had been in the collections section that dealt with people who walked in, or called on phones and who had gotten promoted up to being revenue officers, but I was one of the first two women revenue officers hired from outside. I was 24 years old. Groups were assigned certain geographic areas and the first area they assigned me to work was Harlem. It was not today's Harlem, it wasn't even one of the nicer areas of 1960s Harlem. It was bad. It was drugs, it was crime, it was nasty. For security reasons, we were supposed to go out with somebody else using a government car, and most of the guys did not want to go with me, which I thought was funny because I was 24 and I could run like the wind. These guys were in their 50s; I would have been far ahead of them if we got in trouble. But that worked out to my advantage because I wound up working with the two most talented guys in the group. One had had a heart attack and couldn't get out. I ran his errands and he taught me about all the complex legal issues that could arise. Then there was a second guy who was fantastic dealing with people but like so many New Yorkers, had never learned to drive. One day he said, "so kid, can you drive?" I said yes and he became my partner and I never had any trouble finding anybody to ride with after that.

I remember one time we had taken some cases from another group which had an overflow, and these cases were on the Upper East Side. I swear one day I walked to the sixth floor of a Harlem tenement in the dark because the lights were always out and I climbed back down, got in the car, went over to Fifth Avenue and at my next stop the butler let me in. I had whiplash that day going from such different situations in such a short period of time.

Another time I had a case with a very well-known art forger who, I believe, owed taxes on unreported income. I interviewed him in the Tombs which as you may know, is the New York City jail. It was my first time being in jail and I really didn't like being locked in; it was not much fun at all.

Then there was the porno movie theater that wasn't paying its taxes. In order to get to the office, you had to walk through the theater. I did it with my eyes closed.

Q: Oh god.

BLACKFORD: So, you never knew what came next; you just never knew. It was a bit like the Foreign Service in that regard.

Q: What was the work environment? You know, there's been much talk about sexism particularly in that era.

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: Did you run across any of that?

BLACKFORD: Yes, apart from the guys who didn't want to ride with me there were also guys who hit on me. Mostly they weren't too persistent and they could be jollied along. What most women did in that era was chuckle and pretend that you didn't understand them or you ignored them to the extent that you could. I never had anybody who specifically said if you don't sleep with me, I won't promote you. It wasn't that kind of harassment but there were certainly some things that went well beyond what would be found acceptable these days.

Q: Yes. Well we've gone through a remarkable change in attitudes now, all for the best. Did you see much of a career for yourself moving up the ranks in IRS?

BLACKFORD: I thought about it and that set me on a slightly different course. I came in as a GS-5 and within a couple of years I was a GS-11 which was the journeyman grade for Revenue officers. A few did become GS-12s and supervisors were GS-13s. There weren't any women supervisors but you could see that it would happen within the next couple years. On the other hand, Revenue agents, those employees who did audits, were often 13s and supervisors were 14s. I wasn't qualified to be an agent; I didn't have enough accounting background. I didn't have any accounting background for that matter. What I knew I learned on the job. So, in an effort to enhance my qualifications, I started taking night courses at Pace University, a business school, which was located very close to the IRS office.

After I started taking accounting courses, I realized that with things I'd already taken as an undergrad, I was halfway to having an MBA so rather than an MA in international relations I decided on an MBA in international business. I got the MBA in 1972 the year I turned 30 which was then the cutoff to be hired as an FSO.

Q: Well with the Foreign Service exam, had you been thinking of this?

BLACKFORD: Yes. I don't know quite what I did with my 20s. I just went a different way for a while. But it worked out well. By the time I took the exam I could pass the oral and I had an idea that I would like to do administrative work whereas I'm pretty sure that if I'd taken the exam when I graduated from college I would have been thinking about going into the political cone, which was the most competitive so maybe I wouldn't have been high enough on the register to get hired in that cone. On the other hand, there was a shortage of administrative officers at that time.

Q: First you took the written exam.

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: How did you find the written exam?

BLACKFORD: Not too difficult. English was always my strongest subject and I was always interested in everything so I felt comfortable taking the general knowledge test as well. You never learned exactly how you did. You didn't receive a grade on the test because each year, the Department set the cutoff for the register based on the number of people who could be hired and each cone had a different cutoff.

Q: Well then how about the oral exam? What were your experiences there?

BLACKFORD: I don't remember all that much about the oral exam. The exam was held in a room at the old FSI building in the spring of 1972. I think it was the first time I had been to Washington except for my high school senior class trip. I was interviewed by three gentlemen and we had a nice session. I don't remember any of the questions but I must have answered them reasonably well since I was asked to sit in the hall for a few minutes and then they came out and told me I had passed.

Q: Well, so how did you, when did you come in and what-?

BLACKFORD: August of 1972.

Q: And you say you weren't overly impressed by the A-100 course?

BLACKFORD: No.

Q: Did you have a test-

BLACKFORD: You had information thrown at you in a kind of random way. For example, we had the medical team come in and tell you about what kind of injections you were going to need depending on your assignment. They mentioned the inoculation for plague (we were still sending people to Vietnam at this point) and one of the guys, a Vietnam veteran, raised his hand and said, "what about if you've already had the plague?" The med folks were stumped. They didn't know whether you were immune or not if you once had it. And this was before you had received your assignment so you really were in no position to ask an intelligent question.

Brandon Walker addressed us, I remember that. Several other VIPs came in and talked to us. But it was just too much information. I've taught at IRS and when I was diplomat-in-residence, and I found that if you wanted people to learn something you had to have them do something, have some input into the material. If they had not worked with the information, tried to make some sense of it, it didn't stick.

I do remember we went out to an off-site for three days of management training and everybody who was in the political or the econ cone figured this was a total waste of time. I remember being quite shocked that anybody would think that knowing something about management would be a waste of time.

Q: I guess it gave you an exposure to an attitude.

BLACKFORD: Yes. An attitude that has changed significantly but which completely confounded me at the beginning of my career.

Q: Well I was a career consular officer and I ran into this all the time.

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: Well how about you're A-100 class? How did you find them?

BLACKFORD: Oh, a great bunch of people. There were 30 of us. There were six women and that was the most women they'd probably ever had in the A-100 class. Eric Boswell was in my class, he sat next to me. We were seated by alphabet. I think you interviewed Eric. He was a very interesting guy because he was a Foreign Service brat. That fascinated me. There were three or four African Americans, also an unusually high percentage for the time.

Q: Well back to A-100 course, did you find yourself pointed towards anything?

BLACKFORD: Well the system hasn't changed much over the years; they give you a list of what's available, you express your preferences and you get what you get. In my case however, the Inspection corps came and recruited two of us, the MBAs, to go to work as auditors. This was when the corps was divided into inspectors and auditors, something that changed during my tour. I thought that sounded like a very interesting job. I would get to travel, see a lot of places which in fact I did. It gave me the opportunity to see how different embassies operated, something that I don't think that very many Foreign Service officers are able to so early in their careers. We visited 12 posts during the year and a half or so I was with the Inspection corps. There was so much difference between Europe and Latin America and Africa and small posts and large posts. It gave me perspective that there were many options, legal ones, to handle a variety of situations.

Q: Well did you- did they train you for what to- how to do this work?

BLACKFORD: There wasn't any formal training; it was learn as you go. On my first trip, I was paired up with a very talented, capable budget specialist, Alan Chase, who had many years of experience. He would give me a discreet assignment, go check this and this is how you do it. I would go do that and come back and report and he'd say well you need to doublecheck this too, or that's fine. So, I had plenty of training, on-the-job training.

Q: Well, did you go to any posts during-?

BLACKFORD: I went to 12. Quito, Lima and Tegucigalpa was the first inspection. The second inspection we went to Helsinki, Milan and Rome. Next, we did West Africa; we went to Senegal, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and Mali. Then of course, there was Conakry, Guinea; that was a revelation. Guinea was a former French colony and the

breakup had not been amicable. Sekou Toure, who was Guinea's first President had seen to that. I heard a rumor that the French were so annoyed that they took home everything they could carry including telephone poles. That may have been an exaggeration but the French blow to Guinea's infrastructure plus Touré's devotion to the Marxist economic model had ruined Guinea's economy. I visited the market and that was the saddest excuse for a market I have ever seen. One lady was selling an avocado, several stalls away another had two tomatoes on offer. The Guineans were getting by on the barter system, urban dwellers depended on their relatives in the country; the local currency was worthless. In fact, sometime during the inspection, I stumbled on the post's stash stacked in a closet. I'm not even sure the closet locked, the money was that useless. Hard currency wasn't much of a help either, though that was secured in the safe, because the local folks had no way of exchanging it for anything meaningful. Obviously, this had serious consequences for the Foreign Service staff.

It was the first post I ever visited where the staff spent about half its time just surviving the assignment. Once a week, a plane came in from Paris and the entire Embassy closed and went to the airport to pick up the week's groceries. During a power outage, everyone went home and cooked their rapidly thawing food. The policy of the Inspection corps was that inspectors were always expected to stay in hotels even if offered hospitality by the people at post. The reason was simple, if we had to level criticism of post management, it spared all of us from a very uncomfortable situation but it simply wasn't possible to follow that rule in Conakry since there were no functioning hotels or restaurants.

Conakry was also the first post where I had a child point an AK47 at me. Conakry had a curfew, quite early as I remember, perhaps 9 in the evening, so it was not surprising that we were out after the crucial hour since we had been invited to a social function at someone's house and were returning to our quarters when we hit the road block. Of course, as diplomats we were exempt from the curfew but it was not easy to explain the Vienna Convention to a 12-year old who didn't even have any idea what a diplomat was. As my life flashed before my eyes, I spared a moment to see how my more experienced colleagues were handling the situation. I thought it might come in handy if I ever faced something similar, assuming I lived through the next five minutes that is. Everyone had pasted on a patient, indulgent smile, our leader slowly explained the concept of diplomatic immunity. The guard and his companions might want to consult their superior officers. What could it hurt? Or they could just let us go. Who would know? After much muttering among our captors, they opted to just let us go. Over the years, I found the patient, smiling approach came in handy whenever I ran into an inexperienced and/or inept authority figure whether foreign or domestic.

Q: What was your impression after doing this about how the posts were run and what were the problems?

BLACKFORD: Oh well, the problems were so different. Each post was unique and the problems were very individual. You might have a very weak budget section here; over there at that post the general services section hadn't been inventoried in forever and the inmates were running the institution. Somewhere else everything was beautifully under

control. I remember going as a regional budget officer to Madagascar and the admin officer there had the cleanest, neatest warehouse I have ever seen in my life. You didn't want to come with preconceived notions. You just took everything as it came and checked it; the same thing that I did when I went out as a retired annuitant. I would run down checklists and ask when did you update this and how about this and how about this. I'd look for strengths and weaknesses; applaud the former and then start working to fix the latter.

Q: Well did you find your relations with Foreign Service officers that if you were a management officer you were kind of a second-class citizen?

BLACKFORD: Absolutely. Sometimes it was as if you hadn't been to college and learned the same things they had.

Q: Yes. Well I got this as a consular officer.

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: And it reminds me sort of very much of the British system where sort of the British-somehow the State Department I think had transferred to British class system in a way.

BLACKFORD: And a great change, I think, came in the '90s when the Cold War ended and budgets were cut, slashed. All of a sudden people who never cared anything about management suddenly realized that it was rather useful to know something about management. And maybe your management officer could help you with this resource problem you were having.

Q: Oh, my god, yes. Well, you say your inspection thing did not last very long.

BLACKFORD: Yes, it was about a year and a half. People came and went very often from the inspection corps. Something good would come up and in my case, I was offered the job as a budget officer in the regional budget office in Nairobi and I always wanted to go to Nairobi. I always wanted to go see the animals.

Maybe this is a good place to tell the story about the time I met John Eddy, who I later served with in Kenya. It happened 1967 or '68. I was living in New York and my friend Chris and I tried to travel as much as we could. We didn't have a lot of money so we stuck relatively close to home. We went to Guatemala and Mexico, we visited Surinam of all places and we took a trip to Colombia where we wound up in the town of Santa Marta and woke up one morning to realize we'd been robbed.

Q: Oh god.

BLACKFORD: Not sure if we were drugged or what. The concern for us was that Chris, my college roommate, was a police officer and she had had her badge stolen. We knew we weren't going to get anything back but we had to go to the police station and get a

police report that she could show her supervisor to indicate she had not been negligent. The hotel was outside of town and they were not cooperative at all. They said they'd do something, nothing happened. Several guests at the hotel heard our story before they went off on a tour for the day. When they came back, they had John Eddy in tow. John was economic officer in Bogota and was down at the coast on vacation with his family. Once he got involved, he put on his best Foreign Service demeanor and insisted that we be taken down to the police station so we could make a police report. And they all snapped to and took us down to the police station and got the report completed for us.

Fast forward to 1974 when I walked into the econ section in Nairobi and I said, "oh Mr. Eddy, how nice to see you again." And he looked at me and before long the penny dropped and he said "oh, that's right, you and your friend in Santa Marta, I remember, I remember." So, that was a good Foreign Service officer experience long before I joined the Foreign Service.

Q: Excellent. You were in Nairobi from when to when?

BLACKFORD: Let's see; '74 to '76.

Q: Okay. And so, you are going to be the budget and fiscal officer there?

BLACKFORD: Well, I was going to be one of them. It was a regional shop.

Q: Oh yes, well that should be really quite interesting. Could you explain what- Well in the first place let's talk about what Nairobi was like at the time.

BLACKFORD: I think almost everybody liked the post. It had a great social life. For me it was the last of an era. It was before VCRs. There were televisions but all you got was what President Jomo Kenyatta did today so there was no interest whatsoever in watching television and everybody made their own fun. After that time, very shortly after that, everybody started getting VCRs and everybody stayed home and life became a lot more like it is in the United States in terms of social life.

The housing was excellent. I was assigned a house out in the suburb of Westlands. But I have a very hard time seeing to drive at night and since Nairobi's basically on the equator sunset always came just about 6:00 and it was hard to always make it home by that time. I would drive home squinting, scared to death I was going to hit somebody dressed in black riding a bicycle without lights going down a very narrow street. And, of course, when I was duty officer, sometimes I had to come in in the middle of the night. When I learned the ambassador's secretary was moving out of her apartment which was downtown, I asked if I could move there and the housing committee allowed me to do so. The apartment had a nice balcony and stunning thing happened on one Kenyan National Day. The Kenyans had decided they were going to have four Harriers do a flyover so I went out on the balcony to catch the show. I was struck by how cloudy it was and I thought to myself that's kind of a low ceiling there. Are they're really going to do a flyover? Is that safe? And the first plane went by and it rolled and it came up, and the

second plane came by and rolled and went up. And the third plane came by, I think it was the third plane, and it rolled and I couldn't imagine how it could pull up. And sure enough it went right into the ground in the only place in the middle of Nairobi, the golf course, where it wouldn't have taken out hundreds of people. Giant fireball. I don't think there were any flyovers on subsequent National Days.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: Something I'll always remember.

My apartment was one of 12 apartments on the top of an office building and we rented nine of them. We were never lonely. We were always entertaining each other and I would go to a party and say gee, isn't that interesting. It looks like so and so has a plate just like I do. It wasn't until I came home one time and was giving a party and I looked and I said I don't own a plate that like and I realized that all the servants on the floor just went and borrowed from each other. You always had plenty of dishes. Didn't matter whether or not you actually had plenty of dishes; the servants were very clever about that.

Q: Incidentally, talking about the dishes and swapping around, I interviewed one person, this was way back; she was talking about being in Cairo and she had a turkey dinner and the butler came in to serve the turkey and slipped. The turkey went all over the ground. With great aplomb he went out and the next thing you knew he was serving roast beef. I was talking to a friend later on who said you know, the damnedest thing. We were supposed to have roast beef last night at our dinner party and we ended up with turkey. Such is the Foreign Service.

BLACKFORD:

Kenya was the first place I ever had full time help in the house and it usually came as quite a surprise to my friends and family at home who drew the perhaps logical conclusion that I was enjoying a very opulent life style. The fact was for most Foreign Service Officers living in Africa, especially those of us who were single, having domestic help, at least two or three days a week, was a necessity. Shops were open for limited hours, mostly the same hours we were expected to be at work. There were no grocery stores *per se.* Instead shopping for food and related products, often called for visiting half a dozen places of business. The open-air market sold fruits and vegetables and every purchase was a negotiation, one that went far more smoothly for a local than an expatriate. Meat was sold at the butcher. Dairy products were sometimes just not available. If you needed batteries or toilet paper or other hard goods, you might have to visit three or four small shops before you found what you were looking for. There were no prepared foods, no frozen foods. All fruits and vegetables that could not be peeled had to be soaked in a bleach solution to kill parasites like amoeba and giardia. There was no potable water. Water from the tap had to be boiled.

One of the best things about the post, was that it was large enough. There were plenty of single people and there were married people who didn't have kids. Anytime you wanted

to go on safari, and I always wanted to go on safari, you could find somebody to go with. When I passed through Paris on my way to Nairobi, I bought a Peugeot 504 built for Africa, high clearance, strengthened undercarriage, etc. and she was a very good car. I named her Cher since she was French and expensive but I told her she was a Land Rover and she believed me. We went everywhere together, down dirt roads, through mud, across streams and she never broke down though she did get flat feet quite often. Flats were so common in fact that the first thing you did when your car arrived was to have tubes put in your modern tubeless tires. It was the only way to get them repaired outside the city and some trips involved multiple punctures. On one trip, I ran over a thorn bush and wound up with 10 holes in one tire and two in another. I limped into a tiny village in Tanzania and spent hours watching a roadside mechanic painstakingly scrap and patch each puncture. It was also on that trip that the door nearly shook off. It was holding on with just a couple screws by the time I returned to Nairobi.

My family came to visit. It was the first time they'd been out to see what the Foreign Service was like. We went on the usual safari through Maasai Mara and Serengeti and Tanzania and back to Nairobi. This was my mother's second trip abroad (if you don't count Canada). She was sitting in the little mini bus that we were traveling in, watching a herd of elephants. I looked over at my mother and she was crying. My mother didn't cry as a rule and I said "Mother, what are you crying for"? And she said "oh Peggy, when I was a little girl growing up on the farm the idea that I would someday be in Africa, see an elephant in person, it is just so beyond my imagining". I realized that my mother, people from my mother's era, had experienced way more change in their lives than I had in mine. My mother grew up on a farm and there was no electricity, there was no indoor plumbing, they traveled by horse and buggy. To go from that to flying on an airplane to Africa to go on safari was truly remarkable.

An interesting thing about Nairobi was that it still retained a lot of remnants of the British Empire. You could go to the Norfolk Hotel or to the new Stanley Hotel or the Muthaiga Club and it was like stepping back in time. On Sunday, there was curry for lunch everywhere; British curry, not Indian curry. British curry with lots of chutney and raisins and sweet things like that. There were a number of Brits who had settled in Kenya and decided to become Kenyan. That influence was still around. There was a semi-professional theater which put on a new play nearly every month. Locals, mostly Brits, played the smaller parts but the theater would bring in one or two actors from London to play the leads.

Q: I was wondering was there still anything or did you hear about Happy Valley?

BLACKFORD: I had heard about Happy Valley but by the time I got to Kenya, I think most of the Happy Valley inhabitants had either drunk themselves to death or had reformed and were pretty quiet and considerably older than I was so they weren't going to talk to me about Happy Valley.

Q: But really this Happy Valley was well-known in Kenya as being the place where all the drunks and other couples who were swapping around-

BLACKFORD: They had way too much time on their hands.

Q: Anyway. That had gone. But tell me, you're talking about driving at night. I'm told that Kenya was rather dangerous to go out at night because of robberies and all. How stood that situation in those days?

BLACKFORD: Well there was a lot of talk about it but I don't remember anybody actually ever getting robbed while I was there, or if they did, they were definitely someplace they weren't supposed to be and they didn't talk about it. I wouldn't have been comfortable going out late at night and walking around but once you were in your car and locked the doors you were fairly safe. There were some reports of break-ins and everybody had a guard at their house or at the entrance to the apartment, wherever you lived. They weren't armed though. I always thought it was sort of a mafia thing. You hired the guards so that their friends wouldn't rob you.

Q: Oh yes.

BLACKFORD: I always felt that way; everywhere I went in Africa we had guards.

The most adventurous trip that I ever took, probably the most adventurous trip anyone in the Embassy while I was there ever took, was a week drive to the furthest reaches of Northern Kenya. My friend, Bob Benzinger, and I borrowed a Land Cruiser from one of Bob's friends and we drove up to Lake Turkana, previously called Rudolf. And let me tell you it was not easy to drive to Lake Turkana. If you look on the map you will find it hard to even locate a road and for a while I wasn't sure we were on a road. I had to get out and walk ahead of the vehicle and point out where I thought we might be able to get by. A lot of people did go to Turkana to go fishing but they flew up. We fished as well and were fortunate to run into some nice folks who were flying back and agreed to take our 50 or 60 pounds of Nile Perch back for us so we could continue to travel north. We were the first and the only people I knew who took a car. We had packed extra car parts. We packed water, a giant 30 gallons of water. We packed food. We packed a tent. We had medical supplies. If anything went wrong we were going to have to take care of ourselves. I did tell people it wasn't quite as lonely as I expected because every single day we passed a car, but never more than one car.

That weekend in Turkana was also the bicentennial July 4th weekend. The Entebbe kidnapping of the Israelis was ongoing. We had a short-wave radio and I've forgotten what Bob was doing but I turned on the short-wave radio trying to tune in to see if I could get any news and in this very choppy news report I heard that the Israelis had raided Entebbe and taken their people out. That was kind of an exciting way to spent July 4th.

Q: Oh yes.

BLACKFORD: After Turkana then we went north to a town, I love the name of the town, called North Horr; that's H-O-R-R. Then we drove a little north of that and we met a

camel caravan carrying salt coming from Ethiopia. We decided we'd probably gone about as far north as we ought to go; soon we were going to be in Ethiopia. We turned around and we went to the reserve in Marsabit which no one at the post had ever been to; it was so far out of the way. There were forest elephants there which were hard to see, and there was one in particular that was notorious for having gigantic tusks. We did see him and then we made it home safe and sound. I'm not sure that Embassy employees would even be allowed to make that trip today given the insecurity in the area.

Q: Well what was the embassy like?

BLACKFORD: First of all, I should tell you a little bit about the regional budget and fiscal office because it was not in the embassy *per se*. It covered 11 countries. In theory, there were four American officers. In practice, there were often only two. We had about 30 local employees. It was a good three blocks away from the embassy and it was over the Wimpy's, which for those who don't know is a chain fast food place, a poor imitation of McDonald's. I'm always going to associate that office with the smell of cheap hamburgers because it wafted up from down below. Each officer supervised a group of employees, usually six or so, who worked on certain posts. We also had a couple of specialists. The cashier specialist reviewed all the cashier reports. If somebody hired a new cashier we'd send him off to train the new cashier whether he was in Rwanda or Madagascar or wherever. He was an Indian Kenyan. A few years after I left post, he emigrated to the United States, we're still friends, and he had a career with the Department of Defense. We also had a budget specialist who was a great guy named Hassan. He ultimately emigrated to London. He had a lovely wife and she was always inviting those of us who worked in the B&F (budget and fiscal) office over for dinner. They were Pakistani Kenyans and she made a delicious curry, and I learned to like spicy food.

I supervised a group of employees and people sometimes ask about the ethnic tensions that arise in Kenya. That was certainly the case in my group. I had six employees and every single one of them was from a different ethnic group. One guy was Kikuyu, one was a Kamba, there was a Pakistani and a Luo. I don't remember all of them but I know each one was a different ethnicity. But in some ways, I was probably well off because I didn't have a majority of any ethnicity so nobody could gang up on anybody else. Each group took care of several countries. I was soon assigned to be Nairobi's BFO (budget and fiscal officer) which I enjoyed very much because it made me a part of the embassy. But I did get to visit all of our other client embassies as well.

When the Africa Bureau first started setting up embassies in newly independent countries in the 60s, there were very few educated people who were local and those usually wound up being a minister of this or the president of that. As a result, we had employed a great number of Third Country Nationals (TCNs) often French or Belgian or British, to perform a lot of the functions in the embassy. By the time I was posted to Nairobi, the Bureau was looking for a way to divest itself of TCNs because they were very expensive. They were just like American employees in that you paid them a Western salary, you gave them home leave, they got housing, they had families, you paid to send the family's

kids to school. When I arrived, there was a big switch happening. You would go to one post that still had a TCN in the budget section and you had nothing to worry about; everything ran perfectly smoothly. Then you'd go to another embassy where that TCN had gone home and been replaced by somebody local and things were not anywhere near in such good condition; there was a lot of training that needed to be done on these trips.

The first trip I ever took was to Mogadishu and I was very nervous; not about going to Mogadishu but making a good impression. I went out to the airport in plenty of time to catch the afternoon plane only to find out the plane had left at 9:00 in the morning. I was absolutely dumbfounded. I went back to the embassy and I asked one of the communication guys to send a NIACT telegram (night action – someone must come to the Embassy whatever the hour to read the message) to Mogadishu saying, "I'm so sorry I missed the plane". I learned later that it happened all the time. They'd send somebody to the airport, nobody would get off the plane and the post thought nothing of it because the schedule changed so often. I soon learned that traveling to the regional posts was often likely to be an adventure. After Idi Amin took power in Uganda and we closed our Embassy there, we tried to make sure that we always booked flights that were not scheduled to stop at Entebbe airport but in spite of my best efforts I twice took what was billed as a non-stop flight which nevertheless touched down in Entebbe. Once we were required to exit the plane and held under guard in a boarding lounge. On the other occasion, we were not permitted to exit the plane and armed guards made sure we didn't try to make a break for it. One of the funniest experiences though, was my first visit to Khartoum, also a so-called non-stop flight. About an hour into the flight we began to come in for a landing. I looked out the window and saw nothing but desert and one camel. Now I had never been to Khartoum before and didn't know quite what to expect but I was sure I ought to be able to see either the White or the Blue Nile if not both. We landed on a dirt strip, we were told to deplane, all our luggage was taken off and we were led over to a shack where we were supposed to clear customs. I say apparently as shortly afterwards, we were loaded back on the plane and the next stop was Khartoum where we went through customs and immigration all over again. Our stop I learned later had been Kassala, noted only as having been the site of an 1894 battle between the Mahdists and the Italians who later turned the area over to British in exchange for British recognition of the Italians' claim in what is now Eritrea.

But back to Mogadishu which was kind of a sad place. Our embassy compound dominated the skyline with a large green apartment building, known to us as the Jolly Green Giant

Q: Yes. Did you feel under any particular pressure while you were there concerning surveillance?

BLACKFORD: No, I didn't feel like I was being watched or anything. I probably was but I was oblivious to that. Partly that was because I barely left the embassy compound. There was a guesthouse on the compound and a big pool and a little club where you could get something to eat so it wasn't like you were out running around town. But during my visit there I really began to understand the price some of our employees had to

pay for working for us because one of our Somali employees got arrested for no reason other than the fact that he worked for us. The Somali government was not very fond of us.

Q: It much have been difficult for the budget fiscal center there because Africa was still, I mean you might say going through the growing stages.

BLACKFORD: Absolutely.

Q: Particularly when you get around- when you're talking about money we get very, very nervous.

BLACKFORD: Yes, and with good reason. But I really enjoyed it when I was assigned to overseeing the Nairobi accounts. That gave me a connection to the embassy; otherwise I really wouldn't ever have gotten to know the people in the embassy. As their budget officer though, they needed me for this and that. The other officers in the regional office who were handling Addis accounts for example, didn't have the same connection to the people in the embassy. The job certainly was a challenge however, because a few weeks after I took over responsibility for the Nairobi account I found that the cashier who had worked there for quite a long time had a somewhat irregular notion of the purpose of embassy collections. His scam was this. Back in the days before you had a phone connection to the States from your home, employees would make personal calls from the embassy. The operator would mark the call personal and when the telephone bill came in it was my responsibility, somebody in my office's responsibility, to connect the person with the amount shown on the telephone bill and then go collect. I found that these amounts were not being deposited and I started following up saying to people, "I noticed you haven't paid the bill for x." They said, "yes I did" and brought me receipts. Just not the proper official receipts. This was a "special" embassy receipt. I thought oh, well, that's interesting because none of the money had ever been deposited. So, I fired the cashier and then the fun began because I had a hell of a time getting a new cashier.

The sub-cashier, who was supposed to be able to take over, was just a disaster but we were trying to work with him when he got in an automobile accident and he was laid up for months. We went out to hire somebody and a fellow came in who looked reasonably good and my boss said hire him. I said, "I haven't got the security clearance back". He said, "I don't care, hire him." I said, "But I haven't got the security clearance back." We went back and forth several times but he was the boss, so I hired the new guy Three weeks later the security clearance came back; he'd been fired from his last job for embezzlement. So, I fired him and when I looked at his books he was already starting to find ways to steal money from us.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: Paris at that time was a giant regional financial center and the dispersing office for all of Africa and all of Europe and part of the Middle East. AF funded two or three rovers assigned to Paris but covering Africa. A couple of these rovers helped us for

a bit while I was still looking for someone new. We went back and forth. I think must hold a record. I had eight cashiers in eight months.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: The RSO (regional security officer) hated me. I would turn up at the door and the office would groan. Every time you got a new cashier you had to change the safe combination and since it was money involved it wasn't the RSO who had to change the safe combination, it was the cashier. And the cashiers didn't know how to change safe combinations. They were always nervous about it and half the time they'd forget what number they put in and then the RSO would have to figure out what to do to get the damn safe open again. This was always quite traumatic.

I think the strangest part was the two weeks I was the cashier. I couldn't find a soul to do the job. I wasn't a very good cashier but I didn't steal anything. Finally, we managed to hire a nice young man named Farhat. He worked for us for many, many years afterwards. His was the only Muslim wedding I've ever been to. I got invited to be an honorary man; to sit downstairs with the guys rather than upstairs with the women since the women didn't speak English. Farhat's career ended abruptly in 1998 when the embassy was bombed and he died along with almost the entire budget staff. I believe their offices were next to where the truck bomb went off and they lost nearly 30 people out of the budget section.

Q: Oh. What was it like being a woman in that area? Did you find there were particular problems or not?

BLACKFORD: When I'm asked that I always say that I found that people reacted first to the fact that I was an American diplomat. Being a woman was an afterthought. Mostly they were stunned to find that they were talking to an American diplomat. I never had any feeling that I wasn't getting things done because these were men who didn't want to work with a woman. I will admit that when I first went to Sao Paulo our old-time senior local GSO was kind of reluctant. He seemed primarily concerned that I might faint at his language but when I didn't, he learned fast and he became my biggest fan.

Q: How stood relations with the Kenyans?

BLACKFORD: Well, I had nothing to do with policy so as far as I know everything was all right. Everybody knew that there was a great deal of corruption, few believed it was Kenyatta himself but there were a lot of people around him, especially his wife, who were rumored to be very corrupt. As far as I know, the Kenyans were always ready to see the Americans and talk to them. We didn't have any big blow ups that I know of, but as I say I really had so little to do with policy or with interaction with Kenyan officials that I wouldn't be able to give you much information on that. Kenyan employees, yes, but not Kenyan officials.

Q: What was social life like?

BLACKFORD: Well social life was absolutely terrific. You could drop from exhaustion if you weren't careful. My friend Chris came to visit me for about three weeks. We planned to spend three or four days in Nairobi then get in my car and do the usual route of going to Maasai Mara and over to Tanzania to Serengeti and swinging back around to Nairobi. When she got to my place the first evening she said, "so what are we going to do this week?" I said, "I don't know but something will turn up." As if on cue, the phone started ringing and two hours later we had something on every night that week. Even if you didn't have company, it was that way constantly. People were always calling, come for dinner, come for a movie, there's going to be this or that or the other thing.

Q: It sounds like it would be hard to get you out of there.

BLACKFORD: Well, in some ways. But you know we all became Foreign Service officers because we like to move, to travel, and once I'd learned the job, after two or three years, I was always ready to move on.

Q: Well did you have any thoughts about where you wanted to go?

BLACKFORD: Not really. I had decided as long as my parents were alive, I would like to alternate a post in Washington and a post abroad so that I could stay in contact with the people that I loved.

Q: And how did things work out for you?

BLACKFORD: Oh, they worked out great. I got an assignment in Washington. But before we move from Kenya I want to be sure I tell you about the visit by the Secretary of State that took place while I was assigned to Kenya. Henry Kissinger decided to come. I suspect it was the first time the Secretary of State had ever visited sub-Saharan Africa. At least it certainly seemed that way when you considered the people who came along with him. None of them had ever visited Africa before. The AF (African Affairs) Bureau sent me down to Zambia to handle the budget arrangements for Kissinger's stop there. As you know these big trips are supported by many different agencies and each pays different expenses for their employees. Some agencies picked up the whole tab including room service, some just paid the basic bill, and there were extra expenses for providing refreshments for meetings and so forth. It was just a nightmare for the hotel. I picked out a desk in their accounting section and stayed there until we had all the bills sorted out after Kissinger had left.

The Zambians had never seen anything like it. This was Zambia under Kaunda, which placed a strong emphasis on a socialist regime. They were having a party congress and as far as they were concerned that was way more important than a SecState visit. There was only one hotel in town you wanted to stay at which was the Intercontinental and by the time we were ready to finalize arrangements, it was pretty well booked up with the party congress. We had a hell of a time finding enough rooms. We were doubling everybody up even though people were not happy. Then when the car plane arrived I'm not quite

sure who was more stunned by that, the Zambians or me; "We send a plane with a car on it? You must be kidding."

We had all these first-time visitors to the continent and I spent a lot of time trying to explain that room service sometimes took two hours and sometimes it never came. That was how it was. You couldn't call the airport because there was no line to the airport. There was no diet soda. If you wanted diet soda you needed to get on your airplane and fly to Europe. This was quite the culture shock for a lot of the folks on the trip.

As soon as I finished up with the Zambia trip I flew home to Nairobi just in time for Kissinger to touch down there. I asked if there wasn't something in the Constitution about double jeopardy? I was working the control room one evening and an aide came in and said "Kissinger needs his shirt ironed. He needs this for tomorrow." I thought where in the hell in this hotel will I find somebody at 8:00 or 9:00 at night to iron this shirt? I took it home, I ironed his shirt and I brought it back the next day. Never a dull moment in the Foreign Service.

Q: Oh god.

BLACKFORD: That was my introduction to SecState visits.

Q: Well then, is there anything else we should cover while you were in Nairobi?

BLACKFORD: No, I think that's everything that comes to me anyway.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BLACKFORD: The ambassador while I was there was Tony Marshall. He was a political appointee but this was his third embassy. He'd been PNG'd (*persona non grata*) out of Madagascar and got sent to Kenya. He seemed to be a perfectly nice man to me. I had very little contact with him. He was the son of Brooke Astor, a prominent socialite, and he was an investment banker by trade originally. He really seemed to be very shy, though. The one time I spent any time with him was when we had a Christmas party for the admin staff. It was up on the roof of the embassy building and I saw him standing in the corner not knowing what to do. While all these people worked for him, he didn't know any of them. They were the drivers and the clerks and the budget guys. I went over and started introducing him around. Of course, this is also the fellow that was sent to jail here in New York not long ago when he was convicted of misusing his mother's money. I had a hard time reconciling my view of Marshall, the Ambassador, with the portrait painted in the New York Times.

Q: Yes. Oh boy. Well then where did you go?

BLACKFORD: I came back to the Department. I went to work for transportation. I became the guru for travel. Now this might have been a damn dull job if it weren't for the fact that the Fly America Act had recently been passed. Pan Am was extremely vigilant

making sure that we were flying American whenever possible. Seeing how they went bankrupt a few years later, one can quite understand why they would be concerned. The Act didn't seem all that complicated; it basically said that you should fly American whenever you could but it was a little like the U.S. Constitution; it was all in the interpretation. And just when you thought you had heard every possible story somebody came up with something new. I developed a good relationship with GAO because they were the ones who adjudicated Fly American problems.

Q: This was the General Accounting Office.

BLACKFORD: The General Accounting Office, yes. Now, the Catch-22 was that GAO does not rule on anything until they have a case to rule on: that is, until someone has done something, and has had it disallowed. Most people I saw however, wanted assurances in advance that what they planned to do next week was acceptable. GAO would not rule in advance but I did make pretty good friends with the GAO lawyer who was in charge of most of these cases. She would give me general guidance or refer me to a previous ruling which I might not have been familiar with and might conceivably be applicable.

Q: Well it sounds like you were basically a lawyer.

BLACKFORD: In a way except that I had no legal training and could not give definitive guidance in many cases. The real problem from my perspective was that you could tell people how you thought they ought to fly but if they did something different they might very well get away with it. Or you could conceivably have told them the wrong thing and somebody else would come along and audit them and decide that they shouldn't have flown that way. I always tried to stand behind my advice. Sometimes I'd give the employee a memo supporting the travel. If the employee's budget officer reviewing the itinerary had questions, I would explain my thinking, and quote applicable GAO cases. To my knowledge this was sufficient documentation for the admin staff in the field which did not normally want to disallow a colleague's expenses unless absolutely necessary.

One of the best parts of the job was that George Jenkins was my boss and you couldn't ever have a nicer man than George Jenkins to work for. George had been a Foreign Service officer for the blink of an eye before he switched to Civil Service and headed up the State Transportation Office for years and years and years. He's the fellow who established ELSO (European Logistics and Support Office), the office in Antwerp that would consolidate shipments. Everything from the east coast would get shipped there and then ELSO would break it down and decide how to ship it to Africa or to other places in Europe or to the Middle East. He also supervised the freight forwarders that we had in Baltimore, in Miami, in New York and San Francisco. Not only was he very competent, he was very down to earth and had a great sense of humor.

The biggest benefit career-wise for a newly minted mid-level officer was the opportunity to build relationships across ranks and agencies, particularly the Foreign Service agencies like USIA (United States Information Agency) and AID (United States Agency for International Development). Employees would go first to CATO (Combined Airline

Transportation Office), to make their travel arrangements and when Fly America or other questions arose, CATO would direct them to my office for clarification. I got to meet ambassadors and executive directors as well as people who were very junior and they got to know me. I always found this to be one of the pluses of working in Washington where you get to meet so many more people than you do working out at a post, especially if you go to a small post.

Q: Did you get a feel for the response of various airlines? I mean, the airlines have a personality too, you know, and I was wondering whether-

BLACKFORD: Well, there was a guy from Pan Am who was the driving force behind all of this and he was constantly showing up and asking questions and double checking on this, double checking on that. We saw him with great regularity. I don't remember his name but I remember he was a constant visitor to our shores, as it were.

Q: I mean did the airlines, I mean did you basically find them cooperative or did you have a problem?

BLACKFORD: It really wasn't up to the airlines. The American airlines just wanted us to be sure we flew the maximum amount possible on their airline. But they couldn't tell us whether we should fly TWA or Pan Am or Delta or American. TWA and Pan Am were the biggies at that point. If they got word somebody was not taking their airline somewhere as they thought they were supposed to, they would certainly tell us about it.

Q: Was there turmoil in the reimbursement side of, I mean people getting the wrong reservations or something like that?

BLACKFORD: It was a little catch as catch can because you had to be called on your route by your budget person when you turned in your travel voucher. Some budget people were extremely conscientious about Fly America and some people were not. It wasn't very fair; there wasn't any central office which examined all the vouchers and decided in a systematic way who had flown the correct way and who had not. Some people would come to see me and I would tell them what I thought they ought to do and they would do something else. And they were at liberty to do something else. I'd tell them if you want to fly that way you may fly that way. I am not stopping you. I am telling you I think you are going to be penalized but I'm not stopping you. And sometimes they got penalized and sometimes they didn't. As I say hey, it all depended on who audited your travel voucher once you got to post.

Q: Well I would have thought that this would have been, particularly since this had just gone into effect when you got there that this would have been a pretty stressful situation.

BLACKFORD: Oh, it was. We got cables from the posts all the time and we got high muckety-mucks coming in to tell us that they were too important to abide by these regulations. There was a lot of pressure. But it was kind of fun and I wasn't bored.

There was enormous pressure within State to change the Fly America Act because of all the difficulty it was creating for people. Of course, Congress didn't care how much inconvenience it caused the State Department employees, so I figured out how much extra it cost the taxpayers to have us Fly America and it turned out to be well over $1 million a year. That was when a million dollars was a lot more money than it is today.

Q: Yes.

BLACKFORD: I worked with GAO and we managed to get a one-line rider in the State authorization which exempted State employees from Fly America between points overseas. The airlines wanted to have employees travel the maximum amount on American flights but that sometimes was very inconvenient. In the end we basically came up with the rule that to my knowledge, is still in effect today, you must, with a few exceptions, enter and leave the US on an American carrier.

But I must tell you my best, my funniest story from my time in that office. My file cabinet contained 50 years of files so overflowing that you could hardly slide a finger in a drawer and in my spare time I decide to clear out the cabinet. I made one delightful find. It was a letter from the consul general in Constantinople (yes, Constantinople not Istanbul) apologizing for the five-year delay in shipping Mr. Smith's piano from Izmir. The Consul did have to remind the Department that the fate of Mr. Smith's piano had been complicated by the fact that until recently the US had been at war with Turkey. The date of the letter was 1919.

Q: Oh god. Oh god.

BLACKFORD: I just thought that was precious. We sent that to the Department's historian.

Q: Was there a problem with traveling first class as opposed to-?

BLACKFORD: No. Almost no one got to travel first class. I'm not sure if we even had business class back then, or if it was all first class or coach. I don't think there was quite the same desire to travel business that there is now because then the airplanes were so often empty you could go coach to Africa and you'd get three seats across and you could sleep. It wasn't anything like it is today where every single seat is taken and you're stuck in a middle seat and the seats just get smaller and smaller and smaller.

Q: Yes. I must say traveling by air today is not very fun.

BLACKFORD: No. It was still clear who could travel first class; it was assistant secretaries or anyone in an emergency if everyone agreed it was an emergency and first was the only thing available. But there wasn't a lot of aggravation about first class or coach.

The last thing I wanted to mention about this point in my life was that this is when I learned about the women's class action lawsuit. You were automatically part of the class, that's the way class action suits operate unless you opt out. I saw no reason to be part of this class action lawsuit because it just didn't seem to me like I was being discriminated against. I guess I couldn't really see the glass ceiling from where I was sitting. But there was a meeting to talk about why Alison Palmer and a number of other women had decided to bring the lawsuit and what it might mean for you. At this meeting the one thing that convinced me that I needed to stay part of the suit was that they said in 1966 there had been one woman DCM (deputy chief of mission, the number two in an embassy); and 10 years later in 1976, there was still just one woman DCM. I said to myself, "hmm, I really want to be a DCM. I like the idea of being a DCM and in another 10 years when I might be senior enough to be a DCM I would like there to be more than one slot available to a woman so maybe I better stick with this lawsuit". That's how I came to be part, not one of leading lights to be sure, but a member of the class. Which, in the fulness of time, turned out to be very useful.

Q: Yes. And it really did open things up.

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: There very definitely was a matter of discrimination.

BLACKFORD: I don't think for the most part it was conscious discrimination. It wasn't just even discrimination against women. It was discrimination against consular officers, discrimination against admin officers. Everybody, I never really understood this, but it seemed to me like everybody wanted to have somebody as their deputy who was just like them. If I'm a white male political officer, then I want a white male political officer to be my deputy. There wasn't an appreciation of diversity. I never wanted to have somebody just like me work for me: I wanted people with different strengths. I don't know if that made me unusual but I really, really enjoyed having people work for me who brought different abilities to the table, but it wasn't generally like that at that time.

Q: Well then where did you go?

BLACKFORD: I went to Sao Paulo from there. Mary Ryan had pushed me for that. Mary was always a mentor for me. It seemed like a terrific idea at the time. It was a small post said to have a well-trained staff, and it was a consulate so you should be able to get support from the embassy. However, once I got paneled, the fire happened. The Sao Paulo consulate general was on the fourth or fifth floor of a high rise commercial building with apartments above. The inspectors who had visited there had repeatedly said that it was a fire hazard. In fact, the residents of the building were extremely fortunate to have us as their tenants because it was the Marines who discovered a fire in the middle of the night. They sounded the alarm, summoned the fire department and got the residents out of the building; otherwise hundreds of people might have died. Sao Paulo was notorious for its high-rise fires. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie "Towering Inferno"?

Q: Yes.

BLACKFORD: It's based on a fire that took place in 1974 in Sao Paulo's Joelma Building. One hundred seventy-nine people died. It was the greatest loss of life in a skyscraper fire until 9/11 but it was due to lack of safety standards rather than terrorism. While I was there I saw a high-rise go up in flames. I was out shopping and I saw smoke coming out of a building on the main drag, *Avenida Paulista*. I heard the sirens in the distance and I continued on my errands. When I returned half an hour later, there were flames coming out of the building. The fire department managed to put out a floor and then the fire spread to the next floor. It was 20 stories, something like that. Fortunately, it was a Saturday so they only had the cleaning crew in the building and they got almost everybody off the roof using a sling to the next roof. There were still five fatalities. I stood there and watched for an hour; it was just extraordinary. These were the kind of fires that they had in Sao Paulo with great regularity.

By the time I got to post, everybody had been in temporary quarters for eight months. Most people had no offices. It was just a giant floor with some temporary partitions stuck around here and there. My experience since has been that people are great in a crisis but after eight months they expect normalcy and in Sao Paulo, normalcy was not in the cards. It wasn't anything I could give them for quite a long time. And it was by far my worst tour in the Foreign Service. I broke all my own rules. I was taught to never let them see you sweat; don't put in outrageous amounts of overtime, don't lose perspective. Instead I worked 12-hour days, six days a week; on Sunday I was only putting in four or six hours. I had no idea what I was doing. I inherited a full in-box; in six months I hadn't gotten to the bottom of that box.

Q: My god.

BLACKFORD: I was short-tempered. I defended my staff even when they weren't right. I got mono. I lost a patch of my hair. And just seven months after I got there we moved into the new consulate and that's only thanks to the Consul General (CG), Terry Arnold. He's probably the smartest and toughest boss I ever had. By the time I got to post it had been decided that we were going to purchase six floors of a condominium. It was unfinished; no ceilings, no drywall, no finish on the floors, no office partitions. Just an empty floor with plumbing and electrical wires coming up through the middle of it. It was a major construction project.

Q: So, that must have just added on to your burden, didn't it?

BLACKFORD: Oh yes, because while I tried to keep the people in temporary quarters moderately happy, I was also dealing with all the construction issues. I ran into difficulties in the first week with the condo manager. He owned the building and he was selling the floors. Oscar; I'll never forget Oscar. He was very hard to deal with. He'd been negotiating with the Brasilia admin counselor. And neither one of them saw any reason to include me in their discussions. Once the Brasilia admin counselor went back to

Brasilia, Oscar became my problem. He was always saying, "Ah, but the counselor from Brasilia said blah, blah, blah." It was not much fun.

Q: Oh.

BLACKFORD: But shortly after that we contracted, with OBO (Office of Overseas Buildings) input of course, for construction of new offices and we had a much better collaborator, a Japanese company. Are you familiar at all with the Japanese influence in Sao Paulo?

Q: Well in Brazil it's the biggest overseas-

BLACKFORD: Japanese population in the world, yes.

Q: Yes.

BLACKFORD: They settled mostly in Sao Paulo. There were a million Japanese who lived in the state of Sao Paulo. They'd come to Sao Paulo or they'd come to Brazil starting in 1908 to work on the coffee plantations. They were mostly farmers, vegetable farmers. I was greatly indebted to them because they introduced vegetables to the Brazilian diet. To this day if you go to a Brazilian restaurant and ask, "What do you have for vegetables?" They'd tell you, "We have rice, we have beans, we have potatoes." They rarely have anything green. It was the Japanese who started to grow green vegetables, and anytime you went to a green grocer it tended to be run by Japanese.

There was a section of a town called Liberdade, which was a totally Japanese town. The CG and I often went there for lunch; this is where I learned to love sushi. While working with the Japanese/Brazilian company, my vocabulary began to expand in Portuguese to include things like title search, spot wells, conduit, dry wall. Sometimes things I didn't know how to say in English. At the same time, new employees kept arriving and expecting comfortable housing and a comfortable office, they wanted to know where their air freight was. One guy actually did ask me for his air freight on a holiday the day after I had moved the consulate all night long. I was so wiped out I wasn't quite sure how I was still standing -- he wanted to know where the hell his air freight was. He might not have been very sensitive but it wasn't an entirely unreasonable inquiry, but he never did become one of my favorite people.

The move was quite funny. Terry had said, "We are going to move in November". This was June, construction had not started. We all looked at him and said" huh"? We couldn't imagine how we could possibly move in November. But we did. At five on the Friday afternoon of what must have been Veterans' Day weekend we began. By midnight the staff and the movers had everything including all 20 or so safes full of classified material out on the sidewalk of *Avenida Paulista*. the biggest avenue in Sao Paulo. Then movers said, "oh we think we'll go home now". I panicked. My mind raced. I thought," I'm going to have to have Marines sleep on top of these safes all night." Thank god, our GSO (general services officer) and our local GSO assistant saved me and threatened the

movers until they agreed to keep moving until we got in the new digs at 4:00a.m. I went home briefly and the cat was so annoyed with me. You could practically see him look at his watch and say, "where the hell have you been?"

Q: I have a cat and I know they have their schedule and that's-

BLACKFORD: Yes, but that wasn't his concern. I had gone home briefly in the afternoon and made sure he had water and food. (I lived just a couple of blocks away.) I think he was just worried about me and didn't think that I should have stayed out so late. This was not my cat, by the way. He was just the first in my long career as a designated Foreign Service pet sitter. As you have probably gathered by now, I love animals both the domestic kind and the wild ones I got to meet along the way at my African postings and elsewhere. If I had chosen a different life, I would probably have had my share of pets but after I joined the Foreign Service it didn't seem fair to adopt a pet and then be away so often or to have to worry about moving a pet, finding a vet, avoiding posts with lengthy periods of quarantine. Instead I fell into pet sitting for anyone who asked. Over the course of my career I must have looked after 40 or 50 of other people's critters, from a Great Dane to several Yorkies, and every color and breed of cat you can imagine. It was very rewarding in the way that grandparents often extoll. You keep them, you spoil them and when you need to go away or get some peace and quiet, you just give them back.

But back to Sao Paulo. This was the time when not every post had an RSO (regional security officer) so the day to day duties fell to me as the post security officer, a job later taken over by the GSO. It was not too long after Vietnam and we did not have the best crop of Marines I have ever seen because going into the service was just not very popular in the years immediately following the end of the war in Vietnam. We had this one Marine who was not a very good marksman. He was on duty in the middle of the night and felt he ought to practice his draw. Now, he had an empty gun that he was practicing with and he had his regular sidearm. Somehow or other he got them mixed up and he fired his loaded gun; the bullet went through the throat of George Washington (his portrait to be sure), out the window and into the building next door. As a result, in the middle of the night, five Marines, the GSO, and the gunny (Gunnery Sergeant, supervisor of the detachment), were all on the ground with flashlights trying to find the bullet so that the neighbors wouldn't know what happened. They found the bullet which must have ricocheted off the building next door but I don't think the landlord really did believe me, when I told him some fish story about how the window in the consulate got broken. Eventually he just took our money and got the window fixed.

Q: Oh god.

BLACKFORD: It was an interesting time. There was never a shortage of things to go wrong in Sao Paulo. In spite of that, I really liked Sao Paulo as a place to live far better than Rio. Most people think Rio would be the place to go and we all got to go there with a certain regularity because we did not get a classified pouch; it came to Rio. One of us, a cleared American employee had to go pick it up rather than having it brought by a professional courier. Sao Paulo's airport was one of those that often made the list of most

dangerous. It was located right in the middle of town and when you landed you could look in the apartment windows as you went by. The runaway was very short and ended in a drop off onto a major highway. It's still used for domestic flights but there is now a new international terminal outside Sao Paulo. When I was there however, all international flights landed in Rio. Once a week or so someone would do the non-pro (non-professional) courier run up to Rio. If you went up on Friday you could stay for the weekend and pick up your pouch Monday morning and get on the plane and return to Sao Paulo. I should perhaps add a note about the diplomatic pouch. People who have seen movies, especially ones from the '40s, have this idea that one handcuffs a briefcase to one's wrist when carrying a diplomatic pouch. Well, perhaps in the '40s but by the time I joined the service, if you carried a pouch, it was a large orange canvass sack. You looked more like Santa Claus than a suave, mysterious, diplomatic agent. Apart from looking quite silly with your orange burden, taking the pouch to Rio for those of us in Sao Paulo afforded us the opportunity to have an inexpensive weekend in Rio. Rio was a nice change once in a while but I didn't like Rio's climate, it was so hot, whereas Sao Paulo was a lovely cool most of the time because it was up on a 3,000-foot plateau. The traffic in Rio was bad. Not that the traffic in Sao Paulo couldn't be bad too but much of Rio is sandwiched between the mountains and the ocean; all the traffic funnels along one narrow path. And then there was the crime. The crime in Rio was just unbelievable. I would sit outside in front of the hotel where I used to stay and watch people getting robbed. I don't think I ever went to Rio when I didn't see somebody get robbed. They'd get their pocket picked, they'd get their purse snatched. Nothing violent but very common.

So, I was very happy to be in Sao Paulo. Of course, it was the biggest, the largest city in South America which suited me just fine being as how I loved New York; it made New York seem almost small. It wasn't a place for a tourist. There really wasn't very much for a tourist to do but it was a very comfortable place to live and I enjoyed it.

Q: Well what was social life like there?

BLACKFORD: Mostly I was just so tired that I had very little social life of any kind. I did get to travel a bit. Iguazu Falls was in our consular district so I went there several times, at least once on a VIP trip and a couple of times when friends came to visit. It is a beautiful place. I also had the opportunity to travel to Salvador where I stayed with the CG and his wife during *Carnaval* one year. Rio was where most people wanted to go but insiders insisted that Salvador was a much more traditional experience. I only know that while the celebration in Salvador was lively and authentic, it was much tamer than Rio where the crowds at the hottest time of year probably would have been too much for me. I spent a lot of my free time at jewelry stores. Brazilian jewelry stores were very welcoming and they went out of their way to educate you if you showed a genuine interest. I made two good friends among the jewelers and when I visited, they would often go in the back of the safe and bring out all the unusual items that they had acquired since my last visit. They knew I was unlikely to buy a $10,000 aquamarine but they were always happy to let me look. Of course, I did make quite a few less expensive purchases and whenever guests came to town looking for jewelry, I steered them to my friends.

Other than that, I didn't have much of a social life. Remember, 12 hours a day, six days a week for the first year or so I hardly left my office

Q. *Yes, that must have gotten a little bit long, didn't it?*

BLACKFORD: It did indeed. I was supposed to be three years in Sao Paulo but at the end of two after we'd moved and we got all the new furniture in and we got most of the old furniture out to be sold and the post was in some sort of shape, I decided I needed to curtail. The stress had been too much and I had bad relations with a lot of the people because I hadn't been able do what they reasonably wanted done. It simply was not possible or, at least, it had not been possible for me and I thought if somebody new came in he or she could start with a clean slate and establish new relationships. So, that's what I asked the Department for and they agreed to that.

I should tell you that Sao Paulo is where I came across my first CODEL (congressional delegation). It was extraordinary. I'd heard about CODELs but this one lived up to every bad thing I'd ever heard. First of all, they got off the plane and they literally asked, "what country are we in".

Q: Oh, my god.

BLACKFORD: They cancelled all sorts of meetings that they had asked us to schedule. They had said they were interested in economic activities and we'd gone out of our way to try to line up all these appointments and then when they arrived they said "oh no, we don't want to be bothered". I was working the control room and spouses were sitting around talking and one of them said, "oh, they really owe us this because it was such a tough campaign we really need a break". And there I was taking it all in and thinking" taxpayer sitting here; why am I paying for your vacation?" Worst of all was that the chairman of the CODEL, who was head of a key committee, had brought his wife with him. She obviously was bi-polar and she was having a manic attack. She insisted upon hanging out in the control room with the CODEL doctor, who I really felt sorry for, while she told us everything we didn't want to know about her husband's sexual preferences.

Q: Oh.

BLACKFORD: Fortunately, I didn't have to deal with many CODELS. Serving much of your career in Africa does cut down on the number of visitors you get at post and when I was posted to Paris as HR director, I rarely had much to do with them apart from making sure we had the visits adequately staffed. The occasional CODEL to Africa was usually different. As a rule, just one or two people with a serious interest would come and those were fine. Other CODELs never seemed very worthwhile to me.

Q: Well, usually CODELs in the long run make sense because they do expose members of Congress to the actual conditions overseas. It doesn't always work but it does give us a chance to say what's what, describe the situation and kind of point it out to them and to get our point of view into the congressional mind.

BLACKFORD: You have a point but a CODEL like this really seemed to do nothing but annoy our contacts and waste our time. They learned nothing except what interesting things you could shop for in Brazil. And I've also seen CODELs that required so many creature comforts that when you went out of your way to somehow or other produce these, they just assumed that's how you lived.

Q: Oh yes, no, you're right, there are all sorts of things but in the long run I suppose they make sense. But it's not easy.

BLACKFORD: No.

Q: How did you find the, I would say the Brazilians but basically the people of Sao Paulo? I mean, were they like New Yorkers?

BLACKFORD: I loved the Brazilians. *Paulistas,* the people of Sao Paulo, had the reputation of being very serious, hard-working. Other Brazilians often made fun of them for this but I found them to be delightful. Maybe they didn't party quite as much as the *Cariocas,* the people of Rio, but they did party. When we completed the move to the new consulate, I threw a party for the admin staff at my apartment. Everyone came. We rolled up the rugs, and danced till we dropped. I'll never forget the sight of the CG doing the jitterbug with the janitress. Maybe partying helped the Brazilians forget some of the problems they had when I was there. Inflation was bad, prices were constantly going up and wage surveys weren't keeping pace so there were a lot of difficulties for our employees. But generally speaking, they were lovely people. Our attorney, who worked with us, was absolutely the smartest, nicest guy, and got us out of so much trouble managing all of these contracts and construction and Oscar, our condominium manager.

Q: One of the things I've never served in Brazil but particularly in a- at one point, this is mainly talking about Rio, but it's said that the Brazilians, particularly the upper-class Brazilians, the males often had mistresses and this habit got picked up by a lot of our Foreign Service officers. Was there a problem with extramarital relations there or not in your time?

BLACKFORD: Not to my knowledge. One of the things that I noticed most was that single guys who came to Brazil pretty much always went home with a Brazilian wife. The Brazilians women seemed to find the American diplomats attractive and certainly American men found Brazilian girls attractive. But I never heard of any extra martial goings-on. I try not to be much on gossip and people know that, they don't usually tell me things. But as far as I know nothing like that went on in the Sao Paulo consulate.

Q: Yes, I found myself in some places where I'd be oblivious to things and my wife would say don't you know.

BLACKFORD: Well, not having a wife I missed those things.

Q: But she wasn't much into this but she would just hear.

BLACKFORD: Of course.

Q: It's not as though we relish knowing about things but the problem is sometimes it gets- you really have to know who's with whom and-

BLACKFORD: It gets pretty sticky.

Q: Well then where did you go after this?

BLACKFORD: Well, I went back to personnel to be a career mangler or career destruction officer or whatever people call CDOs (career development officer) these days. And once again it was Mary Ryan who recommended me and I was proposed to replace Johnny Young, another friend, to be the number two in the counseling office for the administrative officers. I was responsible for the admin officers and the admin specialists at grades three and four, all 350 of them.

Q: Oh yes, I had a job like that for consular officers and you-

BLACKFORD: Oh.

Q: Yes. You really got to know your, you might say your cadre there.

BLACKFORD: Yes, especially the ones who were difficult. Those over complement people you couldn't find a job for.

Q: Well talk about some of your, this work.

BLACKFORD: At the time I was there, one of the big challenges was the mid-level program which sought to bring in people with relevant experience to the mid-ranks of the Service. It was an effort to try and bring in more minority officers as well as women but it didn't work very well because it was like bringing a captain into the military who hasn't been a lieutenant. There are just things you are expected to know about the organization and this lack of knowledge really disadvantaged a lot of these people. We sent them out to posts and they didn't know how to write a cable or file a travel voucher, simple things that all junior officers had learned to do. They might have been an expert in Asia and spoke Mandarin like a native but they didn't understand the organizational or the social rules of State Department. I think we disadvantaged them and a lot of them did not do well. Of course, you had people like Pru Bushnell who came in through the mid-level program. Given that she was a Foreign Service brat this was not a difficulty for her.

Q: I've interviewed her. She's really a remarkable person.

BLACKFORD: She is indeed.

Q: Also, she thinks in terms of systems. I mean, she's a good management officer which is not something that you find in the normal Foreign Service officer.

BLACKFORD: She came in in the management cone but she rose quickly and she was very good at policy as well. And she always said just what she thought. I was so proud of her for arguing over and over and over again that our embassy in Nairobi was dangerous and we needed to move. Nobody paid any attention to her, in fact, they got rather annoyed with her but at least when the worst happened she could say I did my very best to get them to do the right thing.

Q: Yes. She wasn't very popular-

BLACKFORD: Pru never seemed to care whether or not she was popular. I admired that a lot.

During my time in personnel, I learned a lot about EERs (employee evaluation reports), how they were good, how they were bad. I read every one written on each of the people I counseled and I sat on a number of promotion boards over the years. At posts, I'd give little seminars on the art of writing EERs and people would ask, "How many EERs have you actually read". Most of them were only familiar with their own and maybe a few they had seen while sitting on a review panel at post, perhaps a 100 and I'd say, "I've seen thousands." They'd look at me in disbelief.

I found it rewarding to work with people who gotten a bad review. They'd come in furious. I'd suggest that they draft their statement, then come back and we'd go over it. They'd bring back the draft and you could almost see the steam rising from the page and I'd take it from them and tear it up and say, "now let's figure out what we're really going to write now that you've got that off your chest." I think I managed to keep a number of people from doing their career in by blowing their top. Some people just couldn't be helped though, some of the things they wrote in their own section of the EER. One time when I sat on a panel, I remember that the criticism of this person was that he was somewhat verbose. And he wrote a rebuttal of four pages. It just dumbfounded me.

Q: Well, we used to call this the suicide box.

BLACKFORD: Exactly.

Q: This was where you were allowed to rebut.

BLACKFORD: Yes. It was never very easy to rebut. I would always counsel everyone to go along the lines of I'm really so sorry that my boss and I didn't see eye to eye. In spite of his criticism I really think I accomplished a fair amount, blah, blah, blah, and I hope that it will go better in the future. Because you just couldn't say what you really wanted to say. One on occasion though, the officer got revenge with a capital R. His boss criticized his drafting skills. He replied saying how he disliked *"misspelling*". His boss, of course, had commented on his "*mispelling*".

Q: Yes. Well, it's an art.

BLACKFORD: It really, really was, and suspect still is. I found it difficult to some extent to be the CDO. I hadn't realized how important the assignment officer was as opposed to the CDO. If the bureau didn't want you, you were not going to get assigned there. They would do everything in their power to keep you out.

I also learned the difference between what you had in your file and what your corridor rep was.

Q: Yes.

BLACKFORD: And how the corridor rep was everything when it came to getting a new assignment. It might be very nice that you got promoted because somebody gave you a good EER that you might or might not have deserved but you were never going to get any kind of a decent assignment unless you had a good corridor rep as well.

Q: Well, how did you find- were there particular problems in dealing with administrative officers in paneling?

BLACKFORD: Well I think the challenge of being a CDO for the admin people was that there were so many different kinds of admin people. You had career budget officers, career GSO specialists, career personnel specialists, and then you had generalist admin people. And trying to find the proper niche for all these people was difficult. Of course, there were people who you simply couldn't get an assignment for because everybody knew, or at least the corridor reputation was that these were poor performers. You could probably get them a job eventually if they were simply believed to be weak performers but those who were reputed to be difficult, hard to deal with all the time, that really was almost impossible to overcome.

Q: And also, I mean, in many ways having a difficult person in administration is much worse than having a difficult person in say political or economic where they can go-

BLACKFORD: Put them in a corner.

Q: They weren't very good at producing but hell, they weren't screwing up your bathroom or something like that.

BLACKFORD: Exactly.

Q: Well, how did you, I mean did you essentially bury an officer or-?

BLACKFORD: Well, we used to find them something temporary, send them to a course. We'd suggest training. If you were a GSO specialist; we might recommend that you take the budget course or vice versa. We parked a lot of people at FSI training center (Foreign

Service Institute) at least short-term while we kept trying to find something that we could do with them or occasionally we'd find some temporary assignment, sometimes at another agency. It wasn't very fair but there weren't any good solutions for these folks.

Q: Well I remember we used to be- something we'd call sort of training officers and just, as you said, these are people we couldn't do anything else with so we trained the hell out of them.

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: Oh boy.

Well, one of the things about having an assignment in personnel like that is you can usually use it to get yourself a good job somewhere.

BLACKFORD: That is exactly true. And that's what I did.

Q: So, what did you do?

BLACKFORD: I got a desk officer position in Southern African Affairs. I really wanted to be a desk officer, I really wanted to stop being an admin officer for a little while. People say to me, you were an old AF hand but I didn't start out that way. I just found that AF was much more amenable to taking a square peg and rounding off the corners. EUR (the European Bureau) got their choice of anybody they wanted. If they wanted a dodecahedron they could find somebody who was just the right fit. But AF was always having trouble getting people to go here and there and so they were much more flexible. And no admin officer, before I got assigned, no admin officer had ever been a desk officer before, at least not to my knowledge.

Q: So-?

BLACKFORD: So, the Bureau liked me from Nairobi and from our dealings while I was in Personnel, and when I interviewed with the Deputy Director of AF/S, I was accepted. It was a great job, at a great time in AF/S, which was one of the busiest offices in the Department because this was the era of South Africa and apartheid and constructive engagement. I took the job against the background of the continuing Cold War. There were a lot of problems in Southern Africa; there was a rebel movement in Namibia which was still ruled by South Africa. There was a large contingent of Cubans in Angola. The people who were in charge in Mozambique, that is, were nominally in charge in Mozambique, were very Marxist Leninists in their thinking and the South Africans didn't like that at all so they were supporting a rebel movement there. The concept of constructive engagement, which was Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker's notion, was under heavy fire by many opponents of our policy towards South Africa. It was thought to be a policy of appeasement to the South Africans; it was thought to be inherently racist. In fact, what Chet hoped to accomplish was to put an end to the wars in the region, to bring peace to the region so that perhaps the South Africans would feel less anxious

about the neighbors and more amenable to making changes at home once they didn't feel that it was likely that communists or other agitators would take over and totally destroy the way of life of the white South Africans.

By the middle of my tour this policy had come under a lot of pressure and there was more and more interest in placing boycotts or embargoes on South Africa. And this began to happen little by little although never to the satisfaction, the total satisfaction of the opponents of our South African policies. Actually, I always felt that the opponents were quite helpful in making the policy work because Crocker could go to the South Africans and say, "Look, we recognize that you have problems here and the administration is not anxious to place more sanctions on you but we've got a lot of problems at home too, we're under a lot of pressure. If you don't give us something these sanctions are going to increase and there will be no argument we can make to forestall them". So, I think in a way it helped us to push for change.

When I became a desk officer, it was a highly sought-after job. They were normally reserved for political and econ officers. Once in a while, a consular officer would get one, especially in a country with a large consular work load like Mexico or the Philippines but never admin officers. If an admin officer wanted a comparable job he or she aspired to become a post management office, that is the liaison with post for administrative rather than policy matters. If I was not the first, I was certainly one of the very first admin officers to become a desk officer. It turned out to be a good fit because an awful lot of the job was making appointments, pushing paper, doing briefings, lots of things that admin officers are quite good at. I'm surprised that today desk officer jobs are not being sought after. When I've gone out as a retired annuitant, WAE (When Actually Employed), I routinely found that the desks for the countries I was in weren't filled, that there was some summer intern doing them, that they couldn't find anybody. I just don't quite understand why this change took place. For me, the job was very interesting, career-enhancing, and varied.

I was originally assigned to be the Botswana and Swazi desk officer. Botswana and Swaziland were what were then called the frontline states, the states that bordered on South Africa and depended upon South Africa for almost all of their manufactured goods. Many like Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana and Zimbabwe were landlocked. There was no way of them getting goods imported except via South Africa and they had to walk a difficult path. As majority ruled black states, they all opposed apartheid but they had to mute their criticism to some extent or risk not having access to essential goods My two countries, however, Botswana and Swaziland, really couldn't have been more different. Swaziland was a very traditional society. King Sobhuza, who was an absolute monarch, had died just before I took over. The country was politically very old-fashioned but economically there was a lot of South African investment and the nation was much better off than many countries in the region. There was a lot of investment in both Botswana and Swaziland by European and American companies that wanted to be near South Africa but didn't want criticism from their home states for working in South Africa. Investing in the neighbors was good business. It insulated them from criticism but still kept them in the South African market.

Botswana was, for me, by far the more interesting of my countries. When the Batswana (plural, the Tswana people, singular Motswana, language Setswana) got their independence in 1966, I believe they had six university graduates and 11 miles of paved road. Or maybe it was the other way around; I can never remember. But either way they were the poorest of the poor. Just after independence they found diamonds. Now, in most countries, finding diamonds wouldn't have done much for the people of the country as a whole, because in most countries where there's oil or some other mineral resource, all of that income goes to a handful of people. But things were very different in Botswana (the land of the Tswana). They used those resources to benefit everyone. They improved roads. They improved education. They improved health care. This tends to support one of my theories that it really does matter who your leaders are, especially at the beginning of your existence.

The first president of Botswana was Seretse Khama. He was the traditional chief of the Bamangwato, a division of the Tswana ethnic group so it was a natural fit. But he was a very well-educated man and he was without a corrupt bone in his body as far as I could learn. He supported the ideas of democracy, free speech and formally abdicated his position as chief, opting instead to push for a democratic government. Botswana has always had an opposition party, although Khama's successors have all been from his party, and have been criticized for being oligarchs. This is not a totally unfounded charge but it has always been a very benevolent oligarchy.

When it came to diamonds, Khama and the government were very smart. Many countries which have discovered mineral wealth, have opted to simply take a percentage of the profits of the sale of the raw materials. However, instead of just letting the De Beers organization come in and take over which would have been the usual deal, Botswana entered into a 50 percent joint venture with De Beers called Debswana and insisted that in addition to profits from the sale of the diamonds, DeBeers would train a certain number of Botswana's citizens to sort and cut a percentage of the diamonds which hadn't happened in any of the other countries where diamonds had been found. This created jobs for people in Botswana, good jobs.

When I went on my first visit to Botswana, I was invited to go to Debswana and to see the sorting and cutting operation. It was very hard to get an invitation because they don't like people running around while they've got loose diamonds out on the tables. We had to leave purses, briefcases, all that sort of thing at the front door. But it was really fascinating to watch this operation.

During my first visit to Botswana, I was delighted to have the opportunity of meeting Khama's widow, Lady Ruth Khama, and his son, Ian Khama, who was then the head of the Botswana defense force (now President of Botswana), both of whom came over for dinner at the ambassador's house while I was there. Lady Ruth was nearly as remarkable as her husband had been. The two met in London in 1947, when Khama was studying law and Ruth was a clerk at Lloyd's. They married after about a year and created quite the uproar. The Batswana were not thrilled to accept a foreign, white woman as the "Mother

of the Nation" but little by little, the Khamas won them over. On the other hand, the South Africans who had just begun to put in place the doctrine of apartheid, were horrified to contemplate the idea of an interracial couple ruling next door and put intense pressure on the British who desperately needed South Africa's mineral resources to shore up its postwar economy. As a result, the British, banished the Khamas from Botswana, then Bechuanaland, a British Protectorate, in 1951 and did not allow their return until 1956.

When it came to tourism, the Batswana also made some very smart decisions. I had seen how the Kenyans managed their tourism. The idea there was to pack just as many tourists as you possibly could into every single game drive and this resulted in dozens of little zebra-striped buses running around. If somebody found a lion then soon there were six zebra buses around one lion who you could imagine was thinking, "oh would you people go home so I can get me a wildebeest for supper". But the Batswana decided that instead of doing that they would make going on safari in Botswana very expensive and very exclusive. To this day most of the camps in Botswana, and they're almost all camps, not big lodges as it in Kenya or Tanzania, hold a maximum of maybe 16 or 20 people. When you go out on a game drive and you find a lion it's your lion until you get tired of it and then you call someone on the two-way radio and say that there's a lion over here if you want to come. In terms of going on safari I always recommend Botswana as being the very best place because it's a much more authentic experience than you'd get in many other places and less traffic is better for the animals and the environment. Botswana has been criticized for its treatment of poachers. Shoot to kill is the policy and while this seems somewhat extreme, the fact is that the poachers often come equipped with automatic weapons and have been known to kill any game wardens they run into.

Q: Well Peggy, tell me something about cutting the diamonds. I've always understood that, the area, it usually was Amsterdam and also in parts of New York where the Hasidic Jewish concentrate in this field. The idea of taking a chisel or something and hitting the diamond and having it come out just horrifies me.

BLACKFORD: Well you know, the thing about diamonds-

Q: Where do they get the expertise?

BLACKFORD: Well someone came and trained them. And you don't hit diamonds with a chisel; they will crack and break that way, they are cut with a diamond saw, that is a saw that has been coated in diamond dust. Diamonds are extremely hard but they're also very brittle so you can break them very easily. Diamonds are cut in different places according to their value. Really, really, expensive big diamonds go to Amsterdam or occasionally to New York; mostly to Amsterdam. But the lesser diamonds, the kind that you find in the $100 or $200 friendship ring that you get at the jewelry store at the mall are mostly cut in India or occasionally in South Africa which provided the trainers for the people in Botswana. The Batswana don't cut all their diamonds; the most expensive diamonds still go to Amsterdam. But the run of the mill diamonds, a lot of them do get cut in Botswana.

Q: Did you find that you had problems of diamond sharks hanging around trying to get in there at all?

BLACKFORD: No. There was very little opportunity for that kind of thing. The diamond mining in Botswana is all done underground in a mine. Sharks thrive in places where they do alluvial mining, that is where the diamonds have been carried from their original site by water and are scattered in a river bed so anybody might be able to pick up a diamond and sell it to one of these merchants. But when there's underground mining, then you are searched very carefully when you leave to make sure that you don't have any diamonds tucked away anywhere. In addition, Botswana's mines are out in the middle of the Kalahari Desert. You can't just hang out around the mine without being noticed. Once the diamonds get to the capital, which is where the cutting and sorting operation is, they are kept in a 10-story building with very good security. People can't just walk in and out or take diamonds out of the building.

Q: Did Swaziland or wherever else you had authority, were they also having diamonds there or not?

BLACKFORD: No. I believe the Swazi have since found some diamonds but they did not have a diamond operation when I was the desk officer, at least any kind of a substantial one.

Q: As a desk officer what were you doing in Swaziland?

BLACKFORD: Not very much really. It's really just part of our policy to have universal representation everywhere. Mary Ryan was ambassador to Swaziland after this time and in her oral history I read that she figured after she'd read the traffic by 10:00 or so she was at a loss what to do with herself so she started accepting every conceivable invitation that she got. But there wasn't really a great deal going on in Swaziland.

Q: How did constructive engagement sit with the officers in your bureau?

BLACKFORD: Well, I think it was a little bit of self-selection. I don't think most of us would have gone to work in the bureau at that time if we hadn't thought that constructive engagement, as Chet Crocker saw it, didn't have a distinct possibility for long-term success, not short-term success but long-term success. And in fact, it worked. It took a long time but ultimately the Cubans left Angola, Namibia gained its independence, the war in Mozambique came to an end and the South Africans began to ease up on restrictions on blacks and other non-whites and shortly after that there was real change taking place in South Africa.

Q: I interviewed Chet Crocker and he talks about his, you might say his war with the CIA, particularly under Casey, that the CIA was sort of hand in glove with the South African security people and he almost had his own covert operations, spying on what the CIA was doing. Did you have any part of that?

BLACKFORD: No. I'm not familiar with that. I'm not surprised the CIA might have worked with the South Africans. It seems to me that in general the CIA always liked the *status quo* as long as that *status quo* was pro-Western, anti-communist.

Q: Did you have many dealings with the South Africans?

BLACKFORD: Not when I was Botswana and Swazi desk officer. Later on, I became one of the assistants on the South African desk. Of course, everybody always joked that Chet Crocker was really the desk officer for South Africa and everybody else was definitely lower down on the totem pole as far as the South Africans were concerned. I did go to South Africa on one occasion with regard to the nuclear problems which we'll talk about a little later. But there wasn't a lot of interchange between me and the South Africans because there were so many people above me in the chain of command.

Q: Did you find- How about the traditional rulers of Swaziland?

BLACKFORD: Yes.

Q: What were they like?

BLACKFORD: Very traditional. They weren't very well educated. King Sobhuza was by reputation more so but once he died, they reverted to this very strange system of a co-ruler; the king and his mother or if his mother died the king and his wife. When the king dies then they usually try to select somebody very young among the king's many, many offspring. When King Sobhuza died they selected a young man who ruled under the name of Mswati III, who is still the king of Swaziland. He was just a very young boy at that time and so his mother was regent for a considerable amount of time. They sent him off to boarding school but they brought him back to be king when he had the equivalent of a high school education. There's kind of a schizoid personality in Swaziland. There's the traditional rule, but you also have this fairly modern economy and the two don't touch too much.

Q: Well it sounds a little bit like the Dalai Lama.

BLACKFORD: Yes. The interesting thing was that this was under Reagan and he appointed a political ambassador to both places. I don't think they'd ever had a political ambassador in either country before. There was also a political ambassador in Lesotho. The ambassador to Swaziland was a very nice man named Robert Phinny, who had a lovely wife and they did what they were supposed to do which wasn't all that much in Swaziland. I found the guy who was ambassador to Botswana to be much more interesting, Ted Maino. He was a construction contractor from California. He was a big game hunter. I once went to his house in San Luis Obispo and I was so uncomfortable. There were all these dead things everywhere you looked. But he was a very smart guy and he was a good friend of Judge Clark, who if I remember correctly, was head of the NSC (National Security Council) under Reagan.

Q: Yes. He had been a political counselor and then NSC.

BLACKFORD: Yes. That's how Ted got his job and it meant that he had a lot of contacts and influence as a result. Because of that, the president of Botswana was invited for an official working visit to the U.S. It was the first time that anybody from Botswana had ever been invited to the U.S. Quett Masire was president at that time, the second president of Botswana. His visit was really the highlight of the year for me. I had a dreadful secretary. She was sweet as could be but completely incompetent so I had to prepare everything for this visit myself. I'd wait until she went home and then do all the paperwork because anything I asked her to do always was full of typos. We did have very early word processing equipment so I could finally manage to turn out something that did not have typos in it, but she apparently was incapable of doing so. Even if I corrected them and sent them back, the documents would come back with new typos. So, I spent a great deal of time doing all the briefing papers for the president, the briefing papers for the secretary, talking points, coordinating with protocol. It turned out to be a great visit. It went really, really well.

Then Masire went up to New York, and this was the fun part for me, President Reagan loaned him his plane. I got to get on the helicopter on the Mall and fly to Andrews, then get on Air Force One -- and I know it's not Air Force One if the president's not on it -- but get on the president's plane and fly to New York. And I thought that was just the cat's pajamas as they used to say many, many years before my time. In New York we had a wonderful time. Maurice Tempelsman, head of Lazare Kaplan, very prominent in the diamond business, also Jackie Kennedy's boyfriend for many years, threw a dinner for Masire and for the rest of us. It was the only time I ever went to the World Trade Center and had dinner at Windows on the World.

Q: Oh yes. Well, I've heard much about Tempelsman and his influence; how did you find him, I mean from your working experience?

BLACKFORD: It was just a casual meet and greet. I didn't really get to know Mr. Tempelsman.

Q: Well I'm not really after that; I mean, I'm talking about did you pick up his influence ___ working thing?

BLACKFORD: Not really. He was very interested in Botswana because of the diamond connection. And he went to Botswana regularly and just wanted to be involved.

As the year went on people kept giving me more and more things to do. I was the backup desk officer for Zimbabwe and Lesotho and then I became the assistant South African desk officer. And the deputy director delegated to me the weekly status reports and updates he was responsible for. But it was in the second year that I took on the nuclear portfolio for South Africa and I still wonder why me. I had no background whatsoever. It's just the way things work in the State Department sometimes. There was a lot of

concern about South Africa developing nuclear weapons but there was never any clear evidence that they had done so. There were a lot of rumors that they had on one occasion exploded some sort of a nuclear device but we never had any proof that that actually happened.

But they did have a lot of nuclear reactors in-country providing energy and we discovered that there were a lot of Americans working at those nuclear plants. Under U.S. law this was illegal. Americans were not allowed to help the South Africans with their nuclear program in any way. The Americans could have been jailed, they could have been fined something like $10,000, 10 years in jail maximum. So, there was a lot of debate, not just in the State Department but particularly in Department of Energy, in Congress, along the lines of how to handle this situation. I truly believe that most of the Americans really had no clue that they were breaking U.S. laws. What we decided to do was to send a group to South Africa to talk to the employees and make them understand that they were in breach of U.S. law. I went with a group of Energy employees; I think they sent me to watch the Energy employees, make sure that they didn't get too friendly with the South Africans. Because when the South Africans decide to put on the charm there is nobody friendlier or nicer in the whole world and they were really turning on the charm on this trip. They took us out to wine country, showed us around; they had us over for a *braai*, a South African cookout. The whole South African experience. I think the most interesting thing I did was wear one of those white suits and a radiation badge and go to one of the nuclear power plants outside Cape Town and poke around. I've never seen anything so clean. There's never a dull moment in the Foreign Service; you never know what comes next.

We finally worked out a solution that worked for everyone except perhaps the South Africans who were losing a large number of their skilled employees. We sat down with the employees, we told them what was the problem, that they were in breach of U.S. law. We suggested, we couldn't promise them they wouldn't be prosecuted, that was not up to us, but if they quit their jobs and went home it was unlikely that anybody was going to prosecute them. And as far as I know they all decided that that would be the best idea and that is exactly what they did. That's the way we resolved that problem.

Q: Well didn't that leave the nuclear plants undermanned?

BLACKFORD: Perhaps it did. But that was the South Africans' problem. They had to go find technicians from somewhere else.

Q: Well where did they get them?

BLACKFORD: I have no idea. Europe, I suppose.

Q: Yes. Well.

BLACKFORD: As far as I know there were never any problems, no crazies in the nuclear power plants. I'm not sure if these people were doing anything super difficult. They very

well may have trained local folk by that point because the Americans had been working there for several years by the time this really came to light

Q: Well then what did you do?

BLACKFORD: Another thing that I was asked to do while I was assistant South Africa desk officer was to come up with ideas for a wage survey that would bring the embassy into compliance with the Sullivan principles. I don't know if you're familiar with the Sullivan principles, but they were developed by an African-American preacher named Leon Sullivan in 1977. The purpose was to apply economic pressure on the apartheid system. And bit by bit it was adopted by almost all the U.S. companies that were doing business in South Africa. Basically, it was a list of ways to treat people equally, to eliminate racial discrimination, to provide programs to train and advance blacks and other non-whites. Obviously, these were ideas that the US Government supported but they didn't fit into the standard U.S. Government system; they weren't things that Personnel normally did. So, that's why I worked to come up with something that eventually the U.S. embassy did adopt, something very similar to the Sullivan principles, and we started paying more attention to making sure that our employees who were not white got training and opportunities.

That's about my experience in AF/S, the key points anyway.

Q: This got you a lot deeper into the South African employment situation than normally a desk officer-

BLACKFORD: Well yes, I think they asked me because I had the admin background.

Q: How did you find this particular task?

BLACKFORD: I was pleased to be asked, pleased to be able to make sure that our embassy to the extent possible was encouraging black employees and non-white employees to find ways to advance in the embassy. As you looked at the embassy in the early '80s it looked a lot like most businesses in South Africa did. Everybody at the top was white and all the people who cleaned and drove the cars and that sort of thing were black. Not that we didn't have a few black employees in professional positions. In the budget section, for example, there were a number of very capable black employees. I attended a budget conference there, and I remember meeting one of the senior FSNs in that section who was black. Everyone at the conference had been invited to dinner at the residence of the Budget and Fiscal Officer. When dinner was over, it became a problem of how would we get her home to the township. What we had to do was drive her to the entrance of the township and leave her there because I guess she had a pass to be out after curfew but we didn't have a pass to go into the township.

Q: Everything sounds complicated.

BLACKFORD: The system was extremely complicated. The whole system of South Africa, where you could live and what bus you could ride on and what bathroom you could use. It was extraordinary how complicated this got. Now, by the time I paid my first visit to South Africa in 1984, many of the overt indications of apartheid had been removed in the center of the cities which most often had international visitors. Black visitors from other countries like diplomats or government officials were treated as "honorary whites" and were permitted in the best restaurants and hotels. I never saw a "whites only" sign in Pretoria or Johannesburg or Cape Town but a few years later while on temporary duty to Lesotho, I went over to the mall in Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, and ran into a "white" bathroom. It was quite a surprise perhaps all the more shocking for the reminder of our own history of segregation.

Q: Oh boy. Well, were you thinking about getting out of Africa at this point or-?

BLACKFORD: Well, you know I always was thinking about getting out of Africa but Africa was always offering me something that I couldn't get somewhere else. In this case they offered me the admin officer job in Zimbabwe. I thought that could be quite nice. It was an admin officer job in an embassy as opposed to a consulate; it was a decent sized post; it was a comfortable place to live from all I've heard. I knew a lot of the people who were there. I knew the ambassador, David Miller, and I liked him and I asked him if he would like to have me in Harare and he agreed. So, I went to Zimbabwe as admin officer.

It was a very comfortable post, had good housing. Zimbabwe which became independent in 1980, was formerly Rhodesia and as Rhodesia had maintained a white minority regime much like that of South Africa. When a civil war ultimately drove the white government to agree to majority rule, many of its white citizens fled the country and put up their houses up for sale at cut-rate prices. Unlike so many posts where we're paying outrageous amounts of rent, $25,000 or $30,000 a year, we had purchased, I don't know, 12, 15 houses when we opened our Embassy there. My house, which was four bedrooms, had about an acre of ground, a rose garden, a swimming pool, etcetera, was purchased for $40,000.

Q: Good heavens.

BLACKFORD: Yes, exactly. That was about the price we paid for most of the houses, maybe a little more for the ambassador's house. We owned the DCM's house but I don't think we paid as much as $100,000 for any single one of the houses that we owned in Zimbabwe. Now, none of these houses was very exciting. I don't think there were any architects involved in the building of most of these houses. They just sort of put together boxes, you know, square room, rectangular room, hallway; and many of them had been built around the time of the Ian Smith regime when there were so many sanctions against Rhodesia. A lot of things were put together with chewing gum and spit. The locals were quite inventive, I must say, but there were lots of things that were broken.

My pool pump never worked no matter how many times people tried. Not that I ever used the pool much because although we had pools, in fact, Zimbabwe was up on a plateau. It

got quite cool at night as a rule, in winter there was actually frost in the mornings, and the swimming pools never got very warm. I had a very deep pool and you'd stick your hand in and go "oh, that's nice", and you'd put your body in and you realized that the first six inches were a nice comfortable temperature but below that it was icy. So, we rarely actually went swimming in my pool.

It was nice to have a big house though I rattled around in it. It made it possible to host the wedding of one of our Marines who married a nice girl he'd met in South Africa on his previous posting. There was plenty of room for the girl's family and friends to come up from South Africa and plenty of room for all the guests. The wedding was lovely.

I enjoyed being sent someplace where I had a lot of background, having been the backup desk officer for Zimbabwe while in AF/S. President Mugabe set the tone for relations with the government. He was very aloof, a very difficult man. You could never make friends with him though American Ambassador after American Ambassador tried. The whole government followed in his footsteps. So, we never had a really good working relationship with the foreign ministry. The fellow who was Minister of Treasury was quite capable and the AID people managed to get along fairly well with him.

Mugabe could not have been more different from Khama in Botswana. It enforced my idea that who you had as a leader, especially at the beginning of your country made a difference. Mugabe completely ruined the economy in one of the essentially richest countries in Africa. It did have some minerals but above all, it had enormously rich soil and for many years was the bread basket of the entire southern African region. Mugabe just ran the country into the ground whereas Khama took a country that was inherently very poor, at independence the third poorest country in the world, and turned it into a country that did very well for its people.

Q: Well that must have impacted on you as far as, I mean you're responsible for management there; you've got a difficult situation, you've got to have problems, didn't you?

BLACKFORD: Yes, there was a problem; not so much when I was first posted to Zimbabwe and there was still a functioning economy but Mugabe detested the West and no matter who you dealt with in the Zimbabwean government they were always cold. They knew they weren't supposed to be anything but cold to Americans or other Western diplomats. The economy played a much bigger role when I went back to Zimbabwe as a retired annuitant, in I think it was 2003, when the economy was in freefall and inflation was beginning to rival that of the Weimar Republic. At country team, people asked me what I found different. I said, "Well I've got a Coke here; I paid $750 for it. And when I was here before I gave my cook $750 to buy a house". When you went to lunch you took a bag of money. This was just the beginning of the era of hyperinflation in Zimbabwe. It was so hard on the locals. Food staples were price controlled and mealie meal (ground sorghum) formed the basis of every meal. No one was willing to sell mealie meal at the legal price, however; they would have lost money. As a result, I would go to the supermarket which still carried a lot of imported, non-controlled items, and out in the

parking lot, someone would come up to me and ask "Psst, you want mealie meal?" I would pay two or three times the legal rate and take my black-market goods home to the people who worked for me. It was like doing a drug deal.

Q: Oh god.

BLACKFORD: It was just awful. And it got much worse. Now they're using American dollars because they just couldn't print enough Zimbabwe dollars.

The embassy was located in an old school. It had been a language school so it was a series of small rooms hooked together. It had a fairly high wall with perhaps a 10-foot setback from the street. It's still in exactly the same place that it was at that time, I guess because we've never had very good relations with Zimbabwe and we didn't ever get them to agree to moving the embassy somewhere else. While I was there we managed to add a health unit and a community liaison office in the back of the building. One of the nice things about the location of the embassy, which was maybe three blocks from downtown, was that it was just across from a very nice public park. The park had a little café so while we did not have a café in the embassy you could walk across the street most days and get yourself a sandwich quite conveniently which I liked since I hated packed lunches.

The GSO section was run by two American GSOs and it was run quite well, I had very little issue there. But the budget section was a total disaster when I arrived. The cashier couldn't count and I discovered that the head of the budget section really had a dislike for paying bills. The EFM (the eligible family member) I hired to help when I found out how bad the budget section was, discovered that he had a whole drawer full of invoices that he had not paid. So, I fired both local employees and then things did get better. Some of the vendors started to talk to me in words that were more than four letters. They had been very unhappy. I ran into the fellow I hired (or rather, stole from the bank) to replace the chief of the budget section in DC about 10 years later and asked, "David, what are you doing here.?" He said, "oh, I won the visa lottery", and he had moved to the United States.

One of my many hats while I was in Harare was post security officer. At that time, we did not have security officers at every post, and our regional security officer was posted in Zambia. I used to drive him crazy to come down and visit us, and he'd come down about once every three months. In his absence, security was up to me. Of course, he was in Zambia during the scariest moment of my tour in Zimbabwe, the second scariest moment of my career, when Samora Machel's plane crashed. You remember perhaps that Samora Machel, president of Mozambique, was returning from somewhere when his plane went down and he died. The rumor was that the South Africans had shot him down. It was a Russian plane being flown by Russians and ultimately most people concluded it was probably pilot error but in the moment of course the Zimbabweans believed that it was the South Africans who had done this and large groups of demonstrators started to gather in front of every site that was in some way thought to be pro-South African. The South African, well not an embassy because the Zimbabweans did not have formal relations

with South Africa, perhaps a commercial office was actually broken into and the staff had to flee. At our embassy, a crowd of about 200 to 300 people started to throw rocks, quite accurately as it happens. They broke eleven of our windows, and threatened to climb the fence. I was sure that the government of Zimbabwe had orchestrated this riot, and they held off responding until the very last minute. I was on the phone constantly trying to get somebody to come and respond.

The colleagues in the embassy weren't helping me either. When I was in Guatemala as a student my professor, who was originally from Cuba and had had some experience with demonstrations, said if you hear a loud noise outside never, ever go to the window, which is literally a lifesaving piece of advice. Inside the embassy however, many of the Americans insisted upon going up on the roof, some of them insisted upon standing at the windows and they just egged on the crowd to no end. I went around saying, "get away from there, get away from there". But I didn't seem to have much impact and it really brought up one of my *bête noire* which is the apparent need of most people to find out what is going on even when that is the most dangerous thing you can do and generally quite unnecessary at least in the short run.

Zimbabwe's attitude toward South Africa was not so much of a love-hate thing, it was more like a need-hate. Everything that they had apart from food and some very basic items, had to come from South Africa. But crossing the border was quite a process. We often drove down to South Africa to shop for ourselves and the embassy, and brought our goods back to Zimbabwe. In order to do this, you needed two passports. You could not enter Zimbabwe if you had a South African stamp in your passport. So, if you were going to South Africa by land, you had to have two passports and you had to be sure that you handed the right passport to the Zimbabweans as you went across the border and then took that back and handed the South Africans the next passport. Then you did the whole thing in reverse when you came back. The Zimbabwean officials then pretended you hadn't been to South Africa although you obviously could not have come from anywhere else. They also had a rule that you could not bring more than 20 Zimbabwe dollars into the country. The problem with this was that you couldn't get from the border in South Africa to Harare without filling up your tank with gas and that took more than 20 Zimbabwe dollars. You always had to lie and say, "oh, I've just got 20 dollars, no more, no, no, no, not a bit", even when it was such an obvious fiction.

There was still a fairly large white population who mostly still thought of themselves as Rhodesians or Rhodies. I got to know some of these folks in two ways. One, I decided that I would take piano lessons while I was in Zimbabwe. You could rent a piano for $25 a month and I thought I would see if I could develop my non-existent musical talent. I did not. I'm as inept as ever. However, I did make friends with my piano teacher who was a lovely woman, also single and about my age, and we often went and did things together.

Then I also joined a group of gemologists. I don't think I mentioned this before but when I was in Brazil my love for gemstones went into hyperdrive, and one of the jewelers, one of the many jewelers that I visited regularly said, "You like this stuff so much you ought to get a diploma in gemology." I asked how to do that and he told me that I could attend

the Gemological Institute of America by mail. In addition, you had to go to three or four weeks of classes in person spread out over several years. So, while I was assigned to the US, I threw myself into studying gemology and was awarded my diploma as a graduate gemologist, the usual professional degree in the field of gems and jewelry. As a result, I was welcomed into a group of three local women jewelers who also were gemologists (of the British variety). We would meet every couple of weeks, and exchange information. Some of these people invited me to parties and they could be quite funny. They had such an interesting view of the way things were.

Now, I had a lovely cook who lived at my house during the week but she went to her home Saturday afternoon and came back to work on Monday morning. She lived out in the "high-density suburb" of Chitungwiza. Like the South Africans, when the white Rhodesians were in power, they had created townships where you had to live if you were black. You weren't allowed to live in Harare unless you had permission. (Of course, the rules changed when Mugabe came to power, but changing the rules didn't instantly mean that the black population had the funds to live in Harare itself.) Chitungwiza was about 35 kilometers away from the city and if Eileen left my house at 1:00 on Saturday, she had to take two buses and didn't get home until 5:00 or 6:00 at night. So, if I didn't have anything else I had to do on Saturday, I would sometimes give her a ride home. I happened to mention this at a party of mostly Rhodies and they were just horrified. Oh my god, I don't think they'd ever been to Chitungwiza but they were sure that any white person who went there would disappear to a horrible death, which was so totally unlike what reality was. Chitungwiza, like so many of the townships in South Africa, had nice sections and not so nice sections. It was a huge place. It probably had a population nearly the same size as the city of Harare.

It turned out to be a good thing that I knew where she lived because she went home one day saying she really didn't feel well and she thought she had malaria. She was gone, for a week, two weeks and I kept wondering what was going on. One evening the guard who watched over my house each night, came up to me and said, "Oh madam, you must go see Eileen. She is very sick". The next day I got in my car and I drove to Chitungwiza and she was very, very sick. Zimbabwe had this reputation as having good health care and in fact it had pretty good health care if you could pay for it. However, if you had to go to the clinic they just treated your symptoms. They never tested you for anything. If you came in with a fever they gave you pills for malaria. If you got diarrhea they treated you for dysentery. And they treated Eileen for all these things and I don't think I've ever seen anybody who looked so sick and didn't die shortly thereafter. I couldn't do anything for her that day but I came back the next day with one of the officer's wives who had some medical training and between the two of us, managed to get her in the car and to a private doctor where I paid $35 for her to have tests run. When the test came back, it turned out she had typhoid. She was admitted to the infectious diseases hospital and three days later she was fine. But she'd been sick for weeks and she would have died, no question, if she hadn't gotten this test and gotten the proper treatment. We stayed friends for many years afterwards.

This was the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in Africa and nobody quite knew what to do about it. We're talking about '85, '86 and of course there was no viable treatment at that time. If you got HIV, it developed into full blown AIDS so prevention was really the only defense. In the category of there's never a dull moment in the Foreign Service, I appointed a condom officer. I asked one of my GSOs to make sure that there were condoms in every bathroom. They were free, you were encouraged to take them home. At the same time, we also did training for all of our local employees on how to avoid getting AIDS. I'm not sure how much of an impact this might have had but I always hoped that maybe somehow or other we managed to save a few lives. The plague really took an incredible toll on the region, however. In Botswana, the average life expectancy was 63 when I was desk officer, but fell to the mid-30's by the early 90s. When I went as a retired annuitant to Lesotho, the local staff told me they attended a funeral nearly every week for a former colleague or family member. In fact, funerals were so in demand, that you could get a cut rate if you agreed to a funeral during the week rather than on the weekend. In this as in so many things, Botswana, led the way in dealing with AIDS. The government accepted that HIV caused AIDS and started a health education program. The President set an example by being tested for AIDS. As soon as an effective regimen of medicine was developed, Botswana made free or nearly free meds available to all.

Travel in Zimbabwe was more difficult than it was in Kenya. You had an equal number of interesting safari destinations but they were further away from the capital city and the Bulawayo Road, which was the one you had to take to get to Victoria Falls and to the parks around Victoria Falls, was off limits to those of us in the official U.S. community because a year or two before I arrived in country three Americans had been killed traveling that way, apparently by bandits. Whenever I got three or four-day weekend and if I had the money, my favorite thing to do was to fly to Victoria Falls, the most beautiful waterfall I've ever seen, and then to take a little bus across the border into Botswana. You could go to the Chobe game park there and the Chobe game park is one of the great game parks of the world.

While I was in Zimbabwe I was asked to go on temporary duty to Maputo. There was still a civil war raging in Mozambique between FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front – the government) and RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance – rebels backed by South Africa). Basically, the only place truly under government control was the capital of Maputo. Embassy staff couldn't leave the city limits. There was a little bridge at the edge of town, and that was the outer limit. The town was essentially without food and figuring out how to get enough to eat took up quite a bit of time. As in Conakry, Guinea years earlier, the other people at post helped me out. There was one restaurant however, that had beautiful Mozambican prawns which to this day are considered some of the very best in the world. At that time, they were very large. They've been fished out a bit so you don't get the same size prawns that once you did but this little restaurant had prawns. Now, when I say it had prawns that is all it had. It did not have silverware or plates, it did not have bread and butter, it did not have salad. So, we went with everything else and they made the prawns and then they just dumped them on the table and you cleaned them and ate them. They were delicious. That was my haute cuisine moment in Mozambique.

The embassy in Maputo was, I believe, the worst embassy I have ever seen. This was two embassies back; one replaced this one and another one replaced the next. But it was in a, I don't know, maybe a seven, eight story building and we had the top three stories. You got in the elevator to go to the fifth floor. The elevator did work. However, it had no light. I don't know why it didn't have a light in it. I don't think the bulb was burned out. I think that there was something wrong with the wiring and so you stepped in the elevator, you pushed your button before you closed the door and then you rode up with your fingers crossed to the fifth floor where the embassy was. The worst thing of all was that overnight the water was pumped from the ground up to a big holding tank on the roof of the embassy and by 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon we would run out of water. So, from about 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon you could not flush a toilet in the American embassy. I really thought that was truly unacceptable.

Q: Oh my god.

BLACKFORD: Now the real *pièce de résistance*, while I was in Zimbabwe and I'm sure you've heard this story before from several other people, was the visit of Jimmy Carter. I was the control officer, lucky me. I'm surprised I still worked for the State Department after that visit. It coincided with the Fourth of July and since the Zimbabweans were so difficult to get along with we had made a deal with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that there would be no speeches at the Fourth of July party, which took place at the largest hotel in Harare. The Americans would propose a toast to the Zimbabweans, the Zimbabweans in exchange would propose a toast to the Americans and that would be it. Gib Lanpher who was the chargé, did his part; he proposed a toast and I think President Carter said one or two nice things and then we turned it over to the Zimbabweans. We should have known something was up when the representative to the American Fourth of July party was the Minister of Youth and Sports, never exactly the highest-ranking member of anybody's cabinet. He took out what looked like eight, 10 pages of a speech. I thought, "Oh, I don't think this is going to go the way we planned." The Minister started to read the most obnoxious speech. It was so insulting. I could see Gib and the President and steam was coming out of both their ears, Gib's maybe a little more than Carter's. I kept watching, wondering what they would do, and they kept looking at each other and finally there was some signal passed between them and they both got up and left. And the Minister kept on reading his speech. He was having a hard time. I don't think he knew all the words. He was really stumbling but he just kept going. Once Gib and the President left the room I went behind and I grabbed all the Americans and I shuffled them all out of the room and the Minister just kept on giving his speech. I'm pretty sure that he never even noticed that people had left he was so concentrated on trying to read this speech which clearly, he had not written. Of course, the next day there was a headline in "The New York Times" and it was the end of aid to Zimbabwe for quite some time. Not that the Zimbabweans seemed to care. They were very good at cutting off their nose to spite their face. And that was the highlight of my professional time in Zimbabwe.

Q: Well how was social life there?

BLACKFORD: It was okay but it was very much a family post because there were nice houses, the weather was lovely, there was very little malaria in Harare, *per se*. There were decent schools. But because it was such a family post there were really not all that many people to hang out with for a middle-aged, single woman like me. As I told you, I did have a few local friends. I wasn't lonely but I never quite connected with anybody who wanted to go on safari with me or could afford to do so regularly. Although that does remind me of another story.

We had a four-day weekend coming up for some reason or another and I thought that would be enough time to drive to Kruger National Park, probably South Africa's best-known game park. I started to see if I could come up with someone who would like to go with me, and I thought of Jackie who was married to an AID guy who traveled a lot. For some reason, I knew he was going to be out of town that weekend so I called up and I invited Jackie. She accepted. After I hung up the phone, I wondered how this would work out. I hadn't really thought about it before but Jackie was African American. I didn't know what the reaction of the South Africans would be. As I've mentioned before at this time the South Africans had declared black diplomats to be "honorary" whites and they were accepted at all the nice hotels and restaurants so I was sure we wouldn't run into any legal challenges but I was unsure what attitudes we might encounter.

So, we went on the trip and it was interesting. Jackie was the only black tourist in the restaurants, the park, but everybody was nice as could be to her except for some of the black South Africans. I can only assume they thought she was stuck up or something. They spoke to her in Afrikaans which of course she didn't speak. And there was a resentment there which was very odd.

Q: In Zimbabwe were there problems between the whites and the blacks?

BLACKFORD: Yes and no. In private, the whites would sometimes denigrate the black Zimbabweans but I never heard any of the black Zimbabweans, except for people in the government speak badly about the white Zimbabweans. The government tried to stir up as much trouble as possible because Mugabe blamed any problem whatsoever on the white population. Of course, in the end he has driven practically all the whites out of Zimbabwe, which in turn ruined the economy, because most of the white owned farms in Zimbabwe were not small subsistence type farms; they were large agribusinesses. When you take away that kind of a farm from somebody who's got the right equipment and you turn it over in little plots to subsistence farmers, the value of the crops drops an extraordinary amount. On top of that, Mugabe gave away these plots of land to his cronies, many of whom had no idea how to farm.

.Q: How about, I mean you probably more than anybody else had to work with the people there. Did you find that you were being overcharged or-?

BLACKFORD: Well, I think there's an expat tax most anywhere you go in the third world. As far as purchases for the Embassy were concerned, most of our goods came from the US or South Africa where everything had a fixed price. Speaking personally, if I

went to market where prices sometimes had to be negotiated, I would pay more than my cook but generally it never seemed excessive. At the end of the day, if I paid a dollar or two more than the locals, it was still quite reasonable and that dollar meant far more to them than it did to me.

Q: Well did you have any dealings with Mugabe?

BLACKFORD: No, I never met the man. People didn't usually. The American ambassador wasn't likely to have a one-on-one meeting more than once every three months. Maybe not that often depending on who was coming to town and what was up. I know that you guys did an interview with David Miller who was the ambassador when I got to Zimbabwe and he talked about his predecessor saying, "I've got to get out of here or I'm going to kill him", and David said, "well, I didn't feel quite that way but if I'd stayed there as long as my predecessor had I probably would have felt exactly the same way." Everybody tried very hard to connect but Mugabe just blamed everything that was wrong on the West. Whatever went wrong in Zimbabwe somehow or other it was the fault of the West or South Africa.

Q: Well I take it that his government wasn't very efficient.

BLACKFORD: Well they were very efficient at doing what they wanted to do but creating a prosperous society for Zimbabweans who were not Mugabe cronies did not seem to be their goal.

Q: How about the other embassies? Were they having the same problems?

BLACKFORD: Most of them did. Let's see, how many embassies did we have? Not very many. The British were there. The South Africans had some sort of a commercial office. Who else was there? I don't remember if the French were there. As far as the Africans, the Mozambicans had an embassy, the Zambians had an embassy, Botswana had an embassy. I'm pretty sure that these people got along all right but anybody who was Western wasn't getting any warm fuzzies from Mugabe's government. And as I say, I'm sure that when there was a riot out in front of our embassy after Machel's plane crashed, they deliberately held back sending the police to break up the demonstration until I pointed out that we were not letting those people in our embassy. We had Marines, we had guns; we didn't want to use them but we weren't letting people in our embassy. Not 15 minutes after that conversation, the police came and disbursed the rioters. It was scary, I'll tell you. It was scary to have people throwing rocks at you and yelling and trying to climb the wall.

Q: Well how did the sort of the South African connection work out? I mean was that- were they doing things inside Zimbabwe?

BLACKFORD: I don't think they were doing much of anything inside Zimbabwe. In all the frontline states from time to time they would have a raid of some kind or another. The ANC (African National Congress) had offices in Zimbabwe and they had offices in

Zambia and I think that the South Africans on one occasion did destroy the ANC office in either Zimbabwe or Zambia, maybe both.

Q: Well you were there how long?

BLACKFORD: I was there for two years.

Q: Well that was certainly enough, wasn't it, I would think?

BLACKFORD: Oh yes. Well you know, I always ready to go by the time my tour was up. I know a lot of people really liked to stay. I didn't even extend in Paris. I joined the Foreign Service to keep moving so that's what I did.
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Q: Well then, your next post was-?

BLACKFORD: Well, I went back to Washington to be the executive director of the Political-Military bureau. It was kind of nice to have an executive director title but for the functional bureaus it really didn't have the same impact of being executive director of a geographic bureau. And it was probably my least interesting job in the Foreign Service. I could never quite figure out what we were doing. There were eight or nine separate offices and they had such distinct missions. One office was selling U.S. Government munitions to our friends. Another office was trying to restrict anybody from selling U.S. Government munitions to our enemies. We were negotiating, I think it was the SALT Treaty, and other arms control treaties. Every single office had its own acronyms. When I went to the weekly staff meetings, everybody talked about what they were doing but I sure didn't understand everyone's mission and I'm really not sure that anyone but the Assistant Secretary and the DASs did see the big picture.

The biggest issue that was facing the bureau was a lack of resources; we desperately needed a better computer system for the Office of Munitions Control. The office was in charge of overseeing munition exports. If you already owned a military system that you bought from the United States and had been cleared to buy from the United States and you wanted to resell it to one of your neighbors, you had to get an export license from the Office of Munitions Control. You also had to get permission from the Office of Munitions Control if you wanted to sell some kinds of civilian technology which had a military purpose, for example ATM machines. I don't understand what this military purpose was but the coding that went into ATM machines was also used in certain weapons. But it was all being done with paper and pencil, well maybe not pencil, maybe pen. Previous export licenses were stored in many, many, many, many file cabinets. If you tried to find out had we sold anything like this before, had there been any problems, there was no way to find this unless somebody remembered something about the transaction. We desperately needed a computer system for that office. And it was one of our biggest offices. And there were these long delays. You applied for an export license; it took months to get the export license everything was so backed up. But trying to get a system was very, very difficult.

Q: Well at this point in time were the systems there, was it a matter of just buying it?

BLACKFORD: Not really. We needed some kind of specially built system which was certainly part of the problem because the office that oversaw information technology for the Department, just wasn't convinced that anything we had found was going to actually meet our needs, and we had to have permission from this office in order to even go forward and ask for funds. The bureaucratic red tape was some of the worst. I had no idea how hard it was to get anything done within the Department. You know, when you're at a post overseas and you need a copier, you buy a copier. In the Department you needed a zillion clearances to get a new copier. I might exaggerate; maybe it was only a trillion, but you had to go to the technology office and make sure that this copier was going to be compatible with the other machines that we were using. You had to go to the electricians and make sure that you weren't going to overload the circuit even if you were just buying a copier to replace a copier. They were so busy that it could take them a month or two months to come around and look at your socket and go yes, that's okay. It was so frustrating.

The Bureau also had a very complex personnel system because being a functional bureau there were a large number of civil servants. There were also a fair number of Foreign Service officers. There were a bunch of military officers seconded from the Department of Defense. We had some presidential management interns. A complete cross-section of people. Everybody wanted jobs reclassified, or converted from Civil Service to Foreign Service or vice versa; it was a nightmare trying to figure out all the systems. And it was difficult to recruit Foreign Service offices to the Bureau because the jobs didn't necessarily seem career enhancing for the Foreign Service officers, so you were constantly on the hunt for people who would come and fill our slots.

The funniest thing that happened while I was there involved my desk. I had a desk; it must have once belonged to the secretary of state. It was huge. It was wood. It was gorgeous. It had coffee rings, it had gouges, it had scars. Obviously, somebody moved it out of somebody very important's office at some time because it had gotten too old and scratched up. I found out that in fact, you could get your desk refinished at Lorton Penitentiary. Some other offices that had taken advantage of this program had not taken classified material out of their desks and wound up the subject of a "Washington Post" exposé. My desk was not implicated. I made very sure I went through every single drawer and there was nothing that went to Lorton except for the desk. So, it was gone for about a month and I worked from my coffee table. People came and asked, "Where's your desk". "It went to jail," I answered. They'd stare at me. The desk came back; it was restored to its glory. I do hope that the executive director of the Political-Military bureau still has that desk because it was just the most magnificent thing. I'm sure you could sell it for thousands and thousands of dollars at this point.

Q: I can understand why if you're a serving Foreign Service officer you'd kind of like to avoid that thing because it does sound like sort of a dead end in a way.

BLACKFORD: Some people did very well. Charlie Duelfer, for example, worked in Political-Military when I was there and later headed up the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I still see him from time to time as a commentator on various news shows. So, there were people who did very well out of the Political-Military bureau but equally you could have wound up someplace with a really uninteresting job. And mine, compared to my other jobs was certainly not nearly as interesting.

Q: Well how long did you do that?

BLACKFORD: Two years.

Q: Where did you find you were particularly- Latin America or Asia or was there any area that was of particular interest to you?

BLACKFORD: Well, I would have loved to go back to Latin America but I burned my bridges there. I crossed somebody who later became the executive director and he blackballed me so there was no way I was ever going back to Latin America.

Q: I mean, I don't need to get into all the details but what would cause to sort of get blackballed?

BLACKFORD: Oh, we just didn't get along. I thought he was incredibly difficult and I challenged him fairly regularly, not that he was ever my boss. And that was all it took.

Q: Oh boy. Well when did you start- at a certain point I suppose you had to look around. Paris must have been a delight, wasn't it? I mean-

BLACKFORD: Well in many ways. People always ask what was your favorite post and until I went to Mali, which is my favorite post, I would always hem and haw. I'd say, "I had a great job there but the post was lacking in social or creature comforts" Or alternatively, "This was the most wonderful place to be a tourist but the job was just okay". It wasn't really until I got to Mali where I got the best of everything. So, Paris was great but I was the personnel officer in Paris, not that that wasn't demanding because there is a very large mission in Paris, it had lots and lots of challenges but it wasn't exactly like being the admin officer, for example. The reason I went to Paris was because it was the only time in my career I got a limited medical clearance. I had been bidding on hardship posts but they didn't work out because without a full medical clearance I was not allowed to go to any of them. So, I started casting around; by this time it was January and there weren't all that many jobs available. I found that the HR position was available in Paris and that a good friend of mine, Rusty Hughes, was going to be going as the number two admin officer. I called up Rusty and I said, "Hey Rusty, I'm interested in going to Paris in this HR job, what do you think?" And he said, "oh yes, please bid on it." So, that's how I wound up in Paris and Rusty was an ideal boss. He always treated me as a peer, gave me credit for everything I accomplished, was always open to my ideas. I only hope that I did as much for the people I supervised over the years.

Q: Well okay, you were what, personnel officer in Paris?

BLACKFORD: I was. Paris was great. I had a wonderful place in the 7th *arrondissement*, just a block or so from one of those fabulous French pedestrian markets. On the Rue Cler, I could shop at the cheese store, the butcher, the seafood store, the bakery (one of three), several caterers or one of a number of greengrocers. I hadn't tasted produce that good since I lost my grandfather, the farmer, who always had a garden in the summer. Europeans, especially the French, are way more demanding of their food than Americans. I believe I read somewhere that the French spend about a third of their disposable income on food as opposed to Americans who only spend about 25%. You sure could taste the difference. Of course, getting to the shops was a bit of a problem. They were open from about 8 in the morning to 7 in the evening during the week and closed about 12 or 1 on Saturday. There was no shopping on Sunday except at the bakery where custom demanded that families could pick up a fresh baguette for Sunday dinner. I never understood how the French women who worked, did it. Embassy hours were from 9 to 6. When you added in commuting time, I barely had time to grab something prepared at the caterer and maybe a vegetable for dinner on my way home. Saturday morning was about the only time to shop or get any other errands done. My apartment was charming. It was one of those apartments that the GSO dubbed quaint which was GSO-speak for in need of major maintenance. It was built in 1890-something. It had the most gorgeous salamander, a bronze salamander as the door opener. It was an art nouveau building. It had a view of the Eifel Tower from the balcony. And there was scaffolding up in the front of my apartment for a year and there was scaffolding up in the back of my apartment for a year because there was always something that needed to be fixed.

Q: Well what were the problems of, I mean the challenges of-

BLACKFORD: Well you know for people like me who spoke French, maybe not terribly well but I spoke French, who were at a certain level and made a certain amount of money, were single, Paris was great. But there were a lot of people who were not happy in Paris at all; the lower ranking people who didn't make a lot of money, people who had families, people who didn't speak French, people who were coming from hardship posts and who were used to the embassy doing for them way more than the embassy in Paris did for anybody. A lot of them were just not very happy. For example, Paris is the only place that this ever happened to me but you had to go out and get your own telephone. You'd go to the French telephone office and wait in line and pay your money and get them to come and install your phone. Now, if you didn't speak French and you needed to deal with the French bureaucracy at the telephone office, this was a nightmare. It doesn't sound like such a big deal but for people who were coming from a post where your phone was always just there it was quite a shock.

There was no furniture. If you were coming from a hardship post and you were used to always being at a furnished post, you had to go out and buy your own furniture if you didn't already own any and if you did have furniture, it might or might not fit in the apartment they gave you. There were a lot of people from other agencies who were doing the only overseas tour they were ever going to have. Mostly this worked for the

employees who knew the experience was career enhancing; they knew they were going to be here for three years, it was not a problem. But for their families, often people who had never thought of living overseas, even going to Paris was culture shock. At large embassies, London, Paris, Ottawa, there's always been this idea that these posts were large enough to absorb problem children. So, you would get people who had problems, weren't very good performers, who had medical problems, who had psychological problems. Often, they weren't very happy and the people who had to work for them or with them weren't very happy. People looking from the outside would think, "oh, you're going to Paris, everything's going to be wonderful"; that wasn't the experience for everybody who went to Paris.

Q: I've heard again and again how Paris was a shock to people, that it just wasn't much fun.

BLACKFORD: Another concern was housing. While I was happy with my gorgeous apartment (run down but gorgeous), people with families do not, as a rule, like to live in apartments. They want a house, a yard for the kids to run around in. Making the adjustment to living in an apartment wasn't always easy for the family or for the kids.

Q: Can you talk about maybe some of the extreme cases you had to deal with?

BLACKFORD: Well, I don't know if they were extreme. We did have one employee who went nuts one day, had a breakdown in the embassy, we had to get the person sedated and eventually medevacked.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: That was pretty exciting.

Q: Yes. How about were there problems with, even among sort of the senior staff of middle-aged men getting a bit frisky around the young ladies?

BLACKFORD: No issues of that kind ever came to my notice in Paris, although I would not be surprised to find that it happened. Probably because it still wasn't something that women complained about officially unless it got really, really bad.

Q: Yes, I mean some of the posts, some of the nicer posts, that sort of thing did happen.

BLACKFORD: Yes, I recall when I was in personnel, there was an embassy in Europe where every woman who was assigned to the admin section got bad performance evaluations, and when I spoke to these women, they told me that the admin counselor had been unsupportive from the day they arrived. The more attractive the woman, the more trouble she had. One of the pluses of the larger posts though was that, unlike in a small post where you have to socialize with the same people you work with, Paris was like working in Washington. You put in your day, you got on the Metro and you went home.

You weren't constantly in contact with the people you worked with. If somebody did bother you at work, usually you could go home at the end of the day and get a break.

Q: Of course, one nice thing about the Foreign Service is that if you have a problem in the office with somebody if you hang around long enough he or she-

BLACKFORD: Leaves. Or you do.

Q: Was alcoholism a problem?

BLACKFORD: Oh, I think alcohol was a problem at every post I've ever been at. But yes, alcohol was certainly a problem. The embassy in Paris was very French. Wine could be purchased with lunch in the embassy cafeteria. The French employees were more likely to imbibe than the Americans, it was a more French tradition, but it sent a certain message. In fact, the couple of problem drinkers I remember from Paris were local employees, very valuable local employees as it happens, and that was even more difficult to manage than American employees who could be medevacked if alcohol began to impair their performance.

Dealing with alcoholism certainly changed over the 26 years I spent in the service and the 14 I worked as a retired annuitant. Early in my career, I had to work with a section where both the supervisor and his assistant were alcoholics. If you needed to deal with them, you had to get them in that golden moment between when they came to work in the morning, late as a rule, and when they went out to lunch. I just assumed that the boss, their boss, who was in a different building, didn't know that this was a problem. But he said something one day and I was shocked to realize that he knew exactly what was going on and was doing nothing whatsoever about it. I don't think that would happen today. When we started to treat problem drinking as a disease rather than a character flaw, supervisors began to be somewhat more willing to confront the problem. And the employees, themselves, were a little less reluctant to agree to treatment once alcoholism began to fall clearly within the definition of a medical issue. Not that it ever became truly easy to manage alcoholism, since one of the symptoms of the disease is that alcoholics will almost always start out denying that there is a problem.

Q: Yes. It is a problem of course. You know, sometimes if you're particularly a political-economic officer you're often going out to various cocktail parties and all-

BLACKFORD: Oh yes.

Q: -and having to deal with people. I mean, it's part of your job.

BLACKFORD: I gave up drinking in the Foreign Service. There was just too much of it even for an admin officer who didn't get invited to nearly as many events as political or economic officers. It became way too easy to have too many drinks and the older I got the more likely I was to have a hangover the next day. So, I said I'm not going to drink. I'm going to establish I don't drink. I found that that worked very well for me. People

just got used to the fact that I didn't drink. Even the Russians who thought it wasn't a social occasion unless you had downed half a dozen shots of vodka eventually gave up on me.

Q: I'm the type I like a drink but I like one drink and after that I move to Coca-Cola or to ginger ale. But no, it's easy to get trapped.

BLACKFORD: Yes. I always found it especially difficult when I was invited for dinner at 8 and then for one reason or another, dinner didn't arrive till 10.

Q: Oh boy.

BLACKFORD: The ambassador to France was Walter Curley. He was an investment banker, from JP Morgan, if I remember correctly. He was a real gentleman. I had a lot more contact with him than I expected. I figured I would rarely if ever be invited to the ambassador's residence in a big post like Paris. Curley really did care about his staff, however. He had some contacts in the film industry, so now and then he'd get a new movie and invite the entire American staff to
come over, and he would foot the bill for popcorn and soft drinks, no minor expense when 2 or 3 hundred of us would show up. I remember going one time and running into the ambassador in the hall. I said, "Aren't you supposed to be watching the movie?" He said, "I have another function going on". I was just blown away by the kind of social life that this man led. He would have a breakfast meeting, a luncheon, tea and then he'd have cocktails and go out to dinner. This was day after day after day. I didn't know how on earth he could stand it but he did. He also invited me over on several occasions in the summer when he invited the summer interns to lunch. He was just very nice about reaching out to employees even employees who weren't people you would normally invite for representational events. He was a political appointee, and as with most political appointees, he sometimes asked for things the regulations or the law did not permit. I can't say he was happy when told no, but he understood that those of us in the admin section were just doing our jobs and might very well be keeping him out of trouble.

But the other reason I spent a lot of time with Ambassador Curley and the DCM was the budget challenge the post was facing. Unlike all the posts where I served in Africa, the Paris budget had no wiggle room. The costs were fixed; salaries, utilities, *etcetera*. In Africa, if you had a problem you could put off buying furniture for a year. There was no point in trying to cut positions since the top guys were rarely making more than a few thousand a year. If you eliminated the position what were you really going to save? Nothing to speak of.

But when the Soviet Union collapsed, the administration, for no reason that I am ever going to understand, decided to show how tough we were by opening all those new embassies in the former Soviet Union, but not asking for any additional funds from Congress.

Q: Oh yes.

BLACKFORD: The Western European embassies were told to make the cuts to cover opening all the new embassies. The only place that significant cuts could come from was from personnel costs. We had to figure out how to do this and what kind of misery to visit upon our staff and what, in turn, kind of misery would be visited upon us. We put together a kitchen cabinet of senior FSNs including several from my staff. I had a wonderful staff. They knew the rules inside out. I had two employees who between them had 80 years of experience. One day I complained to the DCM, saying, I hadn't much work to do because the FSNs knew all the rules, they didn't need me. And he looked at me and he said, "Oh Peggy, but your job is to tell them when to break the rules."

Q: Ah.

BLACKFORD: It was a eureka moment for me. I realized that was indeed my job.

Anyhow, together with this senior FSN committee, we started exploring what kind of possibilities were there. At that time the legal work week in France was 39 hours a week. Of course, the legal work week for the U.S. Government was 40 hours a week. So, we were paying our entire staff, and that was about -- not all of them were State employees -- but we had about 1,000 French employees and about 400 American employees at the embassy in Paris or at the consulates in France. We were paying these 1,000 FSNs an hour of overtime every week. We talked to the FSNs and said well, if we spread the pain and we can get the work week cut back to 39 hours a week you won't take too much of a cut -- it worked out to be about three percent -- but you will get an hour off and we'll give you the hour off Friday afternoon; you can go to your place in the South of France or up in Normandy or wherever you go for the weekend a little earlier. And everybody agreed that that was acceptable.

Then we had the battle with the Department. They said, "But we have to have a 40-hour work week". And we said, "No, we don't. The Americans have to work 40 hours but there's nothing that says that the locals have to work 40 hours a week." We went back and forth and back and forth and finally they agreed and so we changed our work week to 39 hours a week.

At the same time, we still needed more savings and our only option seemed to be a RIF (reduction in force). Of course, RIF plans always call for you to let go the people with least seniority who as a rule are making less money. After we discussed this with the senior FSNs, we were shocked when 12 or 13 of them volunteered to retire. They said, "We were planning to do it within a year or two anyway, we'll get a nice pension, we'll retire and save the jobs of some of our younger colleagues." Perfect. They were all at the FSN 11, 12, 13 level making more than $100,000 each in salary and benefits. So, this was a huge gift from the FSNs; we must have saved a million dollars or more and of course we could replace these people with people who were much more junior and then we could leave vacant positions at the bottom. I don't know how we pulled this off and Paris had no pushback from its FSNs. Everybody thought they'd been consulted, that they understood that it wasn't us and the embassy being difficult, that we cared about them

and they agreed to the changes. In Germany, on the other hand, they went to the papers, they picketed the embassy; it was quite a scandal.

And still the pain went on. The next year we were forced to close Lyon, our consulate there. I got the coveted job of going to Lyon and telling everyone that they were losing their jobs. Not that this came as much of a surprise to most of them, but what did work, again fairly well, was that I was able to promise a job for anybody willing to relocate to Paris. Maybe not the same job but something similar. Three or four of the 12 people or so who lived in Lyon did relocate to Paris but since we had offered to find them all jobs, we didn't have too much aggravation although it's sad, because the consulate in Lyon was really very useful and should never have been closed.

Another thing that we did as a result of this was, I think we were the first post to start this, maybe not, but we decided to have a French intern program. This was another proposal by our local employees. We went out to business schools and language schools and asked, "Do you want to come do an unpaid internship in the American embassy?" Obviously, these positions were not sensitive. But we managed to fill in a lot of places, things like receptionist, translator and that sort of thing which did not require a lot of training. The French interns improved their English and had something to put on their résumé for the future.

Q: Well did the French authorities intrude much in what you-

BLACKFORD: No. The French authorities only interfere if the French employee complains and we were within the law and anybody who was fired got paid the legally required severance pay. Fortunately, the severance pay came out of a different pocket from the pocket that held the salaries. The central system had to come up with that money so if we did get rid of somebody then it didn't cost the European Bureau. Sometimes the severance pay would have cost us more than we might have saved in salary.

Q: How about strikes? Did you get involved with strikes?

BLACKFORD: No, we didn't have any strikes at the Embassy while I was in Paris. Of course, there were lots of strikes but not against us. The French seem to have a tradition; they come back from summer vacation and a week or so after that everybody goes out on strike for some reason or another. Mostly, I think, the vacation wasn't quite long enough so often the people who ran the Metro went on strike for a couple of weeks. We used to get a lot of exercise. Thank god it usually happened in September when the weather was nice and I could walk home. It wasn't that it was close, it was well over a mile from the embassy to my apartment and I was closer than most, but the majority of people could walk home, so we got back and forth to work that way for a week or two.

Q: At one point, I don't know if it still happens but Paris was sort of the center of payments. I mean it-

BLACKFORD: Oh yes, RAMC Paris, yes.

Q: Did you get involved with that?

BLACKFORD: Well yes, they were all local French employees, worked for the embassy just like the people who worked in the political section or the budget section or whatever. The Center had a director and was regional so it was semi-autonomous, but they had to follow all the rules for French employees. I don't remember any specific problems that involved only RAMC. You know I can't even remember what RAMC stands for now. Regional Accounting Management Center, maybe? They were in a separate building co-located with the IRS, the FBI and a number of other agencies as well. It was a substantial distance from the embassy, maybe half a mile, three quarters of a mile and of course you couldn't take a car because there was no place to park it so you would take the Metro or maybe walk but you didn't go too often because it was a bit of a hike.

After we saved all this money and we started opening all these posts in Eastern Europe, I was asked to go to Latvia to help with opening up that post. And that was fascinating. I'd always wanted to go to the Baltic States and the center of Riga was just a beautiful city, a little rundown of course but really beautiful. It must be stunning now that they have some money and they've fixed things up. But it was quite a challenge because the embassy was set up in a hotel. We had just two rooms. One of the rooms had a bed tucked away in a corner so when we couldn't get a room in the hotel which happened quite often, as everyone was flocking to the newly independent republics, then people on temporary duty often slept in the embassy. We didn't have a safe in this embassy. We did get a bar lock, that is a filing cabinet with a bar that ran through the drawer handles and was secured with a padlock, while I was there.

You had to pay everything in cash because there was no other way to operate. The Latvians were still using the Russian ruble but inflation had gone berserk. I would go with a hundred-dollar bill to the money changer in the square and he would give me a gigantic brown paper bag to carry back to the embassy and with this sack of money I could run the embassy for a week. I could pay all the local salaries, I could pay the rent on the hotel. I remember my hotel room was something like $2.50 a night and this was the nicest hotel in Riga. But there was no place to put this money and there was no place you could get more. You had to have dollars in order to get rubles.

So, one weekend I had to go to Estonia and get on the ferry and go to Finland where they gave me $5,000 in U.S. cash, which I then had to carry back on the boat. That was an experience too. The ferry that went from Tallinn in Estonia over to Helsinki was packed with people. I was concerned that I might not be able to get a seat in the dining room so first thing I did was make a beeline for the restaurant. I was seated in the dining room and had a very nice meal but the dining room never filled up. I wondered why not. When I left the restaurant, I realized that everybody had spent the intervening hours in the bars drinking as much as possible. Liquor was so expensive in Scandinavia that people would come over to Tallinn for the day and on the way back they would drink till they couldn't stand because there was no tax on the liquor that was served on the boat. I found that very strange.

Anyway, I went back with $5,000 stuffed in my bra and every other place I could think of as well as with bananas, lots of bananas. This was when bananas were still a very exotic commodity in Russia and its former republics. I gave them to the hotel staff and got excellent service for the remainder of my stay or, at least, the closest people in the former Soviet Union could come to providing service, it had not been a priority up 'til then. I had to sleep with the money until that bar lock arrived. I was only there for three weeks but it was a fascinating experience.

Aside from our budget problems in Paris, the biggest challenge that we faced was evacuations. One evacuation involved Peace Corps volunteers from Chad. It was December and they came in flip flops and shorts. There was this one poor little African village dog standing in the airport with a rope around his neck. I don't think he'd ever had a leash on in his life. He looked totally like a deer in the headlights. But the real evacuation push started with the war in Kuwait. First of all, we got all the people out of Kuwait, then we got all the people out of Baghdad. Then we got all the people from Jordan and finally the Department closed three-quarters of the posts in the Middle East and almost everyone came through Paris and they tended to need everything. You just never knew.

They needed some place to stay. They needed medical help. They needed funds. They needed diapers. They needed kitty litter. And the Peace Corps volunteers from Chad, they needed warm coats and mittens. We had to take up a coat drive. They always came in the middle of the night on the weekend and I was so fortunate to have the help of Johnny Berg. I know you interviewed Johnny before he died. He was a German Jew who evaded capture by the Nazis during World War II and went to work for the American military after the war at the age of 15 and eventually got a job with the American embassy. He was our expeditor. He knew everybody. He could get in and out of that airport. He took me to the airport one time to meet a bunch of people and we went down this staircase and past this cypher lock and over a bridge, through a tunnel. I had no idea where we were, but I think he had more clearances than the people who actually worked at the airport. He was always just as helpful as could be and he never complained no matter what time of day or night our unexpected guests arrived.

One of the responsibilities of a personnel officer that I had never faced before was dealing with the death of employees and dependents. But during my time in Paris I visited the morgue on multiple occasions. The first time was following the UTA crash in Niger where Ambassador Pugh's wife from Chad and a Peace Corps volunteer, were killed. All the remains were brought to France for identification and so I worked with the French to finally identify everyone. On another occasion, a retired annuitant just passing through Paris fell ill and Johnny Berg who had met him, took him to the hospital and he was dead before his family arrived. Somewhere in Africa he'd gotten a scratch or a cut and it had become septic and he died of blood poisoning.

Q: Oh.

BLACKFORD: Finally, there was an employee who was at post by himself, he didn't have any dependents, who died in his apartment on a Friday; no one found him until Monday. I got the job of packing up his apartment, choosing the clothes to bury him in, and arranging his transport home. I couldn't have done any of this without the help of the consular FSN who had all the contacts and the knowledge on this subject.

So, that was pretty much my stay in Paris.

Q: Well, I mean, we've had two very vivid accounts of your work. I think this is probably a good place to stop.

BLACKFORD: I agree. And then we move to Mali, which is my favorite post. The last piece of the Women's class action suit was resolved 1991/92 with the decision that the women of the class were to be offered career enhancing jobs – Deputy Office Director/DCM on their next assignment. The Africa Bureau offered me Deputy AF/E (East Africa). I would have preferred a DCM ship as I wanted to stay out but I accepted and packed out for a tour in DC. Two days – yes, two days – before I was scheduled to leave Paris, the AF/EX Director called and said there had been some problem with the DCM candidate for Mali and asked if I would be interested in Mali instead. I jumped at chance. I had been to Bamako on my 1st tour as Inspector and thought the place was fascinating – very tough – but fascinating.

Mali had been ruled by a military dictator, Moussa Traoré, since 1968 but by March of 1991, the country was ready to see Traoré go. There were numerous demonstrations by students, market women, others. About 300 were killed by the military before the military began to lose heart and switch sides. A popular Colonel, Amadou Toumani Touré, known throughout the country as ATT, rose to lead the military and deposed Traoré promising to rule for a transitional period only. Haven't we heard that before, but surprisingly this time that was exactly what happened. In June 1992, two months before my arrival, Alpha Omar Konaré, known as AOK, was elected President. Konaré was not a politician but a professor, a historian, and archaeologist as well as a former International Visitor grantee (a program that invites up and coming leaders in many fields to visit the US for four to six weeks). Because of his opposition to Traoré's policies, he had founded a small non-profit which had campaigned for civil rights reforms. He was always quick to credit part of his success to the US which had presented his organization with a small human rights fund grant - $5,000 I think. He said that being recognized by the USG, gave him courage to go on even when it didn't seem likely that he would prevail. This made an impression on me – recognition, encouragement might be as important to the development of civil society actors as cash. By the time, I arrived in Bamako in August of 1992, the Malians were throwing themselves into building a democratic society even if they didn't always know what that meant and they were enthusiastically seeking help from the US Mission. That made our egos swell.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you arrived?

BLACKFORD: The Ambassador to Mali at that time was Don Gelber. I knew him slightly from my assignment in Pol/Mil. He had been the POLAD (Political Advisor) to NATO and visited the Pol/Mil Bureau a couple times a year. He was a highly effective Ambassador. I suspect he had waited quite a long time for this opportunity to come to him and he had given the idea of ambassador a lot of thought. He made it clear immediately on my arrival that his job was to be the Ambassador, that is, the face of the mission and he had no interest in running the Embassy – that was my job. His advice to me though was "Don't do what you know how to do, do what needs to be done." I tried hard to follow that advice. And he gave me lots of support. He introduced me to a contact in the Foreign Ministry and insisted I make a call there once a week to stay in touch. Just a week or so after I arrived, he announced he would be taking a month's leave almost at once. When I looked a bit startled, he pointed out that a Chargé could call on Ambassadors and senior government officials in country – a DCM could not. He smoothed my way to meet key players that protocol would not otherwise have allowed me to do and this proved very helpful when I became Chargé, as I was for almost nine months during my three-year tour.

Don was always concerned that ATT might find himself bored after having been President for over a year, and always found a diplomatic or not so diplomatic way of reminding ATT not to think of usurping power. ATT who was charming, funny and very smart, sometimes would cut Don off with a smile and announce that he was very happy as he was and had no intention of making any changes. Don continued to be concerned and sought a way to prove that one could be a successful former President even in Africa. And so, when Jimmy Carter came to visit Mali in the fall of 1992, Don asked Carter to find a job for ATT. In this way, ATT became an employee of the Carter Center and worked to help eradicate Guinea worms, which at that time were still a major problem in Mali as well as many other countries in Africa. (In 2015, there was only one reported case in Mali.) In an interesting post script, I met ATT in 2001, when I was Chargé in the Central African Republic and he had been appointed special UN envoy to attempt to establish peace in the region. We had a nice private meeting to catch up at which time he told me he still had no interest in politics. A year later he ran for and was elected President of Mali. I guess Don had a point but ATT did do it the right way.

Q: What were conditions like in Mali:

BLACKFORD: Bamako earned its 25% hardship differential. I read somewhere that Bamako was the most African of African cities. Unlike many cities in former French colonies, there were no wide avenues, no tree lined streets. Just narrow, potholed lanes jammed with donkey carts, motor scooters, multi passenger taxis, and mini vans. Signs everywhere outlawed public urination but since most of the Malians were illiterate (and of course, because there were no public toilets), these signs seemed to encourage the practice rather than ban it. The Chancery fit right in. It had been a bank building and was connected via the parking lot to the USIA library. Three sides of the compound were directly on the street with no setback at all. Across the street was another compound for the commissary, medical unit, and a few other miscellaneous offices – they were also right on the street. Talk about a security risk. The Ambassador's office had been right at

the corner of two of the streets and at some point, the RSO had insisted that the Ambassador move to the DCM's office and vice versa. As a result, I enjoyed a very nice office as long as I didn't think too much about car bombs. The building was quite run down, which led to me making quite an impression on my first day. As I went flying down the hall to some meeting or other, I missed seeing the one-inch step that for some reason was located there. Talk about going splatt! Everyone rushed to my aid. I growled, "someone paint that damn step". (BTW, I understand that the Embassy was replaced some years later with the latest model fortress. Much safer but not so interesting.)

The medical situation was scary. I went to the public food market just once. The smell overwhelmed me -- well that and the flies. And there were no real supermarkets just a few stores run by Lebanese that stocked imported items like French cheese. Fortunately, I did have a cook and a steward who could do the shopping. I only got salmonella and amoeba a few times. There was one medical clinic that we used in dire emergencies; otherwise employees were medevacked to Paris if they could not be treated in the Embassy medical unit. Malaria was endemic. At least once a month a Peace Corps Volunteer or one of the other American employees was taken ill because they had failed to take their medication as they should have.

For entertainment, there were a handful of restaurants, no movie theaters. The Marine house was the only place in town to see relatively current films. On the plus side, if you liked African music, Mali was one of the best places on the continent to be. You could see top performers at a multitude of clubs or if you preferred a more intimate setting, many of the best bands could be hired to perform at your own house at a reasonable cost. Housing was generally excellent. I had a four-bedroom house with a huge garden and swimming pool which had belonged to the British Ambassador before the Brits had closed their Embassy in Bamako. Of course, four months of the year, during mango season, I had to share the yard with thousands, yes thousands, of fruit bats. Visitors during that time of the year would often comment on the large number of birds to be seen in the yard at sunset. When I suggested they look more carefully, they were amazed. And I was amazed at how noisy the fruit bats were; they seemed to spend every day arguing with their neighbors about whose branch was whose.

Travel was difficult. Early on, I learned the French words for "to be stuck in the mud" and in the dry season, "to be stuck in the sand". When the Ambassador's car lost its way at a river crossing, I made up a new French word "to be stuck in the river". Still there were lots of interesting places in country and well over 100 PCVs who could be visited. Everyone wanted to visit the legendary Timbuktu but the plane schedule was very unreliable. You could fly up one day and then be unable to return to Bamako for a week. Alternatively, it was a tough two day drive up country and it was not unusual for travelers to be carjacked, especially if they had a nice SUV. I was fortunate. The military in Senegal had a C-12 aircraft and when they came to Mali for a visit, like everyone else, they were keen to get to Timbuktu and I hitched a ride and saw the sights in just one day. Later, when I heard the gossip that the pilot was having an affair with the mechanic's wife, I realized how truly lucky I had been.

The highlight of my sightseeing however was the Embassy trip to Dogon county. The Dogon lived in cliff dwellings. Once every couple of years, in April, when their crops had been harvested and before the rains came, they held an astounding festival. About 30 of us decided to go. It was strictly a local event. We were the only tourists which was probably a good thing since the only hotel in town made Motel 6 look like the Taj Mahal. And it was hot! I tell people I don't need to go to hell, I've already been. It was 100 at midnight and not a breath of air. Eventually we all took our mattresses out into the courtyard, soaked our pajamas in water and did our best to get a few hours sleep. The Embassy drivers were horrified. They stood guard all night though what they thought might happen I can't imagine. In spite of the heat and the discomfort, it was worthwhile. The Dogon danced all day – on stilts while wearing enormous masks. It was the most extraordinary cultural event I have ever attended.

It was tough to get out of the country as well. Although there were regular flights to many neighboring countries, the airfares were so high that I usually found I could get away for a long weekend in Paris (where friends would put me up for free) cheaper than going to Senegal or Burkina Faso or Ivory Coast. I had planned to vacation at home sometime in the fall of 1993, but Don called me into his office in June and said, "if you want to take some vacation, you better do it now, since I have decided to retire in August and the new Ambassador won't get here before October or November." As a result, I paid a hasty trip to Namibia in July, and then returned to be Chargé until the arrival of Ambassador Bill Dameron and his wife, Diana, also an FSO who was on leave without pay. The three of us have remained dear friends to this day. Equally talented, Bill was nevertheless quite a change from Don. An Econ Officer, he took more interest in Mali's economy and business sector, as well as the business of running the Embassy. He found the endless round of cocktail parties and receptions quite tiresome and delegated me to attend many of these. While this aspect of diplomatic life had never been my strong suit, after more than a year in Mali, I knew most everyone and started to enjoy these gatherings up to a point. I did get quite a reputation however. Everyone knew I would arrive about 15 minutes after the event was scheduled to begin, make a wide sweep and greet everyone I knew and perhaps make a new acquaintance before slipping out the door and into my car. I rarely stayed more than an hour unless the speeches started late and I couldn't make a graceful exit. My driver soon caught on and would be waiting for me when 60 minutes had gone by. I tried not to be rude, but my back simply couldn't stand for much over an hour. When I told friends at home this, they looked confused. When I explained that one was not allowed to sit down at a cocktail party, they looked even more confused but those were and are the rules for diplomats.

The people were great – the Embassy staff, the diplomatic community and the Malians. At the Embassy, our morale was excellent. It was a big mission for West Africa, about 250 Americans including AID contractors and PCVs and about 275 local staff. We were enthusiastic about helping the Malians to develop democratic practices and institutions. I chaired a Democracy and Human Rights Committee with representatives of State, AID and USIA and coordinated our efforts. The Department had just obtained funding for small Democracy and Human Rights grants and we enthusiastically sought deserving groups. The Women's Lawyers Group started a free clinic in Bamako and offered advice

to women who would otherwise have had nowhere else to turn. The lawyers worked *gratis* and we paid for office furniture, equipment and supplies. A group of journalists wrote Public Service announcements and we paid the many independent radio stations to run them, thus offering a source of ad revenue to the chronically underfunded stations. The Committee for the Defense of Women and Children commissioned a play on the evils of female genital cutting which had its world premiere at my house before going on the road to villages around the country. In fact, we were so successful, every year the Department gave us more money.

One of the most interesting aspects of these grants, was that we discovered that the women's groups were consistently more committed, more successful than those run by men. The first year, we thought it was a fluke. The second year we heavily weighted our grants in favor of the women, and by the third year, we just eliminated any proposal that did not have major support by women. This was before many studies were done that concluded that investing in women paid off much better when it came to development. When women earned extra money, they were much more likely to use their profits to benefit their children, their family, their community. In the case of these grants to non-profits, women seemed much more committed to improving their communities, and found that being part of one of these organizations gave them status not otherwise available to them. Of course, it wasn't always smooth sailing. Many of these groups whether run by men or women had no experience in writing grant proposals, developing a budget or keeping records of expenses. The first year, we had a hell of a time getting receipts for these grants so we could reimburse the grantees. The second year I suggested we take a small amount off the top of the grants, and insist that all grantees get a week of training at a local business school. I worried that the grantees would find being taught such basic skills to be patronizing. I could not have been more wrong. They were thrilled to get training – the first most had ever had. In addition to basic bookkeeping and grant writing, we added such things as how to run a meeting and other Roberts Rules of Order. From then on, we had no problems getting receipts as required.

Q: What about the diplomatic community?

BLACKFORD: The diplomatic community for the most part also seemed to enjoy excellent morale. The largest Embassy, of course, was that of the former colonial power, France. Now my French never really got to be what you would call first-rate. Although I had served in Paris for three years before going to Mali, I had little need for French while in the Embassy. Almost all the French employees spoke English exceptionally well, and I only used French for pleasantries, at the grocery store, the restaurant or occasionally to give directions to French from outside Paris who apparently thought I looked friendlier than most of the French rushing by on the sidewalk. They were quite surprised to get directions with an American accent. The longer I spent in Mali, the more fluent I became, though to this day I tend to ignore many grammatical niceties. The staff at the French Embassy couldn't have been kinder however. The DCM and his wife, as well as the Defense Attaché and his wife became close friends. The French Ambassador, on the other hand, was every inch the Ambassador -- well dressed, imposing, always correct, but a bit aloof. One day we wound up sitting next to each other at the airport waiting for

visitors. Ambassador Gelber had told me that the Ambassador had had an assignment to the UN and was quite the baseball fan so we talked about baseball for a while – in French of course. Finally, I couldn't resist asking why he put up with my French when clearly, he spoke perfect English. "Oh", he said, "it wouldn't do for the French Ambassador in a French speaking country to be caught speaking anything else." This, I realized, was the essence of "Francophonie", the passion the French feel for their language and culture. Until that point, I had never really understood the depths of the French attachment to the concept. (The Ambassador later became the equivalent of Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the Quai. The DCM became Ambassador to Chad where we met by chance at the 4th of July party when I was on a short assignment. The Attaché was promoted to General before his retirement.)

The Russians also had a large Embassy in Bamako but this was 1992, just months after the fall of the Soviet Union and the Russians were still trying to find their footing in a new world order. The Russian Ambassador was quite friendly, spoke excellent French, and appeared to have been an early supporter of glasnost. Perhaps that was why he was in Mali rather than a more critical post which his skills clearly merited. The Russian DCM was not so comfortable with the changes. He wasn't opposed to them, he just hadn't figured out the new rules but by the time we both left post, he too had adjusted.

Q: What can you tell me about the Malians?

BLACKFORD: The Malians were great fun at representational events as well but this could present problems. Malians entertain differently. If they are invited somewhere and they have a couple of cousins visiting, they just bring them along. This plays havoc with place cards. Not to mention that the cousins might only speak one of the local languages. The Ambassador entertained the highest-ranking Malians who understood the Western way of dinner parties but as a single woman, I found lunches to be the way to go. The Malians seemed to understand that lunch was an hour or hour and a half. They came more or less on time and if they brought someone, it was likely to be another member of the National Assembly or another journalism colleague. I tried to be sure each lunch had a theme, this week members of the National Assembly, next week leaders of some of the more important non-profits, the week after bankers. The Americans at the table rarely had to ask more than one or two questions to get things started; then the Malians would pick up the theme and in no time, we would have a cable on what problems were facing Assembly members or non-profits or bankers. I tried to have businesspeople over at least every quarter if not more often. One gentleman, in particular, could hardly get over the fact that the number two at the American Embassy was a woman. He didn't object, he just found it amazing. He lived in Segou about two to three hours out of Bamako on the Niger River and at regular intervals he would repay my invitations. Someone would show up at my door with a giant "*capitaine*" that is a Nile perch, a fish that can grow up to six feet long and weigh several hundred pounds. On occasion, we couldn't get the fish in the freezer. But the most fun we had was at the events that we invited the women to attend.

Being a woman in Mali was a tough job. On paper, women were held to be equal with men but that was far from true. In practice, women were far less likely to attend school,

and thus far more likely to be illiterate. Though the legal age for marriage was 18, girls could be married at 15 with their families' consent, and often they were married even younger than that. They rarely had access to family planning and if they did, had to have their husband's consent to use it. Maternal mortality was very high. In 1990, the World Bank estimated the rate to be just over a 1000 per 100,000 births. By comparison, in the US the rate was 12 per 100,000 and that was higher than many countries in Western Europe. Partly this rate could be attributed to the fact that most of the women had no access to medical facilities and because about 95% of women were subjected to the practice of female genital mutilation which often leads to complications in child birth. If a woman divorced, she had no right to the custody of their children, nor did she inherit her husband's goods if he died. His family would often come and take everything leaving the woman penniless. As a result, the few Malian women who were prominent, who had received an education, were members of the Assembly, attorneys, leaders of organizations that supported the rights of women and children were extraordinary. And on top of all their accomplishments they remained feisty, funny, and the life of any gathering.

Malian society was complex and often surprising. Although there were 10 to 12 major ethnic groups in Mali, unlike so many other places in Africa, the Malians thought of themselves as first and foremost as Malian. Perhaps this can be attributed to pride in the area's history. The Malian Empire dominated the region from 1230 to 1600. This is the period when Islam was introduced to Mali and Timbuktu became a great center of learning. The concept of joking cousins is also very important in Malian society. A Malian name tells others a lot about you – your ethnic group, your religion, your traditional profession. Depending on your names, you can determine if you are joking cousins who are expected to insult each other by commenting on appearance or work or eating habits. For us Westerners, it is often hard to get the joke but calling someone a bean-eater is one of the most common of these insults – apparently flatulence jokes are popular everywhere. Why joking cousins? Some suggest that the practice originated centuries ago to promote cohesion among different ethnic groups. It certainly seems to work to this day. The one exception to this unity is the ongoing conflict in the Northeast between the Tuareg and Songhai. The origins of this conflict are not primarily ethnic in my opinion. Americans might best understand this issue by thinking back to our own experience in the Old West where ranchers and farmers clashed repeatedly. The Tuareg are nomadic herders. The Songhai are farmers. For centuries in the dry season, Tuareg sheep, goats and camels have invaded Songhai fields and eaten their crops. The Songhai have killed the Tuareg stock. In particularly dry years, things escalated to an ongoing border war. There were always peacemakers though. One of the many women's groups that our Democracy and Human Rights grants supported was a group of Tuareg and Songhai women who met regularly and worked for peace. There were Tuaregs in the government but there was feeling among the Tuareg that they were being marginalized and so, in addition to the traditional conflicts, there was a growing separatist movement among those who wanted their own state in the North. More recently of course, things have taken a turn for the worse as radical Islam has grown stronger in the region.

Islam which is the religion of 95% of Malians, was quite carefully observed. Malians rarely were seen drinking or ignoring halal rules. During Ramadan, our employees did not eat or drink during the day even when Ramadan fell in the hottest time of year. (I might note; however, they did get a bit grumpy by closing time.) Still Malian Islam was extremely tolerant of people of other faiths. Every Ramadan, one or other of my contacts, would deliver a nice piece of mutton to my house – practicing the Islamic custom of providing for others. No one ever chided anyone else for drinking in my hearing. And no Malian man ever seemed reluctant to shake my hand, that of a strange woman, as often happens in other Muslim countries. I always knew when Ramadan was imminent. I would look out the window and see sheep parked between the cars in our lot. It seems that you could get the best deal on your Ramadan sheep if you shopped early. Our employees would visit the market at lunch and bring their sheep to the Embassy before taking it home to fatten up.

As an outsider, you could never be sure what the real status of a Malian might be. After I observed several Ministers who had escorted the Ambassador to his car, then turn and warmly greet the Ambassador's driver, I asked about this. It seems that the driver was the traditional griot, that is story teller or oral historian, for one of the largest Malian ethnic groups. Apparently, that didn't pay the rent, but it did assure status. You could also never be sure who was related to whom. Malian families often could only afford to send one or two children to school. Thus, the same family might include a high-ranking government official, several subsistence farmers and perhaps a roadside mechanic. I learned this when I presented a Grammy – probably the only Foreign Service Officer ever to do so. It all came about when noted Malian musician, Ali Farka Touré, on Rolling Stones list of 100 best guitarists of all time, was nominated for Best World Music Album in 1995. Toure was from a small village on the Niger closer to Timbuktu than Bamako. When he wasn't appearing in New York or London or Paris, he spent his time in this village and he could not be persuaded to attend the Grammys. When he won, his agent called the Embassy and asked if we might be able to drum up some publicity for Toure. That sounded like a lot of fun to the Public Affairs Officer and me, and we agreed to hold a reception, invite the press, Touré's friends and family and generally make a big deal out of presenting the award. In due time, the Grammy arrived by DHL and a date was set. Toure seemed quite pleased and when asked to suggest a guest list, I was surprised to find both the former President, ATT, and my driver. Now Toure is a common name in Mali but I was still surprised. They both came and the party was a great success. (And I found out that Grammys are quite heavy.)

Q: After Mali, whither?

BLACKFORD: In the fall of 1994, it was time to bid on a new assignment and as I started to go over the bid lists, I received a phone call from Ed Brynn at that time the PDAS (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary) in AF. This was unexpected as the PDAS had never called me before, but it was always a pleasure to talk to Ed so I picked up the phone and was stunned to be asked if I would like to have AF's backing for Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau. Now truth be told I probably would have preferred to be offered a slightly larger, more important mission but I was pleased nonetheless and jumped at the

chance. I was also startled when Ambassador Dameron announced shortly afterward that he was going to retire after just a year and a half at the job, leaving me Chargé for the last four months of my tour. This did allow me to throw my own farewell party for 400 or so of my closest friends, since my departure fell just one day after the 4th of July. At that event, I thanked the Malians for making me appreciate my own country's history and reminding me that democracy while precious, is by no means easy. Then I was off to Senate hearings for my appointment to Guinea-Bissau.

Before Mali, people would ask me what was my favorite post and I would hem and haw. I liked the work here but not the social life, the ambiance was great there but the job was not too challenging, etc. After I arrived in Bamako, I simply said, "Mali. Mali was my favorite post."

Guinea-Bissau was not.

Q: Why?

BLACKFORD: Guinea-Bissau (GB), or Portuguese Guinea as it was called when I went to school, was colonized by Portugal beginning in the 16th century when the Portuguese began to set up trading ports along the coast. In the 19th century, Portuguese rule spread inland to encompass Guinea-Bissau's current borders. When England and France began to withdraw from their colonies in the 1950s and '60s, Portugal, then ruled by Antonio Salazar, a dictator who held power for 36 years, did not follow suit and set the stage for rebellion in Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. The Portuguese military was reasonably successful in controlling the situation in Mozambique and Angola but Guinea-Bissau, which is sometimes called "Portugal's Vietnam," was a different story. The rebels who became active in the '60s had several advantages – a dense forest terrain, sympathetic neighbors in nearby Guinea-Conakry and Senegal, and support from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and others who provided weapons and other supplies. Many credit the conflict in Guinea-Bissau with being the final straw which brought down Salazar's Estado Novo, as the people of Portugal grew increasingly tired of a war which cost them dearly not just in money but in the lives of their children, all for a colony which unlike Angola or Mozambique offered nothing in the way of resources. In 1974, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde formed a union and became independent. For many reasons, the union lasted for only a short time, and in 1980 ended when Joao Bernardo Vieira led a coup and took power in Guinea-Bissau which at that time was a one-party state. Opposition parties were legalized in the 1990s and in 1994 GB held its first democratic election, although nothing much changed as Vieira was once again elected President for a five-year term which was to expire in 1999.

GB was notorious in Foreign Service legend as one of the world's most difficult posts; it certainly lived up to its reputation though by the time I arrived there in 1995, things had vastly improved over the early days when even the most basic food stuffs were impossible to come by and we paid our employees at least partially in rice, cooking oil, salt and sugar. Jan, a Dutch entrepreneur, had opened the nearest thing GB had to a supermarket. If you shopped there not long after one of Jan's shipments had come in, you

could sometimes find some interesting items, at least you could, if you could read Dutch. Otherwise, we relied on our shipment of consumables and the skill of our cooks and stewards who braved the local markets to find meat, fish and fresh vegetables. Although GB was on the sea, the selection of fish was often rather limited as GB's government had sold much of its fishing rights to the EU and the Chinese which vastly overfished the region. As was customary most of the revenue from these enterprises went straight into the pockets of GB's officials.

And I must tell you a bit about Jan. I have no idea why he settled in GB but he had lived there a long time and knew all the gossip. He also loved to play April Fool's jokes – not on individuals but on the entire country. My favorite was the year he paid the local radio to run an item announcing that GB was investing in a subway in Bissau. The populace was up in arms. Members of Parliament called for hearings on this wasteful government spending. Newspapers called for investigations. Of course, there was no plan to put a subway in Bissau. How Jan got people to fall for these jokes year after year baffled me, but he succeeded.

There were only a handful of private Americans in country, leading to the unusual tradition of inviting the entire community for Thanksgiving dinner. The Ambassador supplied the turkeys, the mission staff provided the trimmings, and everyone else brought whatever they could. Total guests never exceeded 100 including foreign spouses, and significant others.

Building standards in Bissau were sad and for that reason, the Bureau of Overseas Building Operations (OBO) had acquired two pieces of property across the street from each other. On one plot stood our housing compound of four townhouses, the DCM and Ambassador's residences, a generator which assured our power supply, and shared recreational facilities – a pool, a tennis court, and covered pavilion. To say we lived in close quarters hardly covered it. It wasn't too bad when we all got along but that was not always the case during my tenure at post. The Embassy stood on the other plot and had arrived as a prefab building which to my mind always looked just like a small suburban post office in Virginia. For some inexplicable reason, the building had been erected not on a concrete slab, as I would have expected, but instead on the bare earth. As the years went by, critters began to find their way under the building and from there into the walls and ceilings as the DCM's cable, "Rats, and Mice and Snakes, Oh My!" described in detail. We never did find a solution to the problem but when we had to take down the ceiling panels we always stood back as far as possible to avoid falling rodent turds. Fortunately, all the snakes left behind were little S curves in the dirt in the crawl space. Very fortunate indeed as our choice of snakes on the compound were mambas in one of two colors, green or black, with an occasional cobra thrown in.

Bissau was a Sep Post (I think this stood for small embassy post), a concept State came up with in the '70s – a way to staff Embassies in small, newly independent countries when the Department lacked the resources to staff the posts in the traditional matter. The idea was to keep staffing as lean as possible while at the same time reducing the standard workload expected from larger Embassies. The Department was quite good at meeting

the former goal, but the reduction in workload never seemed to occur. We still were expected to do the Human Rights Report. If we needed new vehicles, our vehicle reports had to be up to date. Hardship allowances and cost of living allowances would not be approved without current data. Our local employees did not get a raise unless we conducted a survey. The Embassy was very small - six American employees from State, one from AID, and three at Peace Corps, plus a handful of AID contractors, 35-40 PCVs and about 30 locally hired employees. There were no Marines, no RSO, no military – the importance of which will become clear when I get around to talking about our rather hasty departure from post. We were rarely, if ever, fully staffed. Some jobs went empty for months, and the lack of medical facilities meant that people had to be medevacked for even minor issues. There was no dentist in Bissau so even a small cavity meant that someone would be gone from post for at least three days.

Speaking of medical facilities, there really were none. I visited the main hospital in Bissau and found that on regular basis, it lacked running water and electricity. When I told people that, I could see that they didn't believe me. They knew I was telling the truth but it was an inconceivable truth. There was one hospital, the Chinese hospital, that just barely got by. It had the only ultrasound in the country and sometimes the x-ray machine had film. One major drawback was that it was at least an hour out of Bissau and on the other side of a river which had to be crossed by ferry. Not much help in an emergency. We all lived in dread of a serious car accident so, of course, we had one. Three of our employees, two AID contractors and their local driver had a disagreement with a garbage truck and all were critically injured, two with head trauma and one with a badly wounded leg. All would have been in danger of dying even if proper medical facilities had been available. My timing, for once, was impeccable. I was out of the country but what the Embassy pulled off under the circumstances was nothing less than a miracle. The Peace Corps Nurse Practitioner, the only medical professional on staff, and the wife of our Information Management Officer, a registered nurse who volunteered to help, struggled to keep the injured alive and get them stable for transport. The rest of the Embassy searched for a plane to transfer them to Dakar, Senegal where our Regional Medical Officer would be able to take over. They found a small plane and a couple of pilots, Russians, I believe. Then they had to get airport clearance since the airport was expecting no flights and was closed. Within hours the seats had been stripped from the chartered aircraft, the wounded were strapped down and the two nurses climbed on board to take care of them on their flight. Once in Dakar, the Regional Medical Officer was able to get them stabilized so that they could be transferred to Paris where they ultimately received treatment and survived.

Other diplomats faced the same challenges. The diplomatic community was quite small, and due in part to the fact that there was no international school in Bissau, most spouses remained home in Europe or elsewhere except for a short visit now and then. This made for a rather limited social life, though I did make good friends with the head of the EU Mission and his delightful wife who were resident at post. Language also made entertaining somewhat difficult. Although the official language of GB was Portuguese, many Guineans, including the President, had spent their formative years as rebels in Senegal or Guinea- Conakry and spoke French very well. As a result, many missions

unable to recruit Portuguese speakers, staffed their offices with French speakers instead. At a cocktail party, English often became the lingua franca among the diplomats; I was one of the very few who could communicate in all three languages. Dinner parties were few and far between as it was a nightmare to figure out how to seat everyone so they could talk to their seat mates while still paying some attention to protocol.

Q: What were our interests in Guinea-Bissau?

BLACKFORD: The first two years of my tenure, GB was a member of the UN Security Council and thus a nation we called on to join us in votes before the Council. Mostly they abstained if the issue was at all controversial, trying not to offend either their one-time Marxist supporters, or the US, which they hoped in time to make a better and more generous friend. Otherwise we had only two mission goals.

The first of these was to help create a more modern and stable economic development climate. I was very pleased with this program which AID oversaw. In Mali, AID had programs in education, health, infrastructure, etc. I frankly was never quite sure what we were doing. In GB, we concentrated on improving family incomes. In this we were quite successful. Cashews were GB's principal cash crop. Since most people know nothing about cashews, permit me to tell you a little about them. They grow on trees, one to a fruit. The cashews are hard to extract, not because the technology is complicated or expensive, but because they have a double shell between which is an acidic oil closely related to that found in poison ivy. In 1995, raw cashews sold for about $700 a ton, processed ones for $5,000 but virtually all of GB's cashews went to middlemen who shipped the cashews to India for processing. The most popular stop for our visitors was to our model cashew processing plant, where we trained hundreds of farmers how to prepare cashews for market using nothing but simple roasting techniques, rubber gloves, a sorting table covered in oil to help extract the nut itself, and low temperature drying ovens. The income of these farmers soared. The program also trained farmers in how to sort produce to meet EU standards as well as several similar projects.

We were not nearly so successful in meeting our second mission goal of strengthening GB's nascent democratic institutions. Almost all of GB's governing officials including the President were heroes of the revolution. As such they had spent their early years waging a guerilla war; very few of them had more than a high school education. And most of them saw no need to learn more. They were already the Big Men of their nation, they had mastered the art of wearing bespoke suits and stealing the money they needed to pay for them. Whenever I visited anyone in the GB government they tried to hit me up for money. I soon learned that the solution to this was to agree that their proposal might have merit, and to ask that they send me a written request with a detailed budget. Not once did I ever receive such a request. Other Ambassadors told me that on occasion, their Embassy had drafted the request for the GB Minister concerned and delivered it to the Ministry to be signed. I was horrified. As you can imagine, talking to them about building democratic institutions was tough going.

Given the difficulty that GB faced in communicating with its villages, one day I broached the idea of decentralization in a meeting with President Vieira. Local communities in the US, I explained, were responsible for their own schools, for zoning decisions, for maintaining law and order. Many citizens volunteered their time to these activities. The Fire Department was staffed by volunteers, as was the zoning board, and the Health and Sanitation committee. My mother was the first woman elected to the local school board, an honor that paid nothing. My father was twice elected Mayor, an honor that paid somewhat less than it cost him to cover the expenses of the office. Imagine my surprise when the President said, and I quote, "but that would never work in the villages, they have no electricity." I was so dumbfounded I have no idea what I said to conclude the meeting, but I am sure I left the Presidential Palace muttering something about America's founding fathers and the citizens of Athens. Good thing they didn't know they needed electricity. Upon reflection, I realized that Vieira and I had such different notions of democracy that the twain would probably never even come close. To him, government was infrastructure, resources. You could not govern with volunteers, you needed, yes, electricity.

I did continue to push democracy and human rights especially women's rights whenever I could. Whenever I visited a village and met the elders, all of whom were men, I always asked to meet the women as well. One year I worked with the Minister of Women's Affairs to celebrate Women's Day. The Embassy provided transportation for a TV crew to travel with us out to inaugurate several self-help projects which were run by women. I was delighted when the PCVs sponsored a version of Take Your Daughter to Work. Each participating volunteer brought in a girl from his or her village. The girls arrived on a Friday and settled in to the PCV housing in Bissau. One group of girls spent the day with some of the women local employees at the Embassy, another group went to a women's sewing coop, and so on. On Saturday, the DCM hosted a pool party at the Embassy compound and on Sunday the girls went home, most of them having spent their first nights away from their villages.

One of the best aspects of GB, from my point of view, was that it was small. GB's roads were for the most part surprisingly good which allowed me to visit nearly every nook and cranny of the country in twelve hours or so and still be home by dark. Not that it was all easy going. The mileage from Bissau to the Senegalese border was less than 90 miles. It should have taken at most two hours, but it often took four, since the most direct route required crossing two good sized rivers by ferry. Sometimes you hit the unwritten schedule lucky and then it only took three. There was a detour which avoided the ferries but took you several hours out of the way and over a bridge that had trees growing through it, big trees. I preferred the ferries, though I was somewhat dubious about their safety as well. I guess that's what the hardship allowance covered. On one memorable occasion, in a village at the end of the earth, we inaugurated a new project which the Embassy's self-help fund had sponsored. Self-help funds were allocated to embassies throughout Africa, which in turn distributed small amounts, typically under $10,000 to assist villages in making improvements such as new schools, irrigation, wells, etc. The fund was for the materials which had to be purchased. The village had to contribute the labor and other materials. When the project was finished, the Ambassador would show

up, cut the ribbon, make a little speech and the villagers would cook lunch. The women always danced and they were very inventive when it came to making music. On one occasion, they had sewn bottlecaps to their skirts and they were quite good at creating percussion as they danced. One lady in particular, caught my eye. Her T-shirt proudly said, "Vote for Bill Clinton". If you ever wonder where those old clothes you give to Goodwill get to, Guinea-Bissau is one possibility

The only exception to my home by dark rule was what I came to call my three-goat trip. The south east of GB was very underdeveloped, very rich agriculturally but without access to markets. The road, if you could call it a road, resembled an overgrown driveway. The trees grew in an arch completely over it and when we met the other car that we saw that day, one of us had to pull into the underbrush to let the other vehicle by. The first day we met the representative from the NGO Africare at a village where we had funded a self-help project. We cut the ribbon, made our speeches and were presented with our first goat of the trip. I spent the night at the Africare rep's home and we had goat stew for dinner. The drivers went back the way they came and drove to the other side of the river which divided the area. The next day I went with the Africare rep in her boat to meet our transportation, visited a second village and acquired a second goat. That one went home with the Africare rep as well, but by the time I got to the third village, we were on our own and I was stuck with the third goat. I'm not sure how we got him back to Bissau, we did have two Land Cruisers and he definitely did not ride with me. Chickens in the car I could tolerate but not a goat. He made it safely and was turned loose with two sheep we had acquired under similar circumstances to be the Embassy's lawnmowers.

By June of 1998, I was looking forward to leaving Bissau – well I guess it's clear, I had been looking forward to that for some time but by June of 1998, it seemed imminent. I expected that by the beginning of August I would be packed out and on my way to my final Foreign Service assignment as Diplomat in Resident at City University in New York. Bissau seemed peaceful. The president and his government were widely regarded by Guineans as ineffective and corrupt. Change was probably inevitable but neither diplomats nor Guineans were predicting violent or immediate change. I guess that's how all the most successful coups occur.

At 6 am on Sunday morning, June 7, 1998, my telephone began to ring. By the time I had my eyes open, the phone had stopped but my doorbell had started. Somehow, I knew this was not going to be good news. I threw on my bathrobe, staggered to the door and met the AID Director, Nancy McKay, who while going about her usual early morning birdwatching had run into armed men and heard automatic weapons fire. Standing in the doorway I could hear the gunfire as well.

The mission staff quickly assembled at the Embassy. We learned that the chief of staff of the army, General Mane, fired for his part in an arms smuggling scandal had decided not to go quietly. Illiterate and unable to speak either Portuguese or French, he had been held under house arrest for some time and was little known to expatriates. I had met him once when the Deputy Commander of EUCOM (European Command) who was responsible

for Africa came to visit with Joe Wilson who was then POLAD to EUCOM. Our interview with General Mane was painful. When asked how many people were in the Army, Mane conferred with several aides but never did come up with a number. He totally failed to impress us but what we did not recognize was that he was revered by many in the military who held him to be a hero in the bitter struggle that freed his country from Portugal. And what we didn't know was that Mane was frightened. He had previously been implicated in a missing arms scandal along with the President. In the current case, he was accused of being the only one with keys to the armories where the missing arms were stored. This was ridiculous. I had seen several of these depots and while the keys may have kept the doors tightly locked, most had holes in the roof and the walls. The National Assembly had announced its intention to call Mane to testify before it and we were told that Mane believed the President had plans to kill him to prevent him from exposing the President's part in the plot. Many battle-hardened troops rallied to Mane's support. They quickly achieved control of two key military bases, one nearly adjacent to our Embassy and blocking the only access to the airport and ruling out an evacuation by air.

Office Management Specialist, Diann Bimmerle, a veteran of several coups elsewhere, offered her experience and kept us connected to the State Department's Operation Center in Washington. Calls to EUCOM established that the US military had no ships that could be redeployed to the area for quite some time. Throughout the day, our first-tour Vice Consul, Bryan Hunt, did a terrific job of fielding frantic inquiries from US citizens and the press while at the same time tracking down all the Americans in country and advising them to stay home and in touch. One somewhat befuddled PCV showed up at our door to ask what was going on. She had just walked through both rebel and government lines to reach us without incident. Clearly no one wanted to hurt us but we were caught between enemy lines. The country team met to review tripwires that might require evacuation although almost everyone we spoke with believed that the coup attempt would blow over in a day or two. But early on Monday morning when shelling nearly blew us out of bed, we had to reassess. The rebels were far more determined and better prepared that we had expected and the government forces were not proving up to the task of uprooting them. Americans and others began seeking sanctuary in our residential compound across from the embassy.

Most people reached the Embassy without incident, but two Peace Corps volunteers called desperately seeking help. They were trapped in a hotly contested area of town. The local people were evacuating. They asked us for help. As I tried to decide who to send on this dangerous mission, Nancy McKay spoke up. It was her neighborhood, she knew it well and would go. The next hour, until everyone returned safely was one of the longest of my life. Soon we were sheltering more than 50 people, PCVs, missionaries, businesspeople, and tourists. We ransacked our homes for food, blankets and towels. The PCVs took over preparing meals for our growing army of refugees. Just when I felt I couldn't last another minute, a meal would miraculously appear at my desk, sometimes breakfast at 5 in the afternoon or spaghetti at 10 in the morning but who cared? Peace Corps Medical Officer, Karen Glucksberg treated an epidemic of stomach disorders and headaches brought on by nerves. Our newly arrived summer intern, whose internship was

to be short but memorable, spent hours destroying classified and sensitive documents. Never have I seen people pitch in and work together so well. The handful of us working in the Embassy, moved our mattresses to the Chancery and we slept in our offices along with our eight cats who were somewhat understandably confused by the situation. I learned later that many people were under the impression that all those cats were mine. As a matter of fact, cat person though I am, none of them was mine, although I was cat sitting for two of them who belonged to the former Peace Corps Director.

Our line to the Operations Center remained open for a week. Everyone suddenly was interested in GB. Mary Ryan, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, and my good friend and mentor, talked to us every day, checked on the welfare of all the American citizens as you would expect but also inquired about the staff. She asked what she could do for me. "Call my family and keep them up to date", I asked and she did not just for me but for every member of the staff who requested it. Pat Kennedy, then Assistant Secretary for Administration, called to impress upon me that he had already lost enough friends and I was to get home safe. I assured him I would do my best. There were funny calls as well. Someone from Diplomatic Security (DS) spoke to me and questioned me about the Embassy's "assets". It took me a while but I finally said, "you mean guns". He reluctantly agreed that that was what he was hinting at. I told him I thought we had an old shotgun in a safe somewhere but whether there was ammunition or anyone who could fire it was something else entirely. Did he think it would do much good against tanks and artillery? He hung up quietly. The Design Division of the Overseas Building Operations Office also called. You may remember that during the crisis in Albania a year or so before, this office had sent Ambassador Marissa Lino a telegram reminding her to protect the Embassy silver. Lino shared the cable with the press and expressed her opinion of some bureaucratic priorities. As a result, the call I received was much more diplomatic but made the same request. I made it clear that if anyone's silver managed to make my priority list it would be mine not the government's. Didn't hear from them again either.

Somewhere in the middle of the week, the Senegalese army invaded, ostensibly on the side of the government, but as far as I could see, their main objective was to see what they could loot. One afternoon, a tank showed up on our doorstep and the tank commander said he had been sent to rescue us. I checked with the Ops Center to see if I had missed something and found they knew nothing about it. I could hear artillery targeting in on us and told the commander in most undiplomatic language to get his "expletive deleted" tank away from my Embassy. He left and the artillery ceased to close in on us.

We continued to explore every possibility we could to evacuate and on Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning, the Portuguese Embassy called to tell us that they had found a Portuguese freighter to take refugees to Dakar. It would dock Wednesday morning and could take our citizens. It seemed our best bet, and on Tuesday evening we moved almost everyone from the compound down to the port area and told other American citizens to report to the dock first thing in the morning with lots of water. The Portuguese assured us that they were working with the rebels and the government to declare a cease fire so that the expats could get out safely. Unfortunately, this cease-fire

never occurred. Instead the refugees spent a harrowing eight hours on the dock while shells went off all around them. Finally, the majority of Americans and others who we had accepted responsibility for – some 300 people from a dozen nations -- led by AID Director McKay and Peace Corps Director Brian Cavanagh, boarded the ship for a grueling 24-hour trip to Dakar, Senegal. It must have been a horror. The freighter carried a crew of 15 or 20. 3,000 people got on in Bissau. There was obviously not anywhere near enough water (though we had purchased and loaded on as much as we could buy), or food or shelter or sanitary facilities. I have asked many people who made the trip to tell me about it and they all just change the subject. But Embassy Dakar assured us on Thursday that they had all arrived safely, perhaps not happily, but safely.

The handful of us remaining in Bissau drew a giant sigh of relief and set to work to find evacuation routes for the 17 PCVs who had not been in Bissau when the crisis began. The RSO and the Defense Attaché from Dakar made it into GB as far as the rebel lines but were allowed no farther. They had a satellite phone and called the Embassy, we agreed that they should turn around, pick up three or four volunteers between their position and the border and get those folks out of harm's way. We also learned that several volunteers who lived in the west of the country had hitched a ride with some Africare workers who had been spending the weekend there and had safely reached Senegal as well. We had two volunteers stationed in the Bijagos Islands, remote islands off the coast of GB. Many of these islands were deserted, others had a fishing camp or two where a handful of French tourists came to fish each year. Upon further investigation, it turned out that the two volunteers were hosting several more visiting from Mali, and that the British Voluntary Service had four volunteers who also needed to be rescued. The Department and Embassy Guinea-Conakry chartered a small plane on Friday from one of the bauxite mines located in our next-door neighbor and successfully landed on a small strip on the most populous island and flew them out. That left just one volunteer unaccounted for. The charter from the bauxite mine landed at the strip where she was supposed to be but got a rather unfriendly reception from government troops who were suspicious of this small plane. I suggested they try again on Saturday, this time taking one or two of the Bijagos volunteers who spoke the local creole. Fortunately, everyone agreed to this and when the plane arrived this time, the volunteers were able to clear the air with the military and find the missing volunteer who had no idea she was being sought. By Saturday, June 13, our last citizen was safe and it was time for the five of us left in the Embassy to go as well. We packed up the consular seals, took the cash from the safe, gathered up a cat or two and a change of underwear and got ready to leave.

The Department had hired a small fishing boat to pick us up. Its greatest virtue seemed to be that it had a radio so that we could arrange our pickup. Of course, the radio stopped working and instead of a fishing boat we were met at an isolated dock on Sunday morning, June 14, and picked up by a dinghy from a small tanker -- a river tanker which delivered diesel fuel up river and which as it turned out was empty. We steamed the 40 miles or so down the river from Bissau but when we hit the open sea, we pitched and yawed to such an extent that we had to put in between two islands and spend the night. I staked out a piece of deck, declared it my own and slept like a rock. I don't know when I have ever been so tired. The next day we went back to the drawing board. The river

boat's radio did work and we contacted EUCOM, which had deployed to Dakar and was, I suspect, anxious to get in on the action after traveling so far. They pushed me to get the boat's captain to bring us to Cap Skirring in southern Senegal, famous mostly for having a Club Med. I asked the Captain if he had ever been to Cap Skirring. "No", he said but he could probably find it. I asked what the port was like and the captain told me there was no port. "How were we getting off the boat?", I asked EUCOM. They said they had Zodiacs and could come out and get us. Everyone on the boat was following this conversation and I could almost hear them thinking, "we aren't going to take this rowboat 100 miles up the coast in open sea, are we?" I told EUCOM I'd get back to them, turned to the Capitan, and asked if he had a Plan B. Yes, he said, he could take us a couple miles out to sea to his mother ship, the tanker that refilled his tanks and the tanker could take us somewhere like Banjul, the capital of the Gambia. That sounded way better to all of us. I called EUCOM back, and told them what we had decided. They were irritated, I could tell, but we were very relieved. The sea was quite calm that day and we soon we could see the tanker, which was sitting still as could be. Our boat, now that was something else. As we pulled up alongside, we were bobbing up and down like a rubber ducky in a bathtub full of kids, rising and falling six to ten feet on each little swell and staring at the rope ladder that was to be our only access. At the top of the wave we were just a couple feet from the deck of the tanker but if we timed it wrong we would be slammed between the ships. We quickly passed up all eight cats, then our luggage. Next, I took a deep breath, waited for the up and stepped on the ladder and scrambled in a most undignified way onto the deck. Everyone else followed safely.

The captain and his crew could not have been nicer. The captain gave us his quarters. We took a shower – though drying off was a challenge since we each had only one towel and everything was already very damp. The crew fed us and we steamed toward Banjul. We were greeted upon arrival by the press, the Gambian Foreign Minister, and of course, Ambassador Gerald Scott and his wife. Gerald and his wife housed me, the rest of us were parceled out to other Embassy residences. Most of us had old friends at post since we often traveled to Banjul for official supplies, medical treatment or just a change of pace. Banjul had several ethnic restaurants and nice beaches and hotels which Bissau did not.

Meanwhile back in GB, a civil war that would last more than a year, raged on. Vieira was ousted. Elections held in 2000 put Kumba Yala, the main opposition leader, in power but he too was ousted. No great surprise. Every time he visited me, the stench of palm wine lingered in my office for hours. Many others tried to govern without success. Vieira returned in 2005, and against all odds, was reelected. It was not the best move on his part, as he was assassinated in 2009. All in all, there has been roughly one leader for every year since I left. Sensing an opportunity, South American drug lords made GB their gateway to Europe, and many reporters have dubbed GB a narco state.

After a few days in Banjul, we all made it back to DC. I was disappointed in State. We seem to be so good at professional events, and so callous when it comes to taking care of each other. For example, how do we treat people who retire? Rarely does anyone get a party, a plaque, a picture shaking hands with the boss. And so it was with those of us who

had been evacuated and endured a frightening and grueling ordeal. I checked in with AF the first day I was back, and it was "oh, hi, here's a desk, let's put you to work". At least that's how it seemed to me. As far as I know, no one was formally debriefed to find out what worked and what didn't. No one from MED ever checked with any of us to see if we had PTSD, and I learned later that at least one of our number was having trouble sleeping and jumped whenever there was a loud noise. I thanked everyone for the offer of a desk and a job but said I had other plans, I was going shopping. The confusion was evident on everyone's face. I was wearing a full-length African print dress I had had made in two days while in Banjul. It was a look you could just get by with in the African Bureau, but it was hardly the most professional attire. I pointed out what I was wearing. Everyone nodded, no more enlightened. "Well, it's all I'm wearing, I said." All the underwear that I owned were dirty. Everyone quickly agreed that I should take as much time as I needed to replenish my wardrobe.

During my time in HR I'd noticed how often people who'd done extraordinary things or endured extraordinary hardships, got no credit. Take the case of the hostages in Teheran. There was literally no one who could write their evaluations and they wound up with big gaps in their performance files which may have impacted their promotion as well as their competitiveness for onward assignment. As a result, after a day or so at the mall, I returned to the Department, found a desk, and settled down to write awards and letters of commendation to document the outstanding performance of all those who had been in GB with me. Then I turned to other paperwork.

I found the claims section difficult to deal with; I think we all did. Most of us had lost everything. Four of the houses on the compound burned to the ground the day after we left when mortars set the compound next to us alight and the fire spread. My house was looted down to the bathroom fixtures and copper wire. It seemed obvious to me that if we had lost everything, we would have also lost our receipts, but the Claims Office insisted we had to do whatever we could to document our possessions. I think we all felt we were being treated as though we were chiselers out to cheat the government. I stopped by Pat Kennedy's office to assure him in person that I was all in one piece, and talked to him about our reception. We discussed how we could do better. We explored the idea of creating a volunteer group that could rally when an evacuation occurred. I was pleased to note some months later when another group of evacuees arrived, they seemed much more satisfied with their reception.

The next six weeks or so, I did a variety of things around AF and at the beginning of August when things started to go badly in the Congo, I found myself chairing the task force in the Operations Center, experiencing the other side of a crisis. I came to work one morning about a week later, not having listened to the news, and learned I was now on the task force on the bombings of our Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. It was disturbing for me. As you will remember I had served in Nairobi some 20 plus years before in the Budget section and as the casualty lists started to come in, it was clear that that section had been nearly wiped out. The budget offices (no longer over the Wimpy but instead in the Embassy built after I left and in about the worst location one can imagine) must have been right next to the explosion. Five of the people I'd worked

closely with were dead including the young man I'd hired and who had invited me to his wedding, the only Muslim wedding I had ever attended. It is hard to describe the shock of learning that people you have known, been fond of, have been brutally murdered.

After a week or so on the task force, it was time for me to pack my new bags with my new clothes and move to New York to take up my last Foreign Service assignment, Diplomat in Residence (DIR) at City University of New York (CUNY). State began the DIR program sometime in the '70s as a program designed to improve minority recruitment. There were usually between 10 and 20 senior diplomats assigned to colleges and universities with a large minority enrollment. State paid the salary, the school provided office space and the usual supplies. The diplomat went to career fairs both at his or her assigned university but also at other schools in the region, mentored students, gave guest lectures and taught according to his or her skills and interests if the host school concurred. CUNY turned out not to be ideal. It certainly has a large minority enrollment but it is a city school. Most students worked full-time; there was no hanging out on the quad or participating in extracurricular clubs. Budget was tight during my tenure and I couldn't travel as much as I'd have liked, but I did design and teach a course on the Practice of Diplomacy which the students really seemed to enjoy. Unlike the usual academic course, my course was very interactive, lots of mock Country team meetings, presenting demarches, dealing with the press, planning VIP visits, etc. The DIR assignment was a perfect bridge to retirement for me. I rented a small, very small, apartment near the UN when I first arrived, but by late 1999, I found just what I wanted in a nice coop on the Upper West Side which gave me easy access to all the performing arts which I love. In September of 2000, I officially retired.

I attended the retirement seminar and after considering all the possibilities, I was happy to accept AF's offer to put me on their retired annuitant roster. They gave me short term assignments of six weeks to two months for the next 14 years until I admitted I was perhaps getting a bit old to visit Chad or Burkina or CAR or the other lovely posts which were, after all, where help was needed. During the '90s, the Department faced multiple hiring freezes. As a result, in the 2000s, I was made to feel very welcome wherever I was sent. Many small posts were staffed with just one or two senior officers and the remainder were entry-level officers on their first or second tour and, occasionally, a civil servant on an excursion tour. Mid-grade officers were virtually non-existent. The senior officers at post did their best to mentor the inexperienced officers, but many of them had little or no experience themselves when it came to the nitty-gritty of management. As a result, many of the posts I visited were in serious need of attention, and I found a lot of entry-level officers would find reasons to drop by my office no matter what I was supposed to be doing at post or what section they worked in. I'll never forget the e-mail I received from an Econ Officer who I helped with a Department of Commerce sponsored trip to the US for local businesspeople. He wrote and I quote, "Peggy, did anyone ever tell you that you are freakin' awesome?" I had to admit that no one had, but it is a compliment I will forever cherish.

I love living in New York. It's even better than when I was young because now I can afford to go to as much theater, ballet and opera as I want. I've used the extra money I

earned with State to travel the world to many of the countries that the Department never saw fit to send me to. I've now made it to all seven continents (Antarctica was amazing) and am up to about 130 countries visited so far. With luck, I'm hoping to make it to a few more.

Q: And with that, I want to thank you very much.

End of interview