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

AMBASSADOR STEVEN A. BROWNING

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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Executive Director, Africa Bureau

Foreign Service Institute 1998-2000
Dean of School of Professional and Area Studies (SPAS)

University of Southern California 2000-2002
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Lilongwe, Malawi 2003-2004
Ambassador

Iraq 2004-2005
Management Counselor

Washington, DC 2007-2008
Iraq Management Issues Special Assignment

Kampala, Uganda 2006-2009
Ambassador

Washington, DC 2009-2012
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) for Human Resources

University of California-Berkeley 2012-2014

Diplomat-in-Residence

Retirement December 31, 2014
WAE
Mentor to new Chiefs of Mission

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 16th of August 2016 and this interview with Ambassador Steven A. Browning; our first interview. Steven, let's start at the beginning – when and where were you born?

BROWNING: I was born in Lubbock, Texas, December 6th, 1949.

Q: Let's check out the family. Where on your father's side do the Brownings come from?

BROWNING: It's unclear. We suspect they were originally from England and immigrated to the U.S. and eventually Texas to work in the oilfields. My paternal grandfather and great grandfather retired out of the oilfield; both my father and I worked in the oil fields for a while, as well. Earlier than my great grandfather, we're not quite sure about the family origins. No one's really researched it beyond the mid-1800s.

Q: Let's talk about your father – what do you know about him?

BROWNING: He was one of five children, the first in his family to graduate from college. He served in World War II as an MP (military police) in Europe and came back and went to Texas Tech University in Lubbock on the GI Bill. He worked as a bellhop at a Hilton Hotel while he was going to school.

Q: What do you know about your mother and her background?

BROWNING: They're all sort of northern Europeans – Dutch, English, Scotch, Irish and German. The family lore is that the original immigrant was a pirate who smuggled his son to the States in a flour barrel. We haven't been able to verify that. The earliest record of one branch of the family is from the 1760s when one of our ancestors was being sued over a land dispute. Another member of that family line was a member of the Jesse James gang. Clell Miller was captured as a 14-year-old by the Southern forces during the Civil War. Shortly thereafter the Northern forces captured him from the southerners. Since he was still a boy and an innocent bystander they didn't hold him for long. Then he went off and joined the Jesse James gang and got himself shot and killed in Minnesota. He was 26. We have another family member who was a preacher in Texas who went to court for poisoning his in-laws! He poisoned seven and three died. (Laughter) I finally stopped researching since I don't know what else I'll find if I keep digging into that family line. Maybe one of these days I'll build up the courage to do some more research.

Q: It does sound like your family was rather eclectic, playing every angle.

BROWNING: Right – we are not blue bloods by any stretch of the imagination.

Q: A lot of blue bloods would if you looked too close you'd find were doing what your family did, too!

BROWNING: You're right.

Q: Tell me about your mother.

BROWNING: My mother was raised in West Texas as well, on a ranch. She and my father met after he returned from World War II, at a prayer meeting (she says that his prayers were answered). She finished a year of college before they married and then she quit school and worked in a cotton seed lab to help put him through school. After my brother and I were in junior high and high school, she did something very rare in West

Texas in the mid-1960s. She went back to college, first at the local junior college in our home town of Odessa. She completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in art and education at Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Texas, a three hour drive from Odessa. It was during this period that my brother and I learned to cook, wash clothes and generally learn to take care of ourselves (for which my wife thanks my mother frequently). She then went on to become an elementary school teacher. My mother loved to travel and was the prime motivator for family trips.

Q: Where were you raised?

BROWNING: I was raised in Odessa, Texas. My dad earned a degree in business administration and went to work for an oil company in a real small town of about 300 people called Goldsmith. We lived there for the first five years of my life. Then we moved to the big city of Odessa, Texas in the Permian Basin in West Texas. Then dad left the oil business and started his own insurance company. My mother helped him establish the business and was his office manager and bookkeeper for a while. He kept growing the business and it eventually became the largest insurance agency between El Paso and Fort Worth. He was really successful at it. He was also very active in local civic activities.

Q: How long were you a kid growing up in Goldsmith?

BROWNING: It was just for my first five years. I don't remember much of it at all. My grandparents stayed there as long as they were able to live independently, so I'd go back and visit often. It's about 30 miles from Odessa where I grew up, so it's all in the same neighborhood.

Q: When you as a kid began to know what was happening around you, where were you living then?

BROWNING: That's Odessa. It's a town of about 100,000 now; when I was growing up it was probably closer to 80,000. Its twin city is Midland where George W. Bush grew up until he went off to boarding school. Bush the father was an oilman; he took his family money and built on it. They lived for a while in Odessa then moved to Midland which is about 20 miles away. Odessa has some ranching and some cotton farming, but primarily the economy is all about oil and gas. As I got older I worked summers in the oil fields…boy, that's hard work.

Q: My brother lived in Midland for a while. He was working for Schlumberger, an oil well…

BROWNING: Exactly. They're still big out there.

Q: What was it like as a kid in Odessa?

BROWNING: I went to high school at Permian High School which was the subject of the book Friday Night Lights, if you're familiar with that, on high school football and the culture of West Texas.

Q: I've heard of it, haven't read it.

BROWNING: They made a movie out of the book, then it became at TV show. It's a pretty accurate representation of Odessa and West Texas. It's a very conservative area, with salt of the earth, hardworking folks, but not a lot of outside stimulus. Not a lot of cultural activities. It was sports and church and hunting and Boy Scouts. But I had a great childhood. I could ride my bike all over town. Parents would kick us out of the house and say "Be home before dark;" we'd go off into the pasture and hunt jackrabbits and rattlesnakes. So I had a very "free range" sort of childhood. I went to Permian High School, and became involved in music, the band (I played trombone) and choir for a while. Church was also a big influence in West Texas.

Q: What particular church were you in?

BROWNING: Southern Baptist. That was the dominant denomination out there – that and Church of Christ.

Q: In elementary school, what were your favorite subjects?

BROWNING: It depended on the teacher. I lived right across the street from the elementary school so I spent a lot of time there. Some of the teachers would hang around after class and grade papers; I'd help by cleaning the blackboard and that kind of stuff. I tended toward literature, English, and history as opposed to math and science. I was much more comfortable with the liberal arts.

Q: Were you sort of the good student?

BROWNING: I was not an embarrassment to my family, but I was not at the top of the list either. I studied hard and made As and Bs, but I would not ever describe myself as an academic superstar. Nor would any of my teachers.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

BROWNING: I spent a lot of time reading. Mainly non-fiction. For class work I would read the classics that all kids read in junior high and high school. But for pleasure – I read the Encyclopedia Britannica! (Laughter) I'd come home from school and start from A and work my way through it; I was addicted to it. And National Geographic, Boy's Life which was the Boy Scout magazine. I read the fiction that was required of me in school but for pleasure I really gravitated to non-fiction.

Q: Science fiction?

BROWNING: I never really got interested in science fiction.

Q: In elementary school were you involved in any extra-curricular activities?

BROWNING: I was. I was in Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. I won third place in a city-wide competition for sixth graders; the event was hula hoop! (Laughter) I went to summer camp each summer and got a first place ribbon for goat milking. (Laughter) My extra-curricular activities were pretty benign. I wasn't an athlete so I didn't participate in sports. My after-hours activities revolved primarily around scouts and church.

Q: I imagine somebody had to be pretty good to go out for football?

BROWNING: Yes. My brother played football in elementary school – helmet, shoulder pads, the whole bit. There were companies – particularly oilfield related companies – that would pay their employees to relocate to another school's district if they thought that employee's son was a promising football player. The scouting started in elementary school. If the coaches from the junior high or high school saw a promising elementary kid, they would do whatever they could to get that family moved into their own jurisdiction so they could have that kid when he got to high school. It was ruthless and effective.

Q: Pretty unbelievable business. Where'd you go to high school?

BROWNING: I went to Permian High School.

Q: Permian was the era where oil was developed underground?

BROWNING: The Permian Period, around 250 to 300 million years ago, ended up in the largest mass extinction earth has ever seen, which resulted in huge oil and gas deposits. That whole region of western Texas and eastern New Mexico was once a sea and is called the Permian Basin, from the Permian Period.

Q: What was high school like?

BROWNING: It was a brand new school built just a couple of years before I started there. I started as a freshman in 1964 and was in the second class to go all four years. This was in West Texas in the early and mid-'60s, so integration was still very much a social factor there. Odessa had four high schools. Two were primarily if not exclusively attended by white students, and one for black students and one for Hispanics. Integration was slow and the Feds intervened. The school district tried to integrate the district by merging the Hispanic and black high schools and saying we're now integrated, but the Feds didn't buy that. There was some back and forth on how to properly integrate the schools. As I was growing up there were a few students of color in high school, but it was primarily white. Then, of course, when the football coaches saw the talent of some

of the athletes of color, that all changed. Sports moved integration forward as much as anything else.

Q: You in your later career were in South America – were you picking up much Spanish at the time?

BROWNING: No. I took Latin in high school because I was thinking about a career in the ministry and thought Latin would be good preparation for that. So I spent a couple of years studying a dead language.

Q: How did you relate to Latin?

BROWNING: Not well. Among the many things I am not, "talented linguist" is at the top of the list. The Latin teacher, Edna White, was a friend of my grandmother who taught home economics at Odessa High School until she retired and moved a couple of hours away. Occasionally, when my family went to visit my grandparents, Miss White would ask for a ride so she could visit her friend, my grandmother. They were the most horrible motor trips of my life because we spent the whole time doing Latin drills! (Laughter) Every time I missed a word, my mother would turn around and stare at me from the front seat. So I tried to figure out how to avoid those trips. Two-and-a-half hours of Latin drills will wear anybody out.

Q: Did you find much in the way of the outside world and politics; were you getting a fairly broad education?

BROWNING: No. There were a handful of teachers in high school who were not from Odessa but had moved there for various reasons. They provided some enrichment opportunities. I remember particularly a ninth grade literature teacher who supplemented coursework for a small group of students who would hang out in her classroom after school. She would be smoking her cigarette at her desk and we would be talking about things outside the curriculum. My parents took my brother and me on a train trip from Texas to Mexico City when I was 14; that was my first real exposure to life outside of the U.S. We visited national parks and would go camping. As a Boy Scout I went to the national jamboree in Pennsylvania and visited the New York World's Fair. I had a full and rich childhood, but as far as the academics of the high school, I don't remember that opening up the world to me. It was more my parents and a few select teachers who did that.

Q: In high school, what was the dating pattern?

BROWNING: There were several sub-groupings, as in all high schools. There was the church crowd. There were the athletes and cheerleaders, the popular kids. Then the not-so popular kids. Folks would not intermingle much among the different groups. A typical high school.

Q: What did you do for recreation? Did you go to movies or bowling?

BROWNING: At that time when I wasn't in school, I was at church. I spent every spare minute at church, either in choir practice or hand bell practice or supplementary classes. My social life was almost 100% revolved around the First Baptist Church of Odessa, Texas.

Q: Was the family pushing you towards the ministry?

BROWNING: No, I was the driver there. My parents were churchgoers for sure, but they were not dragging me to it at all.

Q: What attracted you to the ministry? Being enlightened? Anything that was the spur for this?

BROWNING: I felt a very real calling to the ministry when I was 12 and I wanted to pursue that calling. What I found in the church was a very welcoming, supportive group of folks. It gave me a chance to develop in a way I couldn't have in school or on the football field. I participated in a lot of student groups, emerged as a student leader in the church. It was just a very welcoming, fulfilling, stimulating atmosphere.

Q: Did you find this separated you from the majority of the student body?

BROWNING: I think if you went up and asked a student if he was a Christian, 99% would have said "yes." But beyond that, a much smaller percentage were very active in their respective churches. It's like religion in many areas; there are those who claim the label and go on Christmas and Easter. But as far as dedicating their whole lives to a church calling, that's a much smaller group. I led an early morning Bible study group at the high school, attended by about 50 students from all denominations. You could go anywhere in West Texas and more than likely people you interacted with would say they were very active Christians.

Q: Did you find this inhibited your social life at all?

BROWNING: No, it expanded it. I had opportunities to meet people that I never would have had without it. If I had had only high school and not the church, I would have been a very lonely young man.

Q: Did you get involved in missionary activity, particularly international?

BROWNING: No, not at all. We learned and read about it but I was never a missionary.

Q: So as you were getting towards your senior year, were you pointed anywhere?

BROWNING: I very much wanted to go to one of two or three very small, very provincial, very conservative Baptist colleges in West Texas. My parents were reluctant,

however. They wanted me to have a broader education than they thought I would get in one of those schools. They said if I wanted to go to one of those small, very conservative schools that'd be fine, but they wouldn't help me financially. But if I decided to go to Baylor University in Waco, Texas, which is much bigger and had a solid academic reputation, then they would help me out financially. So I made the decision to go to Baylor. That was a decision I made in my senior year, and I went straight from high school to college.

Q: You were at Baylor from when to when?

BROWNING: Sixty-seven to '71.

Q: This is of course a very active time in many student organizations – Vietnam, civil rights, and all this. What was Baylor like?

BROWNING: Baylor was the right place for me during that era. If I'd gone to one of the small West Texas colleges, I think that whole national and international movement would have bypassed us. I never would have confronted a world beyond what I had known in high school and my opportunities for growth would have been extremely limited. Or if I'd gone to one of the heathen mega schools like the University of Texas or Texas A&M, I would have been so overwhelmed with the worldliness of it all that I wouldn't have been able to cope. They would have been so alien and so foreign to what I had known and who I was I suspect I would have just retreated into a hardened religious shell. At Baylor, there was a solid core of what I was familiar with – the church, relatively conservative – that provided some bearings for me. At the same time, the outside world intervened. I can remember a small group of folks, probably 20, who conducted a protest on the Vietnam War on campus. Some of them I knew. It was quite the event – it made the local newspaper and television news. I guess my point is, the outside world came to Baylor but it didn't overwhelm it. That was my first, very protected exposure to the world beyond West Texas and the church.

Q: Were you beginning to develop an interest in the national and international world?

BROWNING: No. I became more aware of it but I can't say that I was drawn to it during Baylor. That came a couple of years later. I was still busy expanding my own horizons beyond Texas, but not internationally. That was a bit too foreign and a bit too far for me at that time.

Q: It sounds like your parents in pushing you towards Baylor knew what they were about.

BROWNING: They did, and I appreciate that about them. It was a very gentle nudge and I never felt that I didn't have an alternative, but I really do believe that was the best path for me. By this time, my parents had started traveling internationally on their own. The two of them would travel to Europe and Asia. Just hearing their stories and seeing their pictures helped give me some awareness of a larger world.

Q: Did you find yourself beginning to be aware of any particular area of the world or was it sort of general?

BROWNING: Very general. It didn't come to me at Baylor. It was a couple of years later that I got exposed to the larger world.

Q: With your parents and you, where did you fall politically at this time?

BROWNING: I grew up in a very conservative environment. Like Hillary Clinton, I volunteered for the Goldwater campaign in 1964. I was licking stamps and envelopes down at headquarters as a 14-year-old boy. But at Baylor – primarily from the professors and the students that I got to know, I really shifted that dial more toward a liberal point of view. I had a much deeper appreciation of the evils of segregation and the need for a government that will help people who can't help themselves. That all shifted while I was at Baylor. Now remember, keep that in the context of Baylor, a Southern Baptist college in Texas. We're not talking about Berkeley! There was a shift toward a more liberal way of thinking, but from a very conservative starting point in a very conservative environment.

Q: Did you find the students at Baylor were at one with the 'never trust anybody over 30,' that whole era of the '60s and '70s?

BROWNING: No. When I was at Baylor, freshmen had to live in the dorm. Women had to live in the dorm until their senior year, then they could move off campus. There was no dancing on campus. Women could not be seen in public wearing shorts. So if they wanted to go from their dorm room to a PE (physical education) class, they had to wear a coat over their shorts – even in the summer. It was still a very conservative social atmosphere. If you lived in an apartment off-campus and somehow the university found out you had beer in your refrigerator, you would be expelled. Part of that conservative culture was respect for family and traditions.

Q: Was Baylor attached to a religion?

BROWNING: Southern Baptist – it's the world's largest Southern Baptist university.

Q: Was football terribly important?

BROWNING: It was terribly important, but we weren't terribly good. We were in the Southwest Conference. We were always towards the bottom of the rankings. We tried hard but just couldn't make it. But we did excel in debate and track and field, and occasionally in tennis. Those big sports require a heavy investment in recruitment, facilities and equipment which we didn't have. It was in 1974 that we finally won a Southwest Conference championship and the campus went wild. I flew back from Syria just to attend the game.

Q: Did you get involved in Texan politics at all?

BROWNING: I did actually. I joined a service fraternity and was active in a church – a relatively liberal Southern Baptist church in Waco. Over that four year period, that needle shifted from Goldwater conservative to eventually supporting McGovern. I was living in Houston at the time, right after graduation from Baylor. There was a woman named Sissy Fahrenthold, a Texas politician who ran for governor. She was very liberal in the Texas context. I got involved in supporting her campaign. That protective shell or environment of conservative school but with access to more open and liberal thinking was how I was able to make that adjustment myself.

Q: The same thought process you were going through – were others, was the student body changing?

BROWNING: Were others going through the same change? Yes, I think so. It was a common phenomenon. I don't know that it stuck with everybody. I think it's typical for college students to spread their wings, to try new experiences, and once they leave it's not uncommon for folks to revert back to their roots or how they grew up. I did not. I kept on heading in that new direction. I would not feel comfortable living in Odessa again because of my newly developed political and religious thinking.

Q: Did any part of the world beyond the United States begin to attract you at this time?

BROWNING: Not at this time, no. I was still very much America-centric. I wasn't even looking beyond Texas. I was a very proud Texan, comfortable there, so I wasn't looking to relocate or get out of Texas. I was looking for opportunities to stay in Texas but stay comfortable with my new way of thinking. There are some pockets of liberalism in Austin, Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth where I think I could have stayed.

Q: What was your major?

BROWNING: Theology.

Q: Does that have a political context?

BROWNING: It was what I had been planning on since age 12. I wanted to pursue a career in the ministry. Quite frankly, it was my theology professors who were really able to get my intellect working and helped me understand the respective roles of faith and intellect in religion and theology. They are not mutually exclusive. We have a God-given intellect that we need to strengthen and exercise and use, and put to good use. That is not a sentiment embraced by all Southern Baptists, so in that sense there was a political context.

Q: What was the attitude at the theology department towards integration and civil rights?

BROWNING: I think among the professors and even among the students there was an awareness that integration was something that Baylor should embrace. The service club that I joined had the first African-American member of a Baylor fraternity. This is in '67, '68 in Texas. He was fully integrated into the workings of the club and was an active member, but gosh, the numbers were so small campus-wide. It was an overwhelmingly white student population. Among the faculty, I'm not aware of any overt anti-integration sentiment. Among alumni, that's a different story. I think that's the case universally among the older set who want their school to remain like they knew it in the '30s and '40s. In the '60s and early '70s, however, Baylor was definitely, but gradually, becoming more integrated.

Q: You were still pointed towards being a minister?

BROWNING: Yes. I got my degree in theology and was accepted at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, the world's largest Southern Baptist seminary. I went there for three weeks then dropped out.

Q: What made you make this step, to drop out?

BROWNING: What drew me to drop out after three weeks? I had spent four years at Baylor learning and embracing the concept that reason and critical thinking are good things, and they empower us in many ways, including strengthening our faith. When I got to Southwestern Seminary that was squashed. I felt smothered by the almost total rejection of critical thinking. I felt their course of action was to adopt and promote a faith that had no room for intellectual discourse and certainly no room for disagreement. Plus, I felt the denomination had strayed from two of the most basic, fundamental tenets of the Baptist faith. One was separation of church and state; it seemed to be that the Southern Baptists were blurring the lines between the two, weakening the wall of separation. Second was "priesthood of the believer," which means ones relationship is directly with God, there should be no intermediary like the priesthood. Well, the leaders of the denomination were awfully free with their directions on how I should live and what I should believe. I struggled with it. I tried but I realized it was not going to work. So I dropped out.

Q: Were you pushing back and finding resistance?

BROWNING: No, I was just trying to stay under the radar and see if I could make it work over time. I wasn't a rebel. I wasn't standing up in class and arguing with the professors. I just realized that it wasn't going to work. So rather than fight the inevitable for two or three years, I decided to call it quits.

Q: That's a pretty drastic decision.

BROWNING: Yes it was! (Laughter)

Q: You'd basically been focused on this and then all of a sudden, it's not what you want.

BROWNING: I won't say it was sudden. I developed over many years a religious point of view that found faith and reason to be compatible. One of the traditions of my home church in Odessa was when our preacher would go on vacation every August, the "preacher boys", the young men who had decided on a career in the ministry, would take over the preaching roles for Sunday morning and Sunday evening. So I preached on August Sunday evenings when I was in high school and in college when I came back for the summer. After a couple of years at Baylor, I gave a sermon that essentially said, "Parents if you don't want your children to dance" – a tenet of Southern Baptist culture – "then tell them you don't want them to dance. But don't say God prohibits it, because nowhere in scripture does it say that boys and girls, men and women can't dance together. That is not scriptural, it's cultural. Don't blame God for this. If you don't want your own children to dance, tell them that but don't misuse the scriptures to push your own cultural agenda."

Our sanctuary had seating for about 2000 people, and there were two aisles going from the entrance in the back towards the front where the preacher stood. The practice was that during the closing prayer, the preacher would walk down one of the aisles to the back of the sanctuary and shake hands with everybody as they were leaving. After that sermon, the vast majority of the people chose to exit via the aisle where I was not standing because they didn't want to shake my hand. (Laughter) But I remember one guy who was a postman. He came up to shake my hand and had tears in his eyes. He said, "Thank you so much, Steve. I have been needing to hear this all my life."

The point was that what had happened there was an inappropriate amalgam of scripture and culture, faith and social norms. I had been unable until I went to Baylor to distinguish between those two. When I was at Baylor I would go to small country churches and give a sermon on Sunday to earn a few bucks. After dinner the head of the board of deacons would usually invite me to join his family for dinner. They would ask questions like "Some of our parishioners are playing cards; I want you to tell them they can't play cards or go to the movie on Sunday." I found myself spending most of my time arguing against these cultural norms and being diverted from the essence of spirituality and faith. That was just reinforced at the seminary, and I thought "this is much bigger than anything I can fight." So I decided to leave them to it and they can try to convince their congregations that God doesn't want them to go to a movie or play cards on a Sunday afternoon. But I couldn't be a part of that.

What I'm saying is this was not an overnight decision to leave the ministry. It's something that had been growing as my own awareness and intellectual capacity was growing in college.

Q: Again this experience must – in Islam they're going through the same problem, of what is Islamic teaching and what are the people in power trying to obey man-made rules.

BROWNING: That's exactly right. The problem is none of the religions have a divine messenger who can come down and say, "This is my message and those are your cultural add-ons." We as human beings are the ones who are interpreting this, and we as humans are the ones who bring in the cultural aspects to make the religion into something we want, something that is familiar to us and comforts us. This is one of the problems in Pakistan and Afghanistan; so much of what is interpreted as Islam is in fact tribal custom, not Islam. So you're right; Islam is undergoing a tremendous examination by its own people and by outsiders. All of the horrors of terrorism that are conducted in the name of Islam are, I would say, rooted in cultural norms rather than the essence of Islam.

Q: I know. It's an ongoing struggle with worldwide implications, but basically on the same thing you went through on your own.

BROWNING: Exactly.

Q: So what are you up to? What were you going to do?

BROWNING: A lot of my Baylor friends moved to Houston to go to medical school. So I moved down there, moved in with some friends from Baylor. I got various odd jobs and enrolled at the University of Houston in the education school – I thought I would get a master's in education and pursue that. I wasn't looking to be a school teacher; my goal was to get a Ph.D. in education. Thinking I could build on my theology courses I chose to specialize in the philosophy of education. I enrolled in that program and stayed for a couple of years. I became a teaching fellow, so I taught Philosophy of Education, a mandatory course in Texas for students working towards a teaching certificate. It looks at the various schools of thought on what education should be – whether it should be purely academic or purely practical or a combination of the two; the role of the state in education. That was interesting but it primarily was a placeholder for me until I could figure out what I really wanted to do. It was clear that I would have struggled to get my Ph.D. I got my Master's, but to spend years doing research and then go on the publish or perish route, it was not something that I embraced.

So in 1974, as I'm ending my master's program and trying to figure out if I wanted to pursue a Ph.D., my faculty advisor, unbeknownst to me at the time, was a consultant to the State Department's Office of Overseas Schools. He was working on a program for the American schools in India, to do some in-service training for the teachers there – just to upgrade their skills and make sure the American students in these schools were getting an education that's roughly equivalent to what they would get in the States. So there was this guy from the State Department's Office of Overseas Schools who was sitting in my advisor's office. He got a phone call from Washington notifying him that they needed a teacher at the newly opened embassy in Damascus, Syria. The parents there had brought their students to the Damascus Community School, a little international school staffed by local teachers, and they wanted an American teacher in that school to help ensure the students got a quality education. So this guy from the State Department asked my advisor if he knew anyone who could leave on a moment's notice and go teach in this

school. My advisor said "I've got a guy I'm trying to get rid of, why don't you talk to him?" (Laughter)

So I met with this guy and 10 days later I'm in Damascus, Syria, as a school teacher. It was just incredible. It fell in my lap. I didn't have a passport, so he had to expedite a passport. I had never taught middle school before, but that didn't make any difference. He said, "They want you to teach a few classes, maybe history and social studies, and throw the football around with the kids after school." They would pay my way there and give me an apartment and pay me the princely sum of $6000 a year if I would do this. I thought, "I'm going to do it!"

Anyway, it was just one of those serendipitous events and I saw a way out of the rut I was in at the University of Houston, and a way to start over with the added bonus of a guaranteed income. So 10 days after that phone call, I arrived in Damascus. It was a life-changing experience, believe me.

Q: Did you know anything about the Middle East?

BROWNING: No. Just that the Holy Land was there, that's all I knew. The Kissinger shuttle diplomacy was in the spring of '74 and then in June of '74 we re-established relations with Syria, which they had broken after the Six Day War in '67. So this was in the news. I was aware of it, but I wasn't really following it or glued to developments in the Middle East. But with that kind of high-profile shuttle diplomacy, certainly it was something I was aware of. Then I arrived in Damascus in September of '74.

Q: It's really incredible, isn't it, when you think about it?

BROWNING: Yes! If I had thought about it and done the advantages/disadvantages worksheet kind of thing, I don't know that I would have gone. It was just one of those opportunities where if you say "no" or you're going to think about it, you're going to lose out on it. The good news is, the folks at the University of Houston had been sufficiently honest with me to say "If you want to get your Ph.D., we'll be as patient as we can, but it's going to be hard for you." I appreciated hearing that – that helped, too, knowing what I thought had been an option was really not an option for me.

So I went with two suitcases and two trunks. The admin officer at the embassy met me at the airport and put me up at his house for a couple of weeks until the school got an apartment for me. I moved into this apartment that was two blocks from the school. This is September 1974; there were no American tourists, businessmen or students in Syria. There was a very small American embassy and a few Americans married to Syrians, but no other American citizens in Syria. It was great.

Q: Were you getting briefed by people or finding out what the hell was going on?

BROWNING: It was the embassy personnel who had wanted an American teacher to come. The chairman of the school board was Robert Pelletreau – if you know that name. He was DCM (deputy chief of mission). The ambassador was Richard Murphy.

Q: Dick and I came into the Foreign Service together.

BROWNING: I taught his son in one of my classes and Pelletreau's two daughters were in elementary grades and were in my PE classes. Skip Gnehm…

Q: I'm working with him right now.

BROWNING: I think Skip was in the political section along with Ted Kattouf. Kenton Keith was the head of USIS (United States Information Service) and embassy public affairs. Bob Hall also was with USIS and he was the embassy employee closest to my age, so we hung out together a bit. A guy named Gary Lee, later one of the hostages in Iran, was the GSO (general services officer) and was my primary contact for logistics when I was at the school. Joe Melrose was admin officer toward the end of my time in Syria. It was quite a distinguished collection of folks.

Because the school had never hosted a U.S. based teacher before, the embassy gave me the bulk of the support to get started. But as far as briefings on the political dynamic, I got much more of that from the teachers at the school, and the students. It was a fascinating time to be there. The students were all children of diplomats. There were only two Syrian students at the school, and they were the children of Syrian diplomats who had been raised overseas. The Syrian government didn't want your standard Syrian children in that school, so the student body was all foreigners. A lot of UN (United Nations) peacekeeping families and their kids were in the school. I would have dinner at the home of the Pakistani ambassador or a Swedish UN observer or the Argentine ambassador and get their perspectives of what was going on in Syria and in the greater Middle East. The embassy folks would invite me to join them on field trips, and I was included in all of the embassy social events. I became very knowledgeable through all these sources on what was going on in Syria, but there was no formal briefing process. More significantly for me professionally, however, was that I was exposed to world of diplomacy.

Q: What was the situation in Syria when you got there?

BROWNING: Assad the father was president and he ruled with an iron fist. Syria was a military dictatorship. There was no crime so it was safe for people to walk around at any time night or day. Nor, however, were there any freedoms or liberties. Assad, as you know, is from an Alawite clan, a Shia branch, and the majority of Syrians were Sunni. Syria was a secular society, so there wasn't an overt Islamist element to society. There were undercurrents of tension; Assad had really gone after the Muslim Brotherhood and had destroyed the town of Hama. Thousands of people were killed as he squashed the Muslim Brotherhood. There was no doubt who was in charge. I never saw any overt dissent to that. It took several months before the Syrians I had befriended trusted me.

The assumption was I was that I was a spy of some sort because I was young and single and just appeared out of nowhere at the request of the embassy. It took a while for them to see that I was just a school teacher.

Q: What was living there like?

BROWNING: It was great, as far as living in a repressive military dictatorship goes. I had a huge furnished apartment. It was the first time that I shopped, cooked and lived in an environment outside of Texas. I became a big fan of Syrian cooking; I learned how to roll grape leaves! The teachers were gracious and hospitable. They would invite me to their homes. One teacher in particular gave me cooking lessons and helped me shop in the market. I used her to give a tongue lashing to the shopkeepers who doubled their prices when they saw me coming. Damascus used to be a very popular destination for American and European tourists until the Six Day War; then there were no Americans there at all except for those very few married to Syrians. Then we reopened our embassy and a few other Western embassies opened. I can remember vividly going in to a restaurant by myself, ordering a meal, asking for the check, and the waiter saying it had already been taken care of by another patron. So, I went over to thank the guy thinking he's a parent of one of my students or something, and he said "you are the American aren't you? Welcome back to Syria." I was known as "the American" for the first few months.

I taught social studies and history. To be able to take your students on class trips to Palmyra and Aleppo and the Street Called Straight and the crusader Krak de Chevalier – these were mindboggling opportunities for the students to see so much history in one spot, not to mention their teacher from Texas. Now having said that, there were some downsides to working in such a tightly controlled society. When the embassy reopened, the Office of Overseas Schools sent some funds so we could buy new textbooks. The school was like a time capsule – between '67 and '74, there were no new books in the library, no new textbooks for the students because there was nobody to fund it. Sadly, I had to spend a few weeks censoring history textbooks and using a magic marker to mark out any reference to Israel or Six Day War or anything that could be construed as anti-regime. I remember doing that in tears. I argued against the censorship with the school and the embassy, but all agreed that if we didn't censor the books the government would shut down the school. It was my first international lesson in pragmatism and practicality.

Just because textbooks were censored it didn't mean the class discussion had to be censored. There were ways around it which we pursued cautiously.

Syria was a fascinating place to live and work. I was there for four years and traveled to Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey. I never went to Israel because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get back into Damascus.

Q: If you had an Israeli stamp in your passport…

BROWNING: The Israelis would stamp a piece of paper that you could take out of your passport, but I was concerned the Syrians would find a way around that and I didn't want to take the risk of not being allowed back in. It's one thing if you're a tourist and Syria says you can't come to Damascus; it's another for them to say you can't get back in to someone who is living and working there. I had my students and school responsibilities that I was committed to. So I chose not to risk it.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BROWNING: Richard Murphy.

Q: Was there a significant other while you were there?

BROWNING: Yes, actually. There were three international schools in three neighboring countries – Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The school in Jordan was called the American Community School; it was very heavily American because of American business interests in Jordan. The school in Beirut was a true international school and very big because of the large international community in Beirut. And, the Damascus Community School, which had 38 nationalities but only about 400 students. We established a pattern where the teachers from the schools in Jordan and Syria would go to Beirut for the nightlife, and from Beirut and Damascus teachers would go to Jordan to buy western goods like peanut butter and Coca Cola. The teachers from Beirut and Jordan would come to Damascus to buy Middle Eastern antiquities and artifacts. We would stay in each other's homes during our visits and got to know each other fairly well. We started an athletic competition among the three schools called the Tri-School Meet. I was the volleyball coach for my school and we competed against the volleyball teams from the schools in Amman and Beirut. Amman's coach was a beautiful tall Californian who I was attracted to and eventually we got married!

Q: Did the repression in Syria affect you all?

BROWNING: As foreigners there was a certain immunity from overt government repression that we enjoyed. As friends and colleagues of Syrians and seeing how they were affected by it, though, we were very much aware of the impact of government oppression on their lives. The repression was everywhere and it was a factor of life. I think our official American diplomatic posture at the time was just one of wanting to reestablish relations. I'm not aware of any attempt to promote democratization or any of the values promotion that we do now. I believe the embassy's initial and primary goal was mainly just to establish a presence in that pivotal country.

Q: Assad of course is renowned for not being a very flexible person.

BROWNING: That's exactly right.

Q: Were you picking up any feelings about the Foreign Service?

BROWNING: I was. We had students from 38 different countries and their parents were diplomats or with the United Nations. I interacted with them, had dinner with them, traveled with them. I would talk with the American diplomats to get a better understanding of what they were doing. I was very attracted to diplomacy as a career because of that experience. Before my time in Syria I had not even been aware of diplomacy; I don't have any recollection from high school or college of Foreign Service or diplomacy being a career option. Interacting with the folks in Syria, not just the Americans, I really saw this as something I could enjoy and get involved in.

So I took the written exam and failed it and spent the next year reading up on the areas where I was weak. My weaknesses were in the fine arts; in West Texas we don't spend a lot of time studying ballet. My friends at the American library in Damascus would save the New York Times and magazines, and when they'd outlived their usefulness at the library, would share them with me and I would spend my evenings reading about music and theater and ballet so that when I took the exam the second time, I was able to pass it.

Q: When did you take the oral exam?

BROWNING: I took the written exam in '77 and didn't pass. Then I took it in '78 and passed it. So I must have taken the oral exam in the summer of '78.

Q: Where did you take it?

BROWNING: Washington DC. I had transferred from the school in Damascus to the school in Jordan so I could be closer to this volleyball coach I had fallen in love with. I told the headmaster at the school that I was pursuing a career in the Foreign Service, but I was told by the State Department that nothing would happen for a year, so she agreed to hire me for the school year of '78-'79. I took the oral exam in the summer of '78 thinking that I'd just have that one year teaching in Jordan then I would immediately join the State Department.

Q: While you were teaching in Damascus, did the Cold War intrude? Were you bringing up the issues of the Cold War?

BROWNING: No. We were still very vulnerable so we were pretty careful about what we brought up in the classroom. We didn't want to run the risk of the school being shut down or constrained. I can't imagine that we didn't talk about it but I don't remember it being an issue or something that I had to really focus on.

Q: Israel – was that a topic to be discussed?

BROWNING: Not to be discussed. Israel did not exist as far as the government was concerned. Remember most of the teachers at the school were Syrians themselves. Most of the teachers had lived through the Six Day War. The Israelis tried to take out the Syrian Air Force headquarters, across the street from the school. Over a ton of shrapnel was collected from the school grounds after the war ended. There were still some very

strong feelings about the war seven years later, and about Israel/Palestine. The headmistress of the school was Palestinian, married to a Syrian. We had to be careful whenever we discussed Middle Eastern issues.

Q: Coming back – what was the difference in Amman, the school there?

BROWNING: Night and day! The U.S. had strong, close relations with the king. In fact, several of the king's children attended the school. The school was supported by American construction companies and others. They had a softball team. The school week was Monday through Thursday; off on Friday because of the Muslim holy day. School on Saturday, then off on Sunday because of the Christian holy day which you never would have had in Damascus. There were American textbooks and an American culture in the school. It was very much the *American* Community School. It was accredited by an American accreditation outfit; the Damascus school was not. There was a world of difference between the two schools. The American student population was the majority in Amman. When I got to Damascus in '74 there were just 12 American students in the whole school. There was just no comparing the two.

Q: How was life in Amman?

BROWNING: With all due respect to my Jordanian friends, it was very sterile and boring. It was very clean, very orderly. People stood in line to get onto a bus! The shops were clean and well-lit. It was almost like being in America. It didn't seem alien to me like Syria did. Syria had such an assault on the senses whether smell or taste or hearing or sight. In Jordan, all the buildings were made out of the same white stone. People obeyed traffic laws. Syria was a cacophony; Jordan was a monologue.

Q: How about teaching? Was it different there?

BROWNING: The Damascus school went through 10th grade and my largest class had 12 students; Amman had nine grades but the classes were much bigger. I taught the middle school folks. I taught social studies again. It was more of a typical American middle school environment. In Damascus, not so much – it was more of a family environment. My 10th grade class in Damascus had six students in it, each of different nationality so our discussions were totally different than with 30 kids I had in the ninth grade class in Amman. The school board was much more active and aggressive in Jordan than in Syria. The expectations of the parents were also different. I think if I had gone to Jordan first I would have enjoyed it more than I did; but having gone to Syria first and experiencing that which was so alien to what I had ever experienced before, the experience in Jordan didn't have the sensory stimulation that Syria had.

Q: You had other concerns at the time.

BROWNING: Well there is that, yes.

Q: So when did you leave? Then what?

BROWNING: I left Jordan in the summer of '79, a year after having passed the oral exam. I had a little money saved up and asked my future wife to join me. My parents had agreed to let us hang out in their lake cabin on Lake Sweetwater in West Texas until all the paperwork got finished with the State Department. So we spent the summer sailing, waterskiing, spending all my money and having a great time. Then I ran out of money. Everything was finished with the State Department except for the security clearance. The embassy was unable to get the Syrians to issue a police letter saying that I didn't have a record in Syria. The Syrians were playing their typical game and there was no way the embassy could break the letter out of them. Without that document I couldn't get a security clearance. A career in the Foreign Service seemed more and more unlikely. I started reestablishing roots in Texas.

Then I got a phone call from the Department the week before Thanksgiving in 1980 saying "Your security clearance is complete; can you be here in a week?" I had given up on the State Department quite frankly – my wife and I found jobs, we bought a house. I said "No. I've been waiting on you guys for two years and you expect me to be there in a week? No way." They said, "We have a class in January '81. Can you make that one?" I said let me talk it over. Both my wife and I really missed the overseas lifestyle and being back in West Texas, I was reminded just how big a world there is out there. So we decided to pursue the State Department. I called them back and said "I can't do next week but I can do January." So that's when I joined the Foreign Service – January of 1981.

Q: Do you remember any of the questions you were asked in the oral exam?

BROWNING: I remember one. I had just spent four years in Syria and one year in Jordan and was fully expecting to have questions on the Middle East and those two countries. But what the examiners asked me about was Mexico! (Laughter) Luckily I had been keeping up all this time because my interest in foreign affairs had been whetted and I was following international relations. Particularly in what was happening in Mexico at the time; there had been an election. So I just by chance remembered the names of the outgoing and incoming presidents of Mexico and was able to carry on a dialogue with the examiners about what to expect in this new Mexican environment. It really struck me – if they did ask me anything about the Middle East, it didn't stay with me. It's that question totally out of the blue on Mexico that really surprised me.

Q: The other question I have is, what was the background of your wife?

BROWNING: She is from Long Beach, California, and had traveled with her sister and a friend to Iran where they had some family friends. They were going to look for jobs there. That didn't work out, so they traveled around, three women from California. My wife ended up in Jordan teaching English to the Jordanian army. She did that for a while until she got the job at the American Community School teaching junior high English and coaching the volleyball team.

Q: Where had she gone to college?

BROWNING: Sonoma State University, in the wine country of northern California.

Q: I take it that she was interested in the Foreign Service – she knew what she was getting into.

BROWNING: She knew what she was getting into, absolutely – and wanted to get back into that environment as much as I did. That was good; I know couples where one partner is very keen on international work and the lifestyle, and the other is not. That wasn't the case with us; both of us were very keen to pursue international careers. In fact, my wife still says the 18 months she spent in Sweetwater, Texas, was her toughest overseas assignment.

Q: This is a good place to stop.

Q: Today is the 27th of August 2016, with Steven Browning. When did you enter the Foreign Service?

BROWNING: I entered in January of 1981. I was in an A-100 class of 52.

Q: How did it strike you when you came in? A new world?

BROWNING: It was an impressive group of folks. Half a dozen teachers, probably a dozen lawyers, a microbiologist, couple of preachers, a hotel manager. Quite a diverse group professionally and regionally.

Q: How did you all fit together?

BROWNING: We bonded well. This is right at the end of the Carter administration; Reagan was inaugurated a week or so after we convened. There was a sense of new beginnings for all of us. There were some who through various experiences had some knowledge of the State Department. One or two were Foreign Service brats, their parents had been in the Foreign Service. So they had some prior knowledge. But I'd say the majority of us were new to the concept and looking forward to it. It was a pretty large group so there were different interest groups within that group of 52.

Q: How about minorities and women?

BROWNING: I don't know the percentages. There were a healthy number of women for the early '80s. For minorities there was not as strong a representation then as we have now, that's for sure.

Q: Were there any diplomatic or foreign affairs issues that were percolating at the time you all were interested in?

BROWNING: Most of us had had some sort of international experience that we brought into A-100, so we tended to focus on those. Peace Corps volunteers from Africa would be interested in Africa; I was interested in Middle Eastern issues. The Iran hostages were released on the same day that Reagan was inaugurated, so that was a big deal for us. In fact, there were 52 hostages and 52 of us in A-100. For a brief moment there was concern there might be a switch to get the hostages released – 52 entry level officers in trade. But that didn't pan out. So there was an interest in Middle Eastern affairs. The PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) was active at the time. Also, the standard Cold War issues.

Q: How did you find the training that went on?

BROWNING: We were in the downtown Rosslyn facilities. We had our own classroom but it was broken up into subgroups; we had to go to different floors for various sessions. As far as the physical setting, there was a lot to be desired. The training itself I remember focused on drafting, learning to speak and write in Foreign Service-ese, and the traditional orientation to the department and its culture, that kind of thing. We had a handful of folks who were already 3/3 competent in a foreign language, so they took off right after A-100 to their first assignments. The rest of us hung around for language training or substantive training for different fields.

It was good training. I felt relatively prepared when I went off for my first post.

Q: What was your wife doing during this?

BROWNING: She was back in Texas teaching school. Because of the delay in the security clearance, I'd given up on the State Department and gotten a job in a little NGO (non-governmental organization) in West Texas. My wife had a job teaching in a middle school. We'd bought a house and the kids were enrolled in school. They stayed there while I came to Washington for training and orientation, and we re-united in the summer.

Q: Did you have much of an option where you would go?

BROWNING: We had a bid list. We talked among ourselves quite a bit and coordinated our bids to try to game the system as much as possible. We had one A-100 member who was in her mid-50s, a school teacher from Texas who only wanted to go to Cuba. She'd been to Cuba as a child and wanted to return, so we all put Havana at the bottom of our list so Betty would be the only one who had Havana as a high choice. Sure enough, she was selected for Havana.

I, like several of my colleagues, was focused primarily on schooling. Because my first tour would be consular work, I didn't particularly care where that was, but I was very interested in a posting where there was a good school for my kids and teaching opportunities for my wife. Other classmates were sensitive to that and the assignments people in personnel were also sensitive to it, so that worked out well for us.

Q: Where'd you go?

BROWNING: We went to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Q: You were there from when to when?

BROWNING: August of '81 to June or July of '83.

Q: What was the situation in Santo Domingo when you got there?

BROWNING: Politically and economically, they were coming out of a rough patch of dictatorship and failed socialism. Remember the U.S. Marines went in in the '60s; that was still a sore spot among the Dominicans. It was a period of proper if not warm relations with the U.S. We were certainly the biggest player on the block and the Dominicans knew that. There had been a recent election that was considered a free and fair representation of the will of the people, so that was a positive sign. It was a time of poverty. Santo Domingo at the time was certainly a visa mill. It was a period when a vice consul would be just as popular in town as the American ambassador because the vice consul had the power of the visa. To be a consular officer in the Dominican Republic at that time was quite an experience.

Q: How did you find visa work? For many of us, when we originally get into the business we never had this power before. Not just power but responsibility, whether somebody goes and will change their life or not – it's awesome.

BROWNING: You're absolutely right – it was awesome. The power was an enticement for many of us. There was a pretty regular turnover of consular officers in the Dominican Republic; the vast majority were first or second tour officers and we had our supervisors who were career consular officers and worked to keep us grounded. I can remember shopping in a supermarket, pushing my cart up to get in line at the cashier. People in front of the line recognized me as an American vice consul and people moved out of line and ushered me up to the front of the line so I wouldn't have to wait – just because I was a consular officer.

We had fresh milk delivered to our house every day. One day the milk man was in tears saying his children were starving and asking if I would give him a visa? We had a very hard time making friends in Dominican society because inevitably the reason folks wanted to establish a relationship was because you had the power of the visa.

We were able to expand beyond the embassy circle through the school – my wife had a job teaching at the international school there. We were able to become friends with school teachers – but not, unfortunately, Dominican school teachers because they would inevitably want a visa for a friend, a cousin, a neighbor. It seemed that a Dominican's status in society in part depended on how easily he could get a visa for a friend or colleague. So in that sense, it was disappointing. Dominicans are lovely people and I

would have enjoyed getting to know them, but you really had to isolate yourself just to keep the pressure away from you.

It was hard work. We only had one car so my wife would drive me to work; at 7:30 we'd drive up to the consulate and there would be a line of visa applicants three blocks long. Traffic would be slow so I'd be sitting in the car as my wife was driving and all these visa applicants would be staring at me, wondering if today was their day for a new life, and would I be the one who would issue them this opportunity to eternal prosperity or would I be the one to destroy their dreams? It took a toll on us, certainly.

Q: Most of the work I take it was non-immigrant visas?

BROWNING: The consulate leadership, the consul-general and his deputies, certainly were mindful of the impact of this kind of work on the junior officers. They would look for ways to mitigate this emotional drain on us. So we would rotate assignments. I did a stint in non-immigrant visas. I then did a stint in immigrant visas, which is a whole other pressure cooker atmosphere. I worked in American citizen services for a while, and worked with the fraud investigation unit. We had our own fraud investigators for visa work. The embassy itself would tap into the consular officers for special assignments or activities. For CODELs (congressional delegations) - consular officers would eagerly volunteer to work a CODEL just to get out of the consular section and do something different. I'd say the bulk of my work was non-immigrant visas but there was an attempt to embellish that and provide some change and variety so you weren't worn down by the non-immigrant work.

Q: Let's take when you're on the visa line. What would the typical thing be and how would you deal with it? What were you thinking as you were sizing these people up?

BROWNING: The physical lay-out was a row of interview windows, sort of like a row of ticket sellers at a multi-cinema; instead of one or two windows, we had six or eight. There'd be glass and a pass-through drawer sort of like a bank teller. You would be looking out over a bullpen of 100-200 people who were sitting on concrete benches with dozens of people on each one. There would be a guard in the room who would direct the next person in line to the window for the next available consular officer. This steady stream of people would keep inching forward on this series of benches. Every eye was on every consular officer. They were watching every move, listening in on the conversation, trying to determine which consular officer was in a good mood that day, which one was giving visas, which one was not. You quickly had to develop a mechanism to screen out the scrutiny– these folks were staring at your every move. Then the applicant would come up; sometimes much to our dismay there would be a relative who was an American green card holder or already had a visa and would accompany the applicant. That would interfere with the interview and complicate the process rather than facilitate it.

We were given 60 seconds in which to receive the applicant's documents, review them, ask some questions, and determine whether or not the person standing in front of us was

an intending immigrant. And then as part of that 60 second process, we had to say yes or no. That was it. The pressure was such that if you started spending 90 seconds on these interviews, your boss would talk to you and say you've got to pick up the pace because we're falling behind. You had to make these life-altering decisions in literally a minute.

So you develop keys or clues that would help you make the decision. If someone comes up in a tuxedo with a letter from the bank saying he has had $10,000 in the bank for two days, and you ask him why he wants to go to the United States and he's single and says he wants to go to Disneyland for two weeks, you question it – it just doesn't make sense. It doesn't fit. It's incumbent on the applicant to overcome a presumption of immigration. So contrary to most American jurisprudence, the person in front of you is presumed guilty, intending to immigrate, and it's his responsibility to convince you that he does not intend to immigrate. So you repeat that process time after time after time every work day. You interview dozens of folks each day and it wears you down. And you're hearing all of your fellow consular officers going through the same interview process, explaining the law and adjudicating cases. It's an environment that is very intense, with a lot of scrutiny, a lot of noise. There's a reason it was called a visa mill.

Q: The thing is, most of the people who come into the Foreign Service have gone to good schools, done well academically, and nobody looks them in the eye and lies to them. And all of a sudden they're up against people who are doing this. I don't blame them for lying; I'd lie, too. They knew what they wanted. But your job was to screen them. This has to have a pernicious effect on you and your fellow officers.

BROWNING: It does. We all realized pretty early on that they weren't lying to Steve Browning. The issue was not to deceive me. I didn't take it personally. I didn't take umbrage that this person who was in front of me lied to me. The issue was, this person was looking to go to New York City and work in a store and send 75% of his earnings back to his village so his kids could eat – and I understood that. I understood the motivation. They're looking for a better life for themselves and their families. So you are certainly empathetic, if not sympathetic. But your responsibility is to enforce the law. So you build up defenses, mechanisms where you can take your own personal ego and feelings out of the process. It's very much like the movie and television show MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) – a MASH atmosphere where you do your job, you go about your business. It's insane, it's crazy. You couldn't make up a worse way of doing business but you've got to take care of business. So you find ways to cope. Every consular officer was different. Some tended to be more liberal in their interpretation of the law than others. Some were just very strict with very little leeway. In fact, the Dominican television station had a variety program which did a spoof of consular officers. They had Dominican actors play the specific consular officers who were assigned at that time. Our Dominican staff saw the program and said the show nailed us perfectly. They knew which ones were easy, which ones were hard. Our staff could tell which of the Americans the Dominicans were spoofing on this show because they had captured so well our personalities and our issuance styles.

It was the job of the supervisor to step in and say to someone who might be overly strict, "Are you sure you're considering all of the information?" And if they're being overly lenient, the same thing – "Are you sure you're not being swayed by emotional issues?" As individuals bringing to the job our own histories and backgrounds and experiences, we all learned to cope in our own different ways.

Q: It must have been good for you that you had a wife – that you could unburden yourself.

BROWNING: It was helpful. But what I learned early on was that I needed to decompress. I would go home – I had a wife, two kids and two dogs – and I smoked at the time. I would tell the kids and wife and dogs "I need 30 minutes." I would go out into the yard with my cigarette and a beer and would just decompress, trying to get it out of my system. Then I could come into the house and have a normal interaction with my family. If I tried to do that without decompressing, it would not be good news for anybody.

My wife was very understanding. Because we couldn't socialize with Dominicans, we socialized with consular officers. We would each help the other. We would have consular folks over for dinner, hear their stories, talk about how we were coping and that kind of stuff. It was quite an introduction to the Foreign Service.

Q: What pressure were you getting? Who was the ambassador when you were there?

BROWNING: Robert Yost was the first ambassador. We didn't overlap all that long. His predecessor had gotten into some trouble – I'm not quite sure what it was but he'd gotten too close to Dominican folks. It involved money and buildings and land and stuff. He got called back and Yost was coming out of the inspector-general corps at the State Department and took over. Then he left and Robert Anderson came on board. They were both fine. We were in a separate building in the consular section, four blocks away from the embassy, so our interaction with the folks housed in the embassy was minimal.

Q: Sometimes there's a problem with ambassadors who've got their friends and contacts and they're continually called upon to produce visas. According to the law, they can't produce them; it's the consular officers who are the only ones who can issue a visa, and it's his or her decision. Sometimes you have ambassadors who can't adjust to that situation.

BROWNING: That's right. I think that's more of a problem in embassies that are not so much visa mills. I certainly felt no pressure from either ambassadors or DCMs. But I had several filters between myself and them – the consul-general, and my supervisor who was one of the deputies. I have no recollection of either ambassador calling me directly saying "Make this happen." I think they appreciated being able to say to their interlocutors, "There's not a thing I can do. Consular is totally separate from me so don't ask me for favors because I can't do it."

Q: Were you getting any feel for Dominican migration – where they were going and what you were feeding into the American mill?

BROWNING: We had consultations in Puerto Rico, the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) office that covered the Dominican Republic. They briefed us on the patterns. Ninety percent of the Dominicans went to New York. There was a core of Dominicans in New York and they started bringing others up there. There were some Dominicans in Puerto Rico. There were some tragic cases of Dominicans trying to sail or float to Puerto Rico, and many died at sea. I'm sure there were some in Miami, but the big draw was New York City.

Q: How were they doing in New York City?

BROWNING: I think they were doing fine. As part of my immigrant visa work I would look into the professional and financial stability of the citizens in New York who were seeking immigrant visas for their family members in the DR (Dominican Republic). They were for the most part solid middle-class folks. They had to show us that the person they were sponsoring would not become a ward of the state or end up on welfare. Certainly there was fraud in those documents, too, but you could see a pattern of working in garment factories or owning a small little "tienda" (shop), or driving a taxi. Solid middle-class kinds of families. I don't remember any concern about the Dominicans as a class being a particular drain on American society – in fact, just the opposite. That played a factor in some of the immigrant visa cases. You'd get some kid in there whose mother had immigrated to New York five or 10 years earlier. He's sitting in front of you and he has straight A grades and he's bright and energetic and enthusiastic, and you can tell this kid's going to be fine. He will be an asset to the country. So if he meets all the legal requirements, you'd be happy to issue the visa.

Q: For example in Korea when I was chief of the consular section, I'd tell my officers to make the best judgment you can, but you know that anyone getting there is not going to end up on welfare and will do very well.

BROWNING: Exactly. We're talking in generalities and I'm sure there were some exceptions to this, but in general the Dominican immigrant whether legal or illegal ended up being a net asset to the country.

Q: That is what makes our country what it is. We are all products of this. After you'd been there for two years, where did you want to go and where did you go?

BROWNING: Well, before we leave the Dominican Republic I just want to make sure that I don't leave too negative of an impression. It was a good tour and I think everyone should do one or two consular tours. You are exposed to segments of society that you would not be in any other field. Plus, your first tour, particularly one not in your cone, is a good chance to learn the culture of the State Department and embassies without the pressure of competing for promotions in you cone.

So we left the DR and, again, I wanted to go to an assignment where there was a school for the kids and teaching opportunities for my wife. And I was admin coned so it was time to get into admin work. The best match for us was Nairobi, Kenya. That panned out for us and I was very happy to get that assignment.

Q: So you went to Nairobi – you were there from when to when?

BROWNING: Summer of '83 to spring of '85; I think it was March or April of '85.

Q: What was the situation by the time you got there?

BROWNING: It was a country that was heading in the right direction as far as the economy and governance goes. Moi was the president. He had won election – might have been his second. Certainly there had been shenanigans and some fraud, but we think essentially the will of the people was reflected in the results of the election. They were good friends to the U.S. The era was still Cold War. Tanzania was still in its socialist non-aligned era. Somalia was always a concern. Uganda was soon to emerge to from its chaos and stabilize. Kenya was our best partner in the region. The economy was strong, and the relationship with the U.S. and the West was strong. It was a good time to be there.

Q: You were an admin officer – what was your job?

BROWNING: I was assigned to the number three GSO (general services officer) position out of three GSOs. Nairobi was a huge embassy. It was a regional platform for East Africa, so we had an admin counselor, then an admin officer, and three GSOs. We had two financial folks, a personnel officer, security officers, communications folks. I was assigned to the junior GSO position, but within a matter of a couple of months both of the other GSO positions were vacant. I ended up being the only GSO for a majority of my tour. So that was a baptism by fire.

Q: You want to explain what you did as a GSO?

BROWNING: Of the admin sub-functions, it's the most general. You do logistics, operations, contracting, housing, motor pool, purchasing, warehousing – the sub-functions that are not covered by a Foreign Service specialty like personnel or finance or communications. So everything outside of those falls into the GSO inbox.

Q: You had a lot of work but it must have been kind of fun.

BROWNING: It was. It was a great opportunity to learn my trade. I didn't feel like I was restricted into just one small area which would have been the case if all three GSO billets had been filled. The admin counselor was superb – he was a great mentor. I'm from Texas and he was from Oklahoma so we had a little shtick going of Texas being Baja Oklahoma and me being the "Texas kid." But he was a very good mentor for me not only in the admin field but also the ways of the Foreign Service. I remember there

was a hurricane that hit Madagascar and did some damage to embassy properties and the embassy warehouse there. They looked to Nairobi to help because we were the big regional embassy. I told my boss, Jim Mark the admin counselor, "I feel sorry for those folks but I'm really busy with stuff here, I've got other things to do." He sat me down and said, "That's not the way we do things in the Foreign Service. These are our colleagues out there. They need help. So we're going to drop what we're doing here for our Nairobi folks and we're going to give all our attention to Madagascar."

We helped the embassy in Kampala get re-established at the end of the Idi Amin era. Same thing – we provided logistical support, did some contracting for them, purchasing and procurement. I was learning the trade and the culture; it was a great tour for me.

Q: How did you find the staff, local and American, in Nairobi?

BROWNING: It was a premier post. People sought assignments there. So you had top notch staff. Because it had a good school, there were a lot of families which was appreciated by my family – a lot of school kids we could interact with. There was a very large and strong AID (U.S. Agency for International Development – USAID) mission. The senior management guy for AID, John Martin, and his family and mine got to be very close. We took safaris and trips together. Our kids fell in and out of love a couple of times, I think.

The first DCM was Bob Houdek and the ambassador was a political appointee, an admiral – I think the first admiral to become an ambassador – Gerard Thomas. He brought his military orientation to the job. He did have a bit of adjustment into the Foreign Service culture. We had a large Peace Corps contingent. The local staff was also good and very talented. I enjoyed working with them and learned quite a bit from them.

Q: There was quite a lot of street crime in Nairobi?

BROWNING: There was and it was something you had to be aware of. But certainly it was not nearly as bad as it is now. My kids would take taxis downtown and hang out and socialize. We taught them some street smarts and were perfectly comfortable letting them hang out downtown – never alone but with a group. You could drink the water right out of the tap. Having come from the Middle East and the Dominican Republic, I was used to power outages – you'd call the GSO to come fix the power. When we lost power in Nairobi and called the embassy, they said "Call the electric company!" What a concept. My point is, the civil services were working pretty well – water, power, telephone. It was in that regard a well-functioning country. Crime was there and it was growing; it had such a huge population growth rate that jobs for young men were hard to come by so they would gravitate towards the urban centers.

Q: Did you have much contact with Kenyans?

BROWNING: I did. One of my large portfolios was procurement, not only for Nairobi but for regional embassies. I had good contacts with vendors, shippers, packing companies, regional distributors of things like foodstuffs. We would send food to Rwanda and Uganda. We got the embassy in Kampala to fund a position in Nairobi so that person could do all the purchasing just for Uganda. Landlords – we were renting a couple of hundred houses so you're interacting with landlords. I did get to know a certain segment of Kenyan society – those who were in business, in commerce. It was much more difficult to establish a relationship with the more traditional elements of Kenyan society.

I can remember one particular FSN (Foreign Service National) I had great respect for. We had a huge warehouse and Eliot Kiyumba was the FSN in charge. He had been with the British army in World War II – ramrod straight military bearing, and ran the warehouse like a precision instrument. I went out for my first introductory visit to the warehouse and introduced myself, and Mr. Kiyumba said "Let's take a tour; I'll show you the facility." It was as clean and spotless as you would expect of a military installation. There were these huge metal doors over the warehouse buildings. We're walking along and he bent down to pick up a little stone, never breaking stride. He threw the stone against the door and I thought a herd of buffalo were coming to run us over! It was all the warehouse laborers – a couple of hundred of them – all came out and stood in line like a military formation, and he introduced me to them. I learned very quickly that the entire embassy poached his staff. If I needed a purchasing clerk, I would call Mr. Kiyumba, and say "Mr. Kiyumba I'm sorry, I hate to do this to you but I need a purchasing clerk. Do you have someone on your staff who would be a good candidate." He would say, "Oh Mr. Browning, you're killing me out here. But I do have a young man." He was like the training ground for the whole embassy. He would take these young men and teach them work skills, and how to work for and understand the Americans. He was like a feeder office for embassy employees – to the political section, to AID, to the GSO or admin section. His staff got a step up out of the labor pool into the professional pool. He was a tremendous, tremendous asset to the embassy.

Q: This is the sort of thing that sometimes gets overlooked, about how much the people of the country who work for us really make it work.

BROWNING: Absolutely.

Q: Were there any particular political or other developments that happened during your time there?

BROWNING: I can't think of any. There had been an attempted coup before I arrived. There was a brief easing of tensions between Kenya and Tanzania while we were there. Kenya was very much a capitalist market-oriented democracy. Tanzania was socialist.

Q: Nyerere was the darling of the socialist world but from what I gather he was driving his country to ruin.

BROWNING: That's right. Ten years later when I was DCM in Tanzania, I could see the changes. At the time I was in Kenya it was just a wreck. They closed the border to try to inhibit smuggling into Tanzania, but they opened it for a while and this AID family and my family took a safari into Tanzania. We went camping and were advised what to bring – fuel for our vehicles, we couldn't get any in Tanzania. We had reservations at a government-owned hotel in Ngorogoro Crater. It was something like $100 a night, just outrageous at that time. And we had to bring light bulbs for the room, soap, towels, and our own toilet paper. And we had to bring our own food – the hotel would cook it for us, but they didn't have any food to sell. We had to bring everything and then paid this exorbitant fee for a room that we furnished ourselves. That was just the state of affairs in Tanzania. We took small little packages of soap and ghee, clarified butter. We would trade those for carvings and handicrafts. Jeans – we got rid of all the kids' blue jeans by taking those with us for barter. This was quite an introduction into a different style of economic development.

Q: Was Nyerere in charge at the time?

BROWNING: Yes.

Q: Particularly the socialists in Sweden and Scandinavia thought he was the cat's pajamas.

BROWNING: They did for a while. Then they ran into a bit of a rough spot because he wanted to close the yacht club in Dar es Salaam which is where all the Scandinavians spent their downtime – sailing and hanging out at the yacht club. When Nyerere threatened to close it down, the Scandinavians said "We're out of here." So he relented and kept it open and they stayed. It was a few years later that, to his credit, he saw the errors of his ways and allowed multi-party elections and started the slow transition to a market economy. I was DCM there from '93 to '96 right as this transition was happening and it was quite an experience.

Q: How did you find living in Kenya?

BROWNING: We loved it. Did a lot of travel. My wife was the CLO (community liaison officer) so she got to know the extended embassy community quite well. Our kids went on fabulous school field trips. Our daughter climbed Mount Kenya. Our son was very athletic and participated in athletic events all over the country with other schools. It was a good place to have a family. I fell in love with Africa, and it was because of that tour that I started to focus on Africa later on in my career. I felt compelled to come back to that continent.

Q: Where did you go next?

BROWNING: I went to Alexandria, Egypt. First I went to the god-awful Mid-Level course. I don't know if you are aware of this but there was a time when for whatever reason – I think there were complaints that there wasn't enough training for FSOs

(Foreign Service Officers) – the Department established this mid-level course that was five months long, I think. I had to either attend it in the spring of '85 or in the fall of '85. And then, go back overseas. That would mean pulling my kids out of school and my wife losing her job for a few months - total disruption to my family for this course. So I was happy that we were able to arrange leaving the family in Nairobi; my wife stayed on as CLO and my kids stayed in school through the end of the school year.

Q: I might interject here that the CLO is the Community Liaison Office.

BROWNING: Right. The disruption to the family was minimal. So I went off to Washington for a few months to this mid-level course. Then I was assigned to Alexandria as the management officer. I was the first management officer assigned to Alex in 20 years or so. So as part of my training in the mid-level course, I got training in the other functions of admin work – personnel, finance, and I was also the security officer so I got some minimal security training. I think we were the next-to-last mid-level course; the dynamic was such that they ended it the class after mine. It was just too disruptive and it wasn't meeting the need at the time. Anyway, I got what I could out of it, and got training in the management functions I had not had training in, and went off to Alex. That was summer of '85 to summer of '87.

Q: What was the situation in Egypt at the time?

BROWNING: Strained. The Egyptians had become isolated in the Arab world because of Camp David. There were mixed feelings among the Egyptians. They never did feel like they were on an equal footing with other Arab countries; they always considered themselves first among equals because of their pharaonic history and their size. There was certainly some tension in the country toward the U.S. Our relations were proper, but not warm. I was in Alexandria. It had always been a city that looks north and not south. A large Greek community was active in Alexandria; they had been traders and seafarers there for centuries. They had a different outlook than did the Cairenes and the majority of Egyptian citizens. One of the tasks I had was to help the Israelis set up a consulate. They looked to us for help because we had our own relations with the security services and protocol, and they didn't. So we provided the Israelis some help which added to the strain between the U.S. and Egypt.

But the Egyptians and particularly the Alexandrians were very warm and friendly. Islam had not really become a factor although I can remember some of my staff members expressing concern – one in particular was concerned when her daughter came home wearing a scarf. It was not something that the family had traditionally done but the young girl had picked it up in school and decided she would be covered from that point on. So it was just the beginnings of an Islamic awareness at the time. *Achille Lauro* was hijacked two months after I arrived; that had a major effect on my tour there.

Q: You must have been called upon to offer assistance. It was brought into the port of Alexandria, wasn't it?

BROWNING: It left the port of Alexandria and was hijacked by the PLO, and was brought back to Port Said. Yes, the situation was that the consul-general was not at post; I think she was at her father's funeral. The number two was also not at post. That left me in charge; I was the acting consul-general. Third-tour officer! When this hijacking happened, you can just imagine. It was an Italian ship but had a lot of American tourists on it. At the time, we didn't know about Mr. Klinghoffer, it was only later that we learned –

Q: He was the American in a wheelchair who was pushed over by these hoodlums.

BROWNING: That's right. But I don't think we, the American government, were aware of that until after the ship arrived at Port Said. Nevertheless, we were very concerned about the Americans on board. The first week or so there was a tremendous scramble for information – manifest and passenger list. I must say, the Egyptians were very responsive – the security and port officials I interacted with certainly were. I spent a lot of time at their offices trying to get information, trying to feed the beast in Cairo and Washington about who was on board, names, passport numbers, whatever information we could get. There was a lot of attention, a lot of demands for information. In the first couple of days – it took a couple of days for the machinery to be put in place with the task force in Washington. Soon Embassy Cairo took over management of the whole process. The first couple of days it seemed like all the attention was on Alex because the ship departed from Alex. The New York Times, the Washington Post, everybody was calling the consulate for information and interviews. It was quite an experience.

Q: How did the Egyptian authorities work with you on this?

BROWNING: They gave information. They were sympathetic and gave me access. I don't know that that was the case in Cairo. One of the things I learned from this experience was the different relationships that a consulate-general has with local officials than those in the capital. Both on the American and Egyptian side we felt that we were able to be closer and more cooperative than they may have felt in Cairo. In Cairo, on the Egyptian side it was their responsibility to maintain Egypt's reputation and not be seen as being overshadowed or bullied by the Americans. That wasn't so much a concern for us who were on the margins in Alexandria. Alex was a port of call for U.S. navy ship visits, so we had some good relationships with the Egyptian military, port officials and various venders and suppliers. Most of the Food for Peace, American food aid, came through the port in Alexandria so we had over time established working and personal relationships with key officials at the port. This all served us well during the hijacking.

Q: Once the ship came back, what were you doing? Eventually it was in the hands of the Egyptians and the PLO people were unloaded.

BROWNING: By that time Cairo was in charge and Alex was no longer the major player. It went into Port Said, so it was up to the embassy in Cairo and the Egyptian officials. I think we had a consular agent in Port Said, an Egyptian fellow. But Port Said was not in the Alexandria consular district; American citizen services were handled by

the embassy consular section. The embassy political section and the DATT (defense attaché) took the lead when the ship came into Port Said.

There was a big issue once the Egyptians got a hold of the hijackers. They did a fine job – there was no loss of life other than Mr. Klinghoffer but that was before the Egyptian commandoes got onto the ship. They captured these guys. The Italians were involved, we were involved; everybody wanted a piece of these guys. The Egyptians decided to fly them to Libya or maybe Tunisia. We didn't like that so we sent up our planes to divert them – that upset everybody. It became a political mess, a very touchy issue that was all handled and managed by the folks at the embassy.

Q: I've also interviewed people who were involved in Italy where the plane with the hijackers on it, a civilian plane, was forced down by our warplanes at our base I think at Sigonella on Sicily. They were involved with the Italians who wanted to get these people out of their hair. It was a mess.

BROWNING: Yes, it certainly was!

Q: How was the economy working as you saw it in Alexandria?

BROWNING: I don't have any recollections of the economy faltering or being particularly weak. Alex was a bit of a different category because it was the major port for the country. Because it had these centuries-long relationships with Mediterranean countries it was a bit of a different environment than the rest of Egypt. Tourism suffered because of the hijackings and the general anxiety about the PLO hijacking planes and other issues; that certainly had an effect. It was also the era when Egyptian students were getting university degrees left and right but no jobs. So the government would create jobs for them and that created budget deficits and other problems. As far as my consulate operation, I was able to retain staff because of the job stability and salaries at the consulate. There was no hemorrhaging of staff to the private sector. I don't remember it being a particular factor in our operations.

Q: Was the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots a problem?

BROWNING: I was not aware of it being a problem. The security services were certainly active in Alexandria. They were keeping an eye on it. Later, it was but at that time – I'm sure there were cells that I wasn't aware of, but government and Muslim Brotherhood tensions or fighting were not a factor at that time.

Q: Were they talking about closing Alexandria when you were there?

BROWNING: Just the opposite. Because there were two U.S. diplomatic posts in Israel – Tel Aviv and Jerusalem – the Egyptians were adamant that there be two in Egypt – Cairo and Alexandria. This was the time of Gramm-Rudman budget pressures in Washington. Over a three or four year period the department as a whole lost seven or eight percent off its budget base. So there were terrible budget constraints. The DCM

sent out a message to all American staff asking for ways that we could cut costs. I really upset my boss in Alex by saying we could close Alexandria. I gave a proposal on how work we were doing in Alexandria could be covered by Cairo-based staff. I immediately got shot down on that – not because of the analysis of the financial factors, but because of the political implications. We had to keep Alexandria open.

There was a separate library, the USIS (U.S. Information Service) American Center. For several years it had been the only place where the American flag was planted in Alexandria. A couple of years before I arrived, the Embassy began renovating an old villa to become the consulate office building. It had been owned by a friend of King Farouk who had the timber import monopoly for all of Egypt. That was a large part of what I was doing in Alex – renovating this building and turning it into an office building for the consulate. There was another old villa that was an R&R (rest and recreation) facility for the Cairo embassy recreation association. They rented out rooms to staff from Cairo who wanted to come to Alex for vacation – like a little B&B (bed and breakfast). We were going through this process of Inman security upgrades. So we had to upgrade security – reinforce the walls for all the compounds. Huge, huge expense. I had nine construction projects going on simultaneously in Alex on office upgrades, perimeter wall upgrades for the CG's (consul-general) residence, the rec association facility, the consulate building itself. It was a huge expense and I thought one way to save money was to close it down but I learned quickly that was not an option. That was my first big lesson on the relationship between policy and resources and the responsibility for the management folks to truly understand the policy priorities so that we can do our part to help achieve them.

Q: How did that work out?

BROWNING: I sure learned a lot about construction!

Later I made the rec association people in Cairo very unhappy. I got a phone call from the Marine security guard detachment commander one day who said, "Mr. Browning you've got to come to the Marine house right now." It was two blocks away from the consulate, so I rushed over. I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "The back half of the house is falling off." Sure enough, a crack had developed. You could see daylight through this crack. So I called the landlord – we had been renting this house for the Marines for quite some time, from when the detachment first showed up. He got a contractor in there and it seems there had been a slow water leak below the foundation for many years, and it eventually undermined the foundation. It seems the house had been built on a Greek cemetery. When they dug into it, it exposed this whole archeological treasure trove of graves. So we had to abandon that Marine house. I suggested we take over the rec association facility and turn that into the Marine house. The Marines loved the idea; it had a basketball court and a tennis court, swimming pool and a big nice garden. Cairo didn't like it. But at least we didn't have to go out and find another Marine house.

I also learned how inefficient Washington can be in coordinating these projects. Each of these projects had a piece which was owned by OBO (Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations) or the Foreign Buildings Office at the time, FBO. Another piece was owned by Diplomatic Security. And the regional bureau had some equity in the projects, as well. They didn't coordinate well in Washington. So one set of plans would say build this wall here. Another set of plans from another office for a whole other project would not see that wall there and would have a water pipe coming through or something like that. It was a mess. I went to Cairo to the experienced admin folks and said, "We've got to stop this." I wrote it all up in this huge telegram with all of these problems and sent it to Washington. To the Department's credit they said "You're absolutely right; we'll take care of it." They put everything on hold and sorted out all of these conflicts. The lesson for me was – I had never served in Washington at this point and I just assumed that Washington knew what it was doing. I learned quickly that Washington didn't necessarily know what it's doing; sometimes the field has to grab an issue and say "Focus on this issue because it's not working the way you've got it set up."

That was a good lesson for me, something that I've taken with me for the rest of my career.

Q: One of the things is, if you're not on the ground you often miss things. I was in Dhahran way back in the '50s. They were building some new quarters. We told them, "Don't direct them the way you are" – they had screened in porches and they were pointing them right into the direction of the shamal, a heavy wind which brought sand in. They said "We know what we're doing" and built the thing, and they were just sand pits.

BROWNING: I was going to say something else that came to mind. In Alex, I had a much smaller staff than in Nairobi, but a more varied staff with different disciplines. I learned also something I took with me throughout my career, which is that the environment and culture are so important for supervision and motivation of your staff. What was important to a Kenyan, what motivated or inspired a Kenyan, what worked in Kenya may or may not work in Alex because it's a different culture with a different history and needs and society. I learned that I had to adjust my own management style to meet the staff where they were. The staff in Nairobi was very experienced, had been with the embassy for a long time. That wasn't the case in Alexandria. It was a relatively new office; you couldn't assume that every staff member knew every aspect of their job. I realized that from that point on as I moved to different posts, I would have to build into my own learning curve figuring out what works in that particular society.

Q: Was the secret police a significant problem for you in Egypt?

BROWNING: Not to my knowledge. I assumed as did my Egyptian staff that the Mukhabarat, the Egyptian secret police, were checking up on our staff members. That's just the way it's done in the Middle East; it was that way in Syria and Jordan where I taught school and I assumed it was going on in Egypt. I was able to establish what I considered to be a very strong, professional relationship with the head of the security services in Alexandria. He understood the significance of the consulate being accessible

to the public in Alex, and he worked with me. I was able to draw upon that relationship throughout my tour there, particularly during the *Achille Lauro* hijacking. I'm not aware of any incidents where the secret police were overtly obstructionist. They may have been indirectly but I think I would have picked up on that.

Q: Thinking about it, there's no reason for them to have been that way. But you never can tell.

BROWNING: That's true, and so much is personality dependent. You get a real obnoxious guy in there, he can make your life miserable.

Q: What about this responsibility for Israelis? After Camp David, the Israelis were going to Egypt. How was that working out from your perspective?

BROWNING: I think there was a misalignment in expectations. I had a similar situation in Colombo, my next post, where we were playing an advocacy role for the Israelis. So I may be conflating incidents in Alex and Colombo, they may be running together in my memory. For example, the Israeli senior person would always travel with a bodyguard, and we did not allow firearms into our diplomatic facilities. The Israelis demanded their bodyguard keep his firearm. I was ordered to let that happen. Which is fine, but it undermines your own security folks, it undermines the Marine guards, and you wonder why are they so special that they get to do that? In Alex unlike Cairo, there was not the animosity toward the Israelis that you found throughout Egypt. Outside Alex and Cairo there was tremendous resentment toward the Israelis. There was a sense of lost fraternity with the rest of the Arab world and toward the Palestinians. But because of the cosmopolitan nature of Alex – you know, trading centers have a way of insuring that commerce is always at the top of the list. Big port cities tend to be more liberal and accommodating and tolerant than you might find in the hinterland. I would argue that's probably the case in our own country, too. Alex was not a huge tourist destination. It was a destination for Egyptians; they loved to come to Alex in the summer and walk on the corniche and be cooled by the Mediterranean breezes. But most international tourism was further south up the Nile in Luxor and places like that.

Q: You left there when?

BROWNING: Summer of '87.

Q: Where did you go?

BROWNING: I went to Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Q: This is a good place to stop for this session.

Q: Today is the 14th of September 2016 with Steve Browning; I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. You're off to Colombo, Sri Lanka – 1987?

BROWNING: Right,'87.

Q: Let's talk about it. What was your job? What was the situation in Sri Lanka at the time you got there?

BROWNING: I reported for duty as the supervisory GSO. Subsequently, the management officer asked to curtail so he could take another position, and I moved into the management officer position after about a year. The defining characteristics and atmosphere in Sri Lanka at that time were the two conflicts that the central government was trying to manage. One was against the Tamil Tigers in the northern part of the country; they were seeking autonomy or even independence from the central government. On the southern part of the island was the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna), a Maoist-Sinhalese insurrection that was fighting the government. It was a state of constant conflict; life on the island was very insecure. Americans were not targeted but we were certainly affected by the violence that was pervasive on the island.

Q: What did that mean to living or working conditions?

BROWNING: Certainly the lack of security affected mobility. Our AID program, our Peace Corps volunteers, State Department staff – their ability to move freely and safely around the island was severely curtailed. The travel restrictions were both professional and also personal. Sri Lanka's a beautiful island and there were many parts we never got to see because of the fighting and insecurity. In Colombo itself, there were what they called "hartals" or strikes. The JVP particularly would let it be known that, for example, on Tuesday there would be a hartal and everybody should stay home. Our local staff was at risk if they came in to work; if the JVP saw they were breaking the strike – their homes would be attacked, firebombed. The employees themselves would be targeted. We had an environment that was very insecure for our local employees. In addition, Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic society. The Tamils tend to be Hindu. The Sinhalese are Buddhists. There's a significant Muslim population, and some Christians. So during the night, these guys were all fighting each other. During the daytime, in our embassy we were trying to build an American embassy team. You had this ethnic conflict that was playing itself out outside the embassy walls with assassinations, fire bombings, typical insurrection stuff. Inside the embassy walls, I'm trying to run an efficient embassy operation with local employees from all the various ethnic and religious groups. It was very difficult to keep the external conflict outside of the embassy walls. But that's something we had to do to take care of business. Many of our local staff had been with us for years and years. We had a dozen or so who just left; they were trying to get their families out of harm's way or had been targeted for assassination. So we lost a lot of senior leadership inside the embassy, and that made it difficult to operate. It was a challenging time for everyone. Not only our political and econ officers who needed to get out and about to get a better sense of what's going on in the government and economy, but also the administrative staff as we were trying to keep things operating smoothly and efficiently with this external conflict and internal tension.

Q: Did you have concerns about Muslim terrorists? Or was this homegrown?

BROWNING: This was homegrown. The Islamic radicalism phenomenon was not in Sri Lanka then. It was very much a Sri Lanka-specific conflict. Two conflicts, both Sri Lanka specific, although there were suspicions that Indian elements might have been stoking the coals.

Q: What type of work were you doing? What were some of the day to day problems?

BROWNING: The first half of my tour was as supervisory GSO. That's all the logistics and operations, housing, contracting, purchasing. The economy was in a fragile state, with businessmen and bankers not wanting to invest deeply in an economy that was being hit on two different fronts. Part of my job was to ensure that the supply lines for the embassy were maintained and that we were able to provide essential services to our personnel, in their homes and at the embassy.

Later on, in the second half of my tour, the management officer curtailed and I was anointed by the ambassador, DCM and regional bureau to take over. I became the management officer. That position assumed responsibility for security, financial operations, communications, personnel, health and a broader range of responsibilities than just general services.

Q: How did the people feel – what was the general feeling about Americans when you were there?

BROWNING: We were certainly not targeted in either of these insurrections, although there were some American casualties due to bombings. Sri Lanka was going through a transition at the time. There was a general appreciation for the leadership of the U.S. When you talk about Sri Lanka and its relations with the U.S., you've also got to talk about India. India had a deep suspicion of the U.S. and our activities in the region. Sri Lanka was trying to establish its own identity in relation to India. So it was complex, but there was no America-bashing that I was aware of. I think our bilateral relations with the government of Sri Lanka were fairly strong.

Q: Was this before the Indian government sent troops to northern Sri Lanka?

BROWNING: I think so. It was right after I left that the Indians went into northern Sri Lanka.

Q: Did we have any connection with the Tamils at all, in your work?

BROWNING: Not in a political sense, but I had Tamil employees at the embassy. It was our policy to keep Sri Lanka intact as a country; we certainly were not supporting a separatist movement for the Tamils. We were interested in human rights and democratization. I think the Tamils had some grievances against the government and the

Sinhalese majority, but we never felt the right path to solving those grievances was through breaking away from Sri Lanka.

Q: What was life like? You were married?

BROWNING: Yes. My wife was teaching school. We never evacuated the post, we never drew down so families and children stayed in Colombo throughout this period. It was rough. The international school was closed for a total of about three months that school year, I think, because of hartals and security concerns. Classes were moved to private homes, hotels and embassy buildings. Even though the majority of the activity was not in Colombo, there was the occasional bombing. Our kids rode a school bus quite a ways to the international school. Occasionally they would witness a necklacing, when someone had a tire put around them and it's filled with gasoline and set on fire. Very traumatic. We had one AID family member who was injured– an explosion in her neighborhood, a bombing. She was at the kitchen window and it blew out; she got glass shards in her face. The violence was pervasive, it was everywhere. But harm to foreigners was ancillary damage; it was not directed at us. We brought in the regional psychiatrist from India to come and talk with our folks and give our parents advice on how to talk to their children about the violence. The underlying tension was pervasive; you couldn't escape it. It affected everything we did.

Q: You must have felt under siege?

BROWNING: Yes. For me one manifestation was cabin fever. It was hard to be on this beautiful island and have your activities limited to such a small part of it. We could go to Kandy up in the mountains, the central part of the island, and to a few beaches in the southern part. But other than that, we couldn't travel much; that was frustrating.

Q: How long were you there?

BROWNING: For three years.

Q: Then what? I take it you were rather glad to leave, weren't you?

BROWNING: I had mixed feelings. It was a good assignment. It was the first assignment I had as a management officer of an embassy, so I was happy to have that experience. The Front Office gave me plenty of leeway. I was an FS-02 at the time and I remember the ambassador, James W. Spain, was insistent that all of his country team members would be of at least "counselor" rank. So I had to do battle with the Department and Sri Lankan protocol on that issue.

It was also a good tour for furthering my education in how management and policy goals and efforts are so entwined. Ambassador Spain was deeply worried about the impact on the economy of all the civil strife. I remember one country team meeting in which the econ counselor assured us that everything was fine because he had just had tea with the governor of the central bank who had assured him so. Well, the management offices

were getting a completely different picture. We were in daily contact with port officials, shippers, merchants, vendors, bankers, all of the commercial side of Sri Lanka. They were extremely nervous about the economy. So, I laid all this out in the country team meeting. The econ counselor sure wasn't happy that I was venturing into his lane, but the ambassador was appreciative of the unique perspectives that management could offer. The tour certainly had its pluses and minuses. But yes, that was my fourth tour in the field (I hadn't served in Washington yet), so I was happy to head back to Washington.

Q: What'd you do in Washington?

BROWNING: I went to the executive director's office in the Africa bureau and was a post management officer, PMO, for Anglophone and Lusophone West Africa. So my empire included Liberia, Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and Ghana.

Q: Africa is one of the hardest places to deal with management, isn't it?

BROWNING: Yes.

Q: All of the other areas have pretty good local supplies but in Africa…

BROWNING: That's what attracted me to the Africa bureau. If you're a management guy I don't really know what you would do in Luxembourg for three years. Local staff is strong, the infrastructure is there. They have their challenges – I don't mean to imply that there's not honest work. But for me, the challenges of providing the platform for diplomacy in Africa was much more challenging than it would be anywhere else in the world. So I sought out the job. I wanted to return to Africa. After my tour in Kenya, it was a place I wanted to return to, for that very reason. The Africans were coming out of colonialism. They were trying to get their acts together as far as governance, all the social human development indicators. They were wrestling with the very fundamentals of life – how do we feed and govern and house ourselves and improve the lives of our families? That was very exciting to me.

Q: We joke in the Foreign Service, but a challenging post means a very difficult post. But it also means more fun – more problems that you can solve.

BROWNING: That's exactly right. At the time – this was before the first Gulf War, before the breakup of the Soviet Union – Africa was virtually the only place where you could get an EER (employee evaluation report) that was "singed on the edges", as my boss phrased it. It shows that you can do your job in a place that's challenging and has a bit of danger that you just couldn't get in other parts of the world. After the troubles in the Middle East and starting up the new embassies in the former Soviet Union, that changed. There were multiple opportunities to face the challenges that we Africa hands had been facing for years.

Q: Were there any particular things that were difficult for you to arrange for? You're trying to keep these posts going – were there any particular challenges?

BROWNING: Oh, yeah. I supported West Africa, the English- and Portuguese-speaking countries. The big issue for me was Liberia. This was during the aftermath of their multiple insurrections – Sam Doe and Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson, all those delightful guys. Liberia at one point was probably our largest embassy in Africa. We had 600 or so folks there. Then, because of all these coups and counter-coups, we really drew down to just a few dozen folks. Our policy was to not close the post. Just about every other country that had an embassy in Monrovia closed its embassy. A few of the Africans stayed open, but I think we were the only Western country to stay open.

We were on a little spit of land on the Atlantic coast, Mamba Point. Our folks, bless their hearts, they were really stranded there. We had to fly in fuel for generators, because there was no city electricity. We flew in water bladders so that when the water was running, we could fill them up. We had a small reverse-osmosis plant that would take seawater and make fresh water. There was not much of an economy as such, but we were still renting houses and trying to buy what we could locally. Virtually everything was supplied by helicopter. We had several U.S. Navy ships off the coast of Liberia which served as the base of operations. Helicopters would fly from the ships to Freetown, Sierra Leone, out to the ships and then to the embassy in Monrovia. The flights would bring in mail, equipment, supplies and cash. One time in a six week period we brought in half a million dollars in cash just to take care of embassy business. I went in on one of those helicopters on my first visit to post. The helicopter was full of diplomatic pouches. There was no seat for me, so I just sprawled out on these pouches. The embassy had turned the basketball court on the embassy grounds into a helicopter landing pad. The helicopter landed, and I saw these embassy staff who were waiting to greet the helicopter. At first I thought they were there to greet me! But they were waiting for all the diplomatic pouches that had food and booze and mail from home. They were really stranded out there. That was a tough assignment for those folks. My job was to be the liaison in Washington for all the different agencies and support activities that our embassy needed.

Q: How well did the State Department respond to the problems in Africa, as far as money, finances, communications, that sort of thing?

BROWNING: The policy priority was to keep the embassy open and play whatever role we could to bring peace to the country. Because of our special history with Liberia, the U.S. felt it had a special role to play in bringing stability to the country. So we were committed. I never felt that the department was insufficiently supportive of what we were trying to do. It's always an interagency effort. I remember the Coast Guard was particularly keen to protect some communications facilities they had that were necessary to their operations. And VOA (Voice of America) had a huge transmitter operation in Liberia. The whole U.S. government was committed to doing what we could to affect a positive outcome in Liberia.

Q: Who was the ambassador in Liberia?

BROWNING: Pete de Vos was the ambassador.

Q: Did you have problems with the ambassadors or administration in any of those posts?

BROWNING: No. I had a very strong and positive relationship with Pete de Vos. In fact, after Liberia he went to Tanzania and asked me to join him and be his deputy. But that was a couple of years later. He was a good ambassador to work with. The Bureau of African Affairs (AF) is primarily staffed with relatively junior folks. None of us were overly experienced. So you get used to working with a relatively junior, inexperienced staff – but hardworking, eager and anxious to succeed. I don't remember any points of contention between the embassy and the department; certainly not between me and embassy staff.

There was a frustration that we couldn't move faster and better and more efficiently, but that's just the nature of life and work in posts in crisis. When you are in the field, your particular crisis, which affects your work, your life, your security, is the most important thing going and you can't understand why Washington doesn't see that. Washington, however, is dealing with dozens of such crises and is struggling with its own resource and policy constraints. This Washington perspective I gained in my PMO tour certainly served me well later in my career when I served in my own crisis posts.

Q: How about evacuations? I've had accounts about why we didn't pull out of places like Liberia. We had ships hovering over the horizon.

BROWNING: That was not their preferred parking spot. But in the civilian-military relationship, Defense Department and State Department, there's always going to be some tension over different priorities. I think once we were able to establish an air bridge directly from Freetown to Monrovia and could bypass the ships off the coast, the Pentagon was happy to take their ships and move them elsewhere. But until we could establish that, we really needed those ships. They were off the horizon; you couldn't see them from Monrovia but we knew they were there and the government knew. In case we needed to evacuate the embassy, we needed those helicopters close at hand. It might have been hard for some of the military folks to understand why we were so keen to maintain a presence in Liberia, but to my knowledge they stayed as long as we needed them. When we said we could handle it ourselves, they took off.

Q: By this time, had we developed a pretty good plan for both evacuating and defending embassies? They were constantly being challenged in Liberia and Somalia and Sierra Leone…

BROWNING: It was a time of multiple evacuations. Once, we evacuated Kinshasa to Brazzaville, right across the Congo River, which itself was in evacuation status! Imagine

evacuating our personnel to safety to a post which was already evacuated because of unsafe conditions, it was really a crazy time. The thing to remember at this time was our president and Secretary of State James Baker were acutely aware of the damage done to the Carter administration by the hostages in Tehran. To my knowledge, the Baker team was the most likely to evacuate an embassy at the first sign of trouble. It was quite frustrating to the Africa hands who had seen this before. "Yeah, there's a riot, there's a coup, but it'll die down and we'll be OK." The Africa folks may have taken it a bit too casually, but the sense on the seventh floor during the James Baker time was "We're not taking any risks. At the first sign of trouble, we're going to pull our people out." There may have been an underlying sentiment of there being nothing in Africa worth risking damage to the White House.

There was almost a hair-trigger kind of reaction to evacuations. It was very frustrating to the Africa hands and to the policy folks. Our policy was universal representation. We felt it was important that the United States be represented with an embassy in every country where we had diplomatic relations. To close an embassy at the first sign of what was typical in Africa – a coup or civil unrest or a few bombings – that was frustrating to the Africa hands.

Q: Any other recollections from this tour?

BROWNING: My two-year long battle with DS (Diplomatic Security) was memorable. Each PMO had a portfolio of different responsibilities. One of mine was to be the bureau liaison with DS. My boss thought that because I had been post security officer in Alexandria, I would be a good choice. And, part of the responsibility included being bureau security officer for the Africa Bureau. So anytime any one of the dozens of bureau employees got a security violation, I was to investigate it, adjudicate it, write up my findings and send them to DS. After my first couple of adjudications, I realized that I was really unprepared to do that. I had had no training and didn't feel qualified to make decisions that would go on employees' permanent records. So I asked DS for some training. "We don't provide training." "Well, how am I supposed to do a good job, make the right decisions?" "It's common sense, do the best you can." I allowed as to how I wasn't going to make decisions that could impact someone's career without being properly prepared to do so. So I didn't. After a few months I was visited by the guy in DS that manages this program who wanted to know what was going on. I showed him the bottom drawer of my safe full of dozens of uninvestigated security violations. That led to several weeks of back and forth between him and me, and then between DS and AF. I contacted by counterparts in other bureaus who all agreed that we really needed training if we were going to be doing DS' work for them. And we finally got it. The lesson for me in all this was that it's sometimes important to push back and force entrenched bureaucracies and systems to be responsive. Of course, I spent many weekends cleaning up the backlog I had created, but it was worth it.

Q: You did this for how long?

BROWNING: It was a two-year assignment, but it got cut short. A guy I had worked with in Kenya, Mark Johnson who was the econ counselor in Kenya, had by this time become the executive assistant to M, the under secretary for management. He contacted the Africa bureau and me and asked me to curtail and move up to the seventh floor to be a special assistant for M So my boss, the executive director for Africa said "sure" because that would give him a friend and spy on the seventh floor. I was excited to do it. For a management guy to be a special assistant in the Office of the Under Secretary for Management, that's a real big deal. I started there in the spring of '92 I guess.

Q: What were the main challenges of this job?

BROWNING: The fall of the Soviet Union was the biggest issue we faced. The State Department wanted to open 14 new embassies in all of the newly independent states. Secretary Baker promised Congress that we would do this without asking for any new money. In order to do that, we had to close existing posts – that was the only way to finance this huge operation. There were two special assistants in M, and I undertook the portfolio of closing 30 existing State Department posts. My colleague's portfolio was opening 14 new posts. So my whole time was defined by this process of working with the European bureau, East Asia bureau, Latin America bureau– "helping" them do what nobody wanted to do, which was to close their posts. EUR (Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs at that time) said why should we have to close Nice so that Tajikistan can become an embassy? I said, "Well that's what we're going to have to do." My colleague got to do the exciting, happy, positive work of opening new embassies, while I had the responsibility of being the bad guy/enforcer with all these bureaus, telling them you have to identify another two posts to close because we need the money and we need the people.

That was the whole portfolio of what we did. Also the occasional evacuation and other stuff, but the overarching job was closing posts.

Q: What was your feeling and the feeling of people around you towards Baker making this promise? Was this political grandstanding or what?

BROWNING: My sense was the focus was not <u>against</u> State; it was more <u>for</u> the White House. It was showing Congress that the administration was mindful of the need to open the posts, and of the budget situation. This was the era of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, the budget legislation that really shrunk the budget of the federal government. I think State had its operations budget cut by 12% or so. There were some real fiscal constraints. There was some resentment on the part of State Department folks that we promised to close posts – we should ask Congress for more money so we could keep our existing posts and open these 14 new posts. But the political reality was such that it just was not going to happen. So do we protest and fall on our sword to save a consulate in France and not open an embassy in a newly independent state in the former Soviet Union? The answer was no. We had to be on the ground in these new countries as they got established. If the political environment on the Hill was such that we were not getting new money, then this was the only way to do it.

Q: Sometimes you have to bow to the political winds.

BROWNING: You don't have any choice. I don't think Baker and Bush were prepared to – I don't know if they would have been successful if they had decided to fight this budget battle and ask Congress for new money. I think they realized it wasn't going to happen and we had to be there, so we would make it happen with our existing money.

Q: How did you feel about the efficiency of these new embassies?

BROWNING: It was very much like Africa. There was limited infrastructure. There were no FSNs because these had all been part of the Soviet Union. We didn't have consulates in these places. They themselves didn't have foreign ministries and offices of protocol and the infrastructure you would expect when you open up a diplomatic institution. They were struggling; we were struggling. The housing in some of these places was just deplorable. There was no rental market for expatriates in these new capital cities. We struggled to find a place for our folks to live, as well as office space. Communications were weak and limited. It was a struggle; it was hard. The department should take credit for doing a good job of opening these places up under very difficult circumstances. The first folks to go in deserve particular praise. And the EUR bureau, who was leading the charge, they were working 20 hour days back in Washington, trying to energize the domestic bureaucracy. The logistics of shipping all of the communications and security equipment required to open an embassy – that was a huge operation.

Q: I was retired when this happened, but I went as a consultant on consular affairs to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The embassy was in a cottage; I would have felt cramped if I had gone there just with my family. They took the garage and all the outlying buildings. We got through that period.

BROWNING: That's right, and it's good that we did. Not to have been there would have been a horrible mistake.

Q: Did you have any desire to get out in the field again?

BROWNING: After that assignment? Yes. (Laughter) It wasn't all bad. One of the fun things I worked on was putting together training programs for diplomats from some of these countries. In the early days, they really were in need of understanding the basics of diplomatic tradecraft so we found a very talented officer and shanghaied him for several months to manage this program. We flew them over, put them in furnished apartments and gave them some intensive training. I remember waking up once in the middle of the night thinking "Garbage disposals! These guys don't know what a garbage disposal is. Some young Tajik diplomat is going to chop all his fingers off." So we added a module on living and taking care of domestic business in America.

But I did want to get back in the field. I'm really not a staff type person. It seemed all I did was nudge, shake my finger, monitor progress of someone else's work, facilitate, grease wheels and that kind of stuff. I didn't *own* anything. Nothing was really mine. So I was happy to leave that job.

Q: You had probably a couple of the tougher management assignments.

BROWNING: The job in AF/EX (Office of the Executive Director in AF), post management officer, was my first job in Washington. I'd had three assignments in the field in which I was heavily dependent on Washington. But my understanding of Washington was very limited. The shortened PMO job and then the M special assistant job really gave me some insight into living and working in Washington, which really made me eager to get back into the field.

What happened is, this was an election year and in November of '92 Clinton beat Bush, and so Baker would no longer be Secretary of State. The transition team chose Brian Atwood to be the new under secretary for management. Traditionally these special assistant jobs are apolitical; we're not partisan and provide continuity between administrations. The practice had been to keep all of the career folks and release the political appointees. But Atwood wanted a whole new shop, so I was pretty much out of a job in January '93 at the inauguration. Pete de Vos by this time was in Tanzania as the ambassador. The designated DCM for Tanzania got into some kind of trouble and couldn't report to post, so de Vos called me and asked if I would bid on the job of being his deputy. It was perfect because it got me out of Washington and got me a job –

Q: A DCM job, too.

BROWNING: - a DCM job. So I was able to branch out a bit. I said "Sure." I went there in '93. That was a good turn of events for me. I was really glad I could take that job and get out to Dar es Salaam.

Q: What was the situation there when you went out?

BROWNING: It was a time of tremendous transition for Tanzania. Julius Nyerere had been president since independence. He ruled Tanzania with an iron fist. He had been a firm believer in socialism, and a firm practitioner of a single party state. He was the darling of the Scandinavians, who really were looking for an opportunity to show that socialism with a human face could take root around the world. To his credit, Nyerere realized eventually that it wasn't working. The economy was in shambles – he just needed to change course. He chose – one of the few African leaders to do so – he allowed multiparty elections. That's on the surface; in reality he was never going to let his ruling party risk loss of control, but they did have these elections and they transitioned from a socialist economy to a market-based economy. That was ongoing when I arrived. To be present as the country was making this huge transition in governance and their economy was really exciting. I was happy to have been there during that time.

Q: What was the embassy like?

BROWNING: It was a strong embassy, but like most of the embassies in Africa it was not large – a couple of dozen folks if I remember correctly. We certainly were not over-staffed. Pete de Vos and I together had more experience than all the rest of the embassy staff put together. They were mainly second or third tour folks. We had a very large AID program and a large Peace Corps program which were responding to the government's request for assistance in making these transitions from single- to multi-party, and from state socialist economy to a market-based economy. It was a very active embassy. We got out and about. The U.S. was a major player in Tanzania to be sure, but we were far from the largest donor. We were #13 behind Finland – Finland and 11 other countries gave more development aid to Tanzania than the U.S. did! Finland, can you believe it? But our leadership role was not based on dollars – we were the United States of America, so the American embassy and ambassador had a front-row seat and were always in a leadership position.

Q: I imagine for one thing, the embassy must have been doing some heavy economic reporting.

BROWNING: Not just reporting, but programmatic work. In fact, the Tanzanians came to us and said, "We want a stock market." We asked, "Do you have any publicly held companies?" They said "No, but we want to head in that direction." It was our USIS folks who put together a program on what a stock market is all about. I had worked with a guy in Sri Lanka who had given a program there explaining stock market operations. USIS contacted him, and he flew out and gave a well-received presentation to business and government leaders on all the implications of having publicly traded companies. Their supreme court contacted us and said, "With market economy will come contracts and lawsuits, and we don't have a clue how to deal with this." So we set up an exchange program with the DC circuit courts and the Supreme Court of Tanzania. We would bring U.S. judges over and they would send their judges to DC. We helped them set up a case management program. To go from a country where commercial lawsuits were non-existent because there was no private enterprise, to one that could be rife with conflict because there were no laws on the books governing private enterprise and no training for judges and lawyers was quite sobering for the judicial leadership. Tanzania probably had 30 lawyers in the whole country at this time because there had been no need for lawyers. I can remember hosting a dinner in the DCM's residence, which was on the coast of the Indian Ocean. We were outside, a lovely, tropical evening, and the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Tanzania gave a toast thanking the United States for helping Tanzania "re-engineer our society." And that's exactly what it was. It was a massive change for the country and its people and its government. We played an essential role in that transition. We were certainly reporting, but more significantly, we were engaging in significant programmatic activity – USAID, Peace Corps, the State Department, the whole embassy operation.

Q: Were they disassembling these villages that had been promoting…

BROWNING: Nyerere forced people into collective villages, "ujamma" I think they were called, almost North-Korean-style operations. But when you take people out of their local villages and tribal structures and force them into other areas, force them to grow crops they're not familiar with – it just doesn't work. In 1979, 90 percent of Tanzanian farmers lived on collective farms, but generated only 5 percent of the country's agricultural output. He eventually recognized the collectives were a mistake; they were disbanded by the time I got there.

One of his successes involved schooling. All the secondary schools were boarding schools. He established this string of boarding schools all over the country, and he said "If you're a high school student you have to go to a high school that is not in your home region." So if you're from the south, you've got to go to the north. All the instruction would be in Kiswahili – you couldn't use your tribal language. The result was that, compared to the rest of Africa, tribalism in Tanzania was virtually non-existent. The Tanzanians would watch Kenya erupt in tribal conflict; Uganda would have it, north vs. south. All the Tanzanian leaders would tell me they were petrified by the thought of tribal violence in Tanzania. So this Nyerere initiative of forcing upcoming leaders, the new generation, to live and work side by side with people from other tribes and not speak their traditional language, unifying the country through Kiswahili – that was successful. Hugely expensive and it didn't reach all who wanted to go to secondary schools, but for the lucky few who could afford this or were chosen for it, it worked. The collective villages, however, those were universally seen as disastrous.

Q: It's very difficult – social engineering sounds fine when a committee looks at it. When it comes time to really do it, it's another matter. How did you find your dealing with the government there? The ministers. Were they wary? It's got to be pretty dramatic for them.

BROWNING: Absolutely. Nyerere had stepped down as president and allowed multiparty elections. There was a residual element of the die-hard Socialists who considered us the enemy. But the folks I dealt with – the foreign minister, minister of defense, minister of finance, central bankers – they were all on board. A lot of these were Western-educated. They were wanting to make the transition. The governing party was the Chama Cha Mapinduzi and there was no doubt that they would retain power. But there were factions within the party; some embraced the changes, some resisted. But Nyerere stayed in Dar es Salaam. He had a villa on the Indian Ocean and even though they had a new president, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, Nyerere was always looming in the background. He was out of office, but everybody knew he was keeping an eye on things and nobody was going anywhere without him knowing about it. When he decided Tanzania was going to change direction and align its self with capitalism and multi-party democracy, the resistance was there but muted. Those who were on board felt comfortable to be very positive in public about it. That gave the U.S. an opportunity to take a leadership role here. Our Scandinavian colleagues who had invested so much in trying to invent this socialism with a human face, they were also undergoing their own transitions back home. I don't remember any resistance on their part to this transition.

So by and large, though there was a residual suspicion of the U.S., the vast majority of the government was eager to work with us.

Q: How about the universities, schools? They'd have to go through a drastic change in what they were teaching?

BROWNING: They did. I don't remember the universities being a flashpoint or a conflict point. I'm sure the majority of the professors were trained in schools in Scandinavia or the Soviet Union and to the extent they were true believers, there might have been some resentment on campus. But I don't remember the student body resisting these changes. Tanzania was in really pathetic economic shape when Nyerere realized that his direction was wrong. There were very few people advocating to stick to the program and stay the course, because it was such a disaster. There was so little in the markets. I don't remember anyone defending the old ways. I don't remember any resistance on campuses. I'm sure there was by the professors, but it didn't get any traction that I'm aware of.

Q: What about the Scandinavians? They'd been promoting this – what were they doing?

BROWNING: Right, they were promoting this. One incident happened before I got there. They were big supporters of the yacht club, a very nice sailing facility and club with a pool and bar and restaurant, a nice place where the Scandinavians could use the diplomatic pouch to bring in supplies. It was one of the few places in Dar es Salaam where you could get a nice meal and a drink. Nyerere said it wasn't compatible with socialist ways and moved to shut it down. The Scandinavians said they would leave if he did. So while they were committed to socialism, they were also committed to their creature comforts.

The Scandinavians were the most enthusiastic practitioners of what I call "values promotion"…this value is important to us and we want you to promote it here. The donors would all get together and meet, talk about priorities. Just like the U.S. and the Brits, the Scandinavians would say "Our parliament wants us to emphasize child nutrition," or women's rights, or environmental issues. The poor Tanzanian government would have to struggle with Denmark wanting it to make this value their highest priority and the U.S. wanting another value to be the highest priority and the Finns something else.

Eventually, the Tanzanian government called us together and said, "We cannot work with you the way you're set up. The majority of our budget is based on the foreign aid you give us. We appreciate that, but the demands you're putting on us are so great and so diffused, and we have such weak bureaucratic infrastructure that we can't respond. The Finns want a quarterly report, the Danes want one every four months, the Americans want a weekly report, in such and such a format. And each of you wants us to have a different highest priority." The Tanzanians said, "We just can't respond to that. You guys get together, put together your priorities and requirements, and make it such that we can partner with you." That was very effective, I thought. The donors got together and

among ourselves talked about what we could modify and still keep our home capitals satisfied. We were able to streamline our donor involvement with the government. My recollection is, the Scandinavians recognized the experiment in Tanzania was a failure. They weren't trying to defend it. They were trying to make the new system work, and they were prepared to work with us and the British and the Tanzanian government to make the transition work.

Q: You must have had to undergo a whole training in the American demand economy. Most of us, this is just the way it is, the stock market has been there and we don't really pay a whole hell of a lot of attention to it, right? Had you been an economic major?

BROWNING: I was a theology major! You're right, there was a lot I needed to learn, and I learned a tremendous amount. Part of it was Pete de Vos – this was his fifth ambassadorship in Africa. He knew Africa, he knew the issues and he had experience working with other development partners. I was able to learn a lot from him. Plus, we had a strong country team. The AID director was strong as was the Peace Corps director. I was very much the rookie learning all this stuff, and that was fine because the rest of the country team was so strong that I didn't need to produce, I just needed to get out of their way and learn from them – which is what I did. In fact, State's inspector general inspected Dar and said that our country team was one of the best they had seen and could serve as a model for others.

Q: One of the strengths of the Foreign Service is we're used to being in unfamiliar situations and learn a lot in a short time.

BROWNING: Exactly right. My wife is a good example. Before she got her teaching job at the international school, Peace Corps asked her to work for them. When we arrived in Tanzania, the Peace Corps program was focused on traditional stuff like drilling wells, health care, agriculture, etc. Soon after arrival the government said, "We want to do away with all of that and we want all Peace Corps volunteers to do nothing but teach English in our schools." They realized if they were going to be part of the international economy… unlike other former British colonies, they did not have a governing or business class that spoke English because Nyerere had tried to unify the country by forcing everybody to speak Kiswahili. So the Peace Corps asked my wife the English teacher to put together a program to teach Peace Corps volunteers how to teach English. I traveled around the country with her, meeting local officials, chiefs, village leaders, to see how they were coping with this change. They were, but it was a mixed bag. Change is hard for everybody. It gave me an opportunity to learn about the country and how this transition was affecting folks at the local level.

Q: Were you finding that you had a lot of people from universities wanting to come out and look and see what was happening, and to help?

BROWNING: There were exchange programs with the university in Dodoma, which is the legal capital. Dodoma was another Nyerere initiative of moving the capital from Dar on the coast to the middle of the country, a Brasilia-type of thing; nothing was there

before but a sleepy town and nobody wanted to go there. But the university was based there. Several years later I ran into some university professors from the University of California at Davis who had worked on agricultural exchanges with their counterparts in Tanzania. In some of our implementing programs, the Tanzanians would ask us to help do this or that and AID would look to universities in the States as implementers. So they established relationships that continued beyond the AID programming.

Q: This must have been very exciting at the embassy.

BROWNING: It was a good time to be there. It was hard on the administrative folks because Tanzania was coming out of this era of scarcity. There was no rental market, so rental houses were hard to come by. The infrastructure was pathetic. The Japanese put all their efforts into building roads. There was very little tourism. Those elements that help build an economy that management folks tap into, to help support the diplomatic platform, just weren't there. They did a yeoman's job in keeping the embassy up and running.

Q: What was life like there for you and your wife?

BROWNING: We really enjoyed it. We got to see a lot of the country through the Peace Corps work my wife did. She eventually got a job with the international school, so she was home more with the teaching job. I bought a little sailboat and we'd spend the weekends sailing around the bay at Dar es Salaam. We had a particularly strong group of deputies – the DCMs from the UK, Netherlands, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and the U.S. They were particularly engaging folks. So we would get together frequently and drink and trash our bosses and talk about the difficulties of being the number two and the challenges of working in Tanzania. Those relationships lasted long after we all left. We kept in touch for many years, that group of folks.

Q: You all were leading a revolution. You had knowledge you probably didn't realize you had that was being called upon to display.

BROWNING: That's right. The Germans and the British had a history in Tanzania, so they were able to tap into that through their DCMs, and all the Scandinavians, those deputies had the power of the purse. We were a really active group of deputies who supported each other, learned from each other and worked well together.

Q: While you were there, were you seeing this knowledge that you were passing on and the work the Tanzanians were doing, were you seeing solid progress?

BROWNING: Oh, yeah. Little cafes or restaurants and shops opened. The entrepreneurial Asian community was unshackled. Minor political parties were springing up. The Tanzanians themselves were embracing this.

Q: They're a trader nation, aren't they? I think of Tanzania with Mozambique being part of the whole Indian Ocean trading complex.

BROWNING: Zanzibar was at one time the capital of Oman; the sultan of Oman moved his capital from the Arabian Peninsula to Zanzibar. There was a long history of trading with the Gulf States through Zanzibar. Much of the East African slave trade was based there. Zanzibar also had spices and there was gold and ivory in Tanganyika. There was a lot of trading historically. But during the socialist era of Tanzania, they didn't have much to export. They had some sisal to make rope. I can't think of much else they had to export.

Q: Where were some of the most dramatic changes, while you were there, in the economy?

BROWNING: One was in telecommunications, cell phones had a dramatic impact in a country that previously controlled all sources of information.

Another was tourism which had been controlled by the state. The state owned every hotel, for example. So you can imagine what they were like. They would make Soviet gulag facilities look luxurious. You'd check into these hotels and had to bring your own toilet paper and light bulbs. They were horrible state-owned socialist facilities. In one case we really stretched the rules but we had a Greek Cypriot Tanzanian whose mother had an American green card. We used that connection to help him get some OPIC (Overseas Private Investment Corporation) funding to open up a Sheraton hotel which would be key to growing the business and tourism trades. The whole expat community and the Tanzanian government were really excited about getting a Sheraton hotel in Dar es Salaam. However, we ran into the most bizarre problems. The planning commission said, "It's not tall enough." I was involved because of the financing through OPIC, and I would meet with this guy. He said, "The planning commission wants me to add five stories to the hotel." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because they want a skyline like Nairobi!" They didn't understand that the size of the hotel depends on financing and the infrastructure that can support the hotel. Is there water? Electricity? Sewage? Transportation? Will there be that many occupants?

Well they didn't care about any of that. They just wanted a skyline like Nairobi's, therefore they wanted the hotel to be seven stories instead of two. We had to explain the basics and fundamentals to government officials. The skyline will come eventually. The goal is to have a hotel that will help spark more business interaction and tourism. Businessmen will have a place to stay. That will generate more business, and eventually the skyline will come. The goal is not to have a skyline but to have an economy that builds a skyline.

Then, they decided to change their foreign investment laws, in mid-stream of some semi-serious projects. I really had to work hard to convince the government that one of the most important things foreign investors look for is predictability and if they saw that the government was moving the goal posts every few months, investors would leave.

We spent a lot of time working on the fundamentals. I don't mean to be overly critical of the Tanzanian government officials, but they really were starting from a weak base, and this transition was happening very quickly.

Q: It's remarkable that they were able to respond to this. Give them full credit for that.

BROWNING: A lot of it was a cork on the ocean type of response. It was happening, and once it got unleashed each segment of government was doing its thing. We had this active, engaged, generous donor community that was pouring money into Tanzania. But you're right, it was their country and their future and they deserve a lot of credit for managing very dramatic and rapid change.

Q: What about the problem of corruption?

BROWNING: During Nyerere's days, there was no private enterprise. So if you had a house and yard in Dar es Salaam and chickens and if you sell an egg to a neighbor, you could go to jail! No private enterprise at all. He worked really hard at enforcing his values and principles. The jails were full of people who tried to make money outside of the system. So corruption was really frowned upon. It was punished severely during the Nyerere heyday. I think during the transition, for the three years I was there corruption was not pervasive, but people were beginning to test the waters to see what they could get away with. But Nyerere was hovering in the background so people weren't too audacious or too aggressive. I think eventually, Tanzania caught up with its African neighbors with corruption, and it became a big issue.

Q: Did you feel Nyerere – he was floating around causing problems, or was he helpful?

BROWNING: I think he was helpful. It was a stabilizing factor. If he had not been there I think there would have been much more factionalism, competition among different groups within the ruling party for supremacy or power. The fact he was there and was such a feared and respected leader had a chilling effect on some of the more negative aspects that could have erupted. I think his hovering in the background was a positive thing. I can remember President Mwinyi driving out to Nyerere's house to talk things over with him. Legally, he didn't have to do that, but I think he saw the wisdom in it and the need to have Nyerere's blessing for his initiatives.

Q: Sounds like a healthy situation there. Were you getting stories about Nyerere coming around in the early days when all of these great plans of his were falling apart?

BROWNING: I don't think he looked at it as falling apart. He's the one who made the decision that it was not working and that they had to try something different. When you own that, when you say, "We gave it our best shot. It didn't work. Now we're going to do it differently," it's a positive thing. Historians will argue that it was a mistake and Nyerere would admit, "Yeah it didn't work out."

Q: When you think about where these countries came from, being under colonial rule, the time element isn't that great between trying something that didn't work and moving on to the next. It's quite respectable as far as change of policies.

BROWNING: Considering the fact it was done without a civil war, without a separatist insurgency – Zanzibar's a different case, I don't want to imply that Zanzibar was perfectly in sync with what was going on in the mainland. It really is a testament to the Tanzanians that this transition was pervasive throughout society and was undertaken successfully. Tanzania's got a vibrant economy now. I have no idea what the skyline is like, but it has been a successful transition.

Q: This is one of the things in the Foreign Service. Sometimes you can be in a place where you were one of the people that helped make a difference.

BROWNING: I consider myself very fortunate to have been there during that time. It was quite a societal transformation. It could have gone south in so many ways, and it didn't. The U.S. should be proud of the fact that we played a positive role in that.

Q: You left Tanzania when?

BROWNING: I left in the summer of '96.

Q: Where'd you go?

BROWNING: I went back to Washington to be executive director for the Africa bureau. On Tanzania, though, I would like to talk a little bit about the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. I just mention it because it was spring of '94. The genocide, the massacre started. While the majority of Rwandans and Burundians went to Congo, Tanzania got a half a million of them in just a few days. They crossed the river and set up their camps in far western Tanzania. Africans are really very hospitable to their neighbors. It's traditional that families and clans and tribes are not bound by borders drawn by Europeans. They gave them safe haven. But over time, the Rwandan refugees caused severe damage to the countryside. They cut down trees for fuel. The refugees encroached on traditional lands that Tanzanians had access to for farming and grazing. It was quite a burden on the Tanzanian government to support these folks. So the UN took the lead in humanitarian response, and the various donors made adjustments to our programs to do what we could to support the UN. We made several trips to the west to visit the refugee camps. We talked to the local leaders about what we could do. I spent a lot of time in Dar in various government offices trying to get the government in synch with this massive relief operation that was descending on them. I had to talk them out of imposing a tax on relief supplies, which the donors would have refused to pay in any event. They initially refused to give blanket clearances for the relief flights – primarily U.S. military aircraft. Flights were backed up in the U.S. and Europe for lack of clearances. The Tanzanians just didn't have the capacity to manage each clearance individually so we eventually convinced them to grant a blanket clearance.

I remember Washington was focused on identifying and capturing the leaders of the genocide who had fled with the refugees. They were hiding in these camps. We got into a big fight with Washington over going in and capturing these leaders in the camps. The embassy really had to argue that it wasn't feasible for outsiders to go marching into these camps and identify and capture and extract these war criminals. Eventually Washington agreed, "Were not giving them a bye on this but we understand we can't do it that way."

In time, early on as the fighting and killing was at its peak in Rwanda and Burundi, I got a call from Washington which was trying to figure out how to stop the killing. In Tanzania we were focused on helping the Tanzanians deal with the refugees. The Africa bureau called and asked me to go to Nyerere, who was retired but living in Dar, and see if he would undertake a role to talk to the warring factions and argue for a ceasefire. We put together our talking points. I was chargé at the time; Pete de Vos had left and the new ambassador, a political appointee, hadn't arrived yet. So I went to see Nyerere at his house on the coast with my talking points. I asked, "Would you use your good name, your good office, your reputation as a senior African leader, could you go in and persuade the warring factions to stop?" He thought about it for the longest time. Probably only two or three minutes but to me it seemed like an hour. He said, "No. The timing is not right. We have to let it play out." He didn't use those words, but what he was saying was it can't be stopped right now. He explained that there was this phenomenon of killing and counter-killing and retribution and all of this horrible stuff that was going on – he said it can't be stopped. So no he wouldn't try, maybe in a few weeks the timing would be right.

So I had to write a cable back to Washington explaining my inability to convince Nyerere, which was a very difficult thing to do. It reminded me that we in the West get focused on our very pragmatic way of doing business and getting things done. That's not always feasible in these situations. That was one thing that just struck me. The ways of approaching a problem and its solution can really be different between the West and Africa.

Q: How was the cable received?

BROWNING: It was accepted. I think Washington was just looking for anything they could do to bring it to an end. There was no pushback to try again. No one in Washington wanted to get too involved in this because that was a slippery slope they didn't want to go down. There was a disappointment, but not any pushback.

Q: Had the situation more or less played out by the time you left?

BROWNING: The fighting had ended and the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) had taken control of Rwanda. Most of the refugees were Hutus, and they were the ones that had lashed out against the Tutsis. Among the Hutu refugees were a lot of the instigators of this genocide. So while the fighting may have stopped in Rwanda, the animosity toward the Hutus was still very much alive. By the time I left the Tanzanians were getting very frustrated. They had given a mining concession to an American outfit to mine cobalt, but

the whole concession was covered with refugees. The mining operation couldn't get started because of all the refugees that were there. The Tanzanians were saying "They're cutting down all our trees, taking the land our farmers need. There's a limit to how long we can support these folks." But there was no place for them to go. Nobody wanted to force them back into Rwanda against their will because nobody knew what the retribution would be like. I remember the minister of defense called me in, and said, "It would be helpful if we could have helicopter reconnaissance of all the refugee camps in western Tanzania, to help us keep an eye on where they're going and what they're doing. Would the Americans provide this capability?"

I said, "To have a capability like that, you've got to have a base to repair the equipment and supply and house the crew. Do you have anything in western Tanzania that could serve that purpose?"

He said, "No."

I said, "I don't see how we can do it."

He said, "Why don't you put an aircraft carrier in Lake Victoria?"

This is a Western-educated guy, not a stupid guy. But it's indicative of the weak expertise of the Tanzanian government at this time. They really weren't experienced. I said, "How do you expect us to put an aircraft carrier in Lake Victoria?"

He leaned in and said, "You are the United States of America. You can do anything you want."

I was flabbergasted that this sophisticated Western oriented guy would think that. I had to explain to him it's just not possible; we can't move an aircraft carrier to Lake Victoria and we can't provide reconnaissance. By the time I left, the process of reconciliation was going on in Rwanda and they had their tribunals and community healing. Eventually the refugees returned and remained relatively safe in Rwanda; there would not be mass retribution against the Hutus.

Q: Today is the 22nd of September 2016 with Steve Browning. Steve, we left you leaving Tanzania in '96?

BROWNING: Yep, summer of '96.

Q: Where did you go?

BROWNING: I went back to the department as AF/EX, executive director for the Africa bureau.

Q: That's a pretty substantial job.

BROWNING: It was a great job.

Q: You did that from when to when?

BROWNING: It was summer '96 to summer '98.

Q: When you got there, what was the status of the Africa bureau?

BROWNING: The Africa bureau has always been the underdog in the department. It's big – 48 posts or so, depending on how many are evacuated at any given time. We had about 5,000 employees. But compared to the other bureaus, our staff was always relatively junior and inexperienced. Instability on the continent was always a factor. The support network between Africa and the department is very long and unreliable. The supply chain for material and equipment, the instability, disease, unrest and just the challenges that we faced in Africa, you didn't always see in other bureaus. It wasn't until the creation of SCA, the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, in 2006 that we felt there was another bureau with these kinds of difficulties and challenging environments. The Africa bureau was making do with what we had, but it was staffed with really good, dedicated folks. They were people who wanted to be in Africa. They were invested in what we were trying to accomplish in Africa. The Africans are still focused on the very basics or essentials of life. They're trying to figure out how to feed, protect and govern themselves. So there were multiple issues going on in Africa that were very challenging, and people interested in those kinds of issues were attracted to the bureau. I was very proud to be a part of it and it was good working with the folks there.

Q: You had a multitude of issues, but what did you see as the main issues you had to deal with?

BROWNING: Coming from my DCM-ship in Tanzania directly to AF/EX, I was really focused on the embassy front office perspective in a way that my colleagues and counterparts in the other regional bureaus may not have been. I was sensitive to how the executive director's office and what was happening in the building were impacting chief-of-mission authority and the ability of the ambassador and DCM to accomplish their goals. I focused on that and was really surprised to learn that there were several unrelated initiatives that collectively were diminishing the responsibilities and authorities that previously had belonged to the assistant secretary or the ambassador and DCM; they were taking those authorities away from the regional bureaus and centralizing them in the department. It was a centripetal force – bringing things from the outside or the field and centralizing them in Washington. Some examples:

First, during this time the department developed the Overseas Staffing Model (OSM). For the first time, we had the central system saying "If you are an embassy of this importance to our foreign policy, you should have X number of political officers and Y number of admin officers and Z number of econ officers." Well, that previously had been a decision made by the bureau assistant secretary and the ambassadors. They would decide which embassies within the bureau needed which resources in order to meet the

bureau's policy objectives. The Overseas Staffing Model established a template that really constrained the management flexibility and authority of the bureau front offices.

Second, the central system set up special embassy posts, SEPs. Our assistant secretaries were adamant that they wanted to be present at every capital city where we had diplomatic relations. That wasn't always the case but it was our goal. So the SEPs were helpful in that regard in that they were much cheaper to establish and manage. The theory was that we would have a real small post which we'd protect from a lot of the onerous bureaucratic work, the reporting requirements that came out of Washington and such. But they needed logistics and bureaucratic support from Washington, and that came primarily from the central system, not the regional bureaus.

The Department also set up a joint planning process for IT (information technology) projects in which every bureau had to go to a central system committee and compete for resources. We'd argue, "My computer needs in Bangui are more important than his computer needs in Luxembourg." We had to compete against each other for these limited resources and the regional bureau lost the ability to shift resources around within the bureau to meet the assistant secretary's priorities.

They changed the interagency administrative support mechanism from FAAS (Foreign Affairs Administrative System) to ICASS (International Cooperative Administrative Support Services). This is in-the-weeds stuff that only admin types can appreciate, but it really took away from the embassies what had been a very State-friendly management mechanism in which we provided support services to other agencies. Granted, it wasn't a very transparent system, but it gave the admin officers (and, therefore, the ambassadors and regional bureau assistant secretaries) a great deal of management flexibility and maneuverability. ICASS opened all that up to inter-agency scrutiny. It set up a board of directors that included the other agencies which allowed for closer oversight of the admin types, mainly State Department employees, in the field. There certainly had been some abuses that allowed State to take advantage of the other agencies, and I agree it needed to be done. But the point is, in this time period, ICASS was just one more shift of authority and flexibility and freedom of movement away from the regional bureaus and ambassadors/DCMs to the central system.

Collectively all of these changes resulted in a significant loss of authority for the regional bureaus. I spent a lot of time helping our ambassadors and DCMs in the field understand this dynamic that was happening in Washington, because they were getting frustrated. "What do you mean I can't have another political officer? At my last post all I had to do was ask and I got it. You're the executive director, you should be able to make this happen." I said, "Those were the old days, and now were in the new days. It's not done that way anymore."

That was the atmosphere in Washington when I was there. As far as events on the ground, we were still struggling with evacuations. And a presidential visit; President Clinton visited with 800 of his closest friends, traveling around the continent, which was a huge challenge for our little posts. We had an Ethiopian Air plane hijacked and

crashed, with a U.S. government employee on board. It was a time of continued budget constraints. We were understaffed for what was being asked of us. I remember sending out a cable to all of our ambassadors and DCMs in about April saying "You need to be thinking about the summer transfer season. You are not going to be able to give all of your staff the vacation time that they want at the time they want it and expect me to find TDY (temporary duty) support staff for you. We don't have the people or the money. I'll be happy to entertain requests if you are in a worse situation than post X." I didn't say what the post was, but I explained there was one post that was going to have one employee cover nine different positions during the summer transfer season.

Q: Good god!

BROWNING: I said, "This is what we're all facing. If you're in that kind of situation, send me a cable and I'll do what I can. But if you are asking me for TDY help because both of your political officers want to be gone at the same time, you can agree to that if you want, but you don't have to. You can require them to stagger their vacation times so that there's always coverage in the political section. That's a choice and a responsibility that you the ambassador have. So exercise that authority. If you don't, don't come to me looking for a bail-out because I can't give it to you."

About 15 seconds after that cable went out I got a phone call from the DG's (Director General) office summoning me upstairs immediately. One of the DG's DASes (Deputy Assistant Secretary) asked "What the hell are you talking about?"

I showed her. "Here's the cable from the post. This poor FSO is going to have to cover nine different positions over the course of the summer. Not all at the same time, but over two weeks he'll have to be the acting econ officer, and one week he's going to be the acting refugee officer. For three weeks he'll be the acting GSO." We went through the whole list. I said, "That's the reality out there. The DG's office really needs to understand this."

That was the challenge and the environment during that time.

Q: Did you feel the plan made sense, or was this something cooked up in theory and foisted on you to make it work.

BROWNING: The move to more centralized management made sense. I'm not arguing that they were the wrong moves to make. Transparency is generally a good thing, although opacity has its benefits as well. (Laughter) My point is that transition has to be managed. There was certainly information coming from the central system saying this is what we're going to do and why we're doing it. But that's not enough. All the info was on a tactical level, not on the big picture, strategic level: What does all this mean for the Department and the field? How does it affect the relationship between the two? What's the best way to manage in this new environment? Somebody's got to hold the hand of the ambassador who's on his third ambassadorship and is always used to having things his own way, and you have to say "I know you used to do it this way, but this is why you

can't do it that way anymore. It hurts and it's not fun, but this is the direction we're headed." My staff and I invested a tremendous amount of time in change management, trying to educate and help the field through this process of really significant change that was underway.

Q: I'm a consular officer by background. Normally at post you'd have a brand-new officer as a consular officer, but he or she can go to other officers who've had experience and get some help. But you ended up with a lot of young officers and no real support.

BROWNING: The will was there. It was just the capacity that was lacking at times. Consular work in Africa is not always our greatest priority or need. In many of the smaller posts, the consular officer would have auxiliary responsibilities. Like our consular officer in Tanzania, who was also our environmental officer. He would do consular work two or three days a week, and then he would travel and look at environmental projects we were supporting or environmental issues that Tanzania was facing.

This is another area where I would counsel ambassadors and DCMs. They would say, "My consular officer is leaving in August. I want there to be an overlap with the new consular officer, so tell the new guy he can't get the three-day environment course or the two-week area studies course he's asked for." I'd push back, saying, "We can do that. But you need to determine that the benefit of having a contact replacement with two days overlap with the outgoing consular officer is worth the new consular officer who also has the environmental portfolio arriving at post untrained for his responsibilities. That's going to handicap him for the rest of his tour. Is that really what you want? Can you not suck it up and get somebody else to do the consular work?" So we had those kinds of dialogues with the field for the whole of my two-year stint as Executive Director…"What are your needs, what is best for the post in the long-term. Five years ago we could have done it that way, but we're in a new era now and we can't."

Q: Did you have any equivalent to a response team where if worse came to worse you could assemble something and send it out to a post that had problems?

BROWNING: Yes, we had a roster of different categories of people. Probably unique in the department, we had two FSNs based in Paris who were budget specialists. We would keep an eye on how our budget officers were doing in the field, and would routinely send these two to cover gaps, to help struggling budget or admin officers. We kept a close eye on the management teams in the field and would send in support personnel to help if needed. We had another guy, a retiree, a WAE ("while actually employed"), who did nothing but help prepare posts for inspections. We'd find out that Bangui was going to be inspected and we'd send this guy out a couple of months in advance. He'd sit down with post management and say "I've looked through your files. Here's what the inspectors will be looking for. I recommend beefing up records keeping in this area, clean up your act over there, and devote some attention to this issue here." It was helpful and comforting, particularly because we had so many employees who were serving their first time in their positions. For a first-time admin officer and a lot of first-time consular

and econ officers, to have an experienced hand say "This is where you need to put your attention" was helpful.

I had to make a whirlwind trip through Africa in preparation for the POTUS (President of the United States) visit. It's just a huge undertaking. We had had presidents visit Africa before, but never for such a long swing through Africa like this one. It was a reconnaissance trip to get a truthful, honest assessment from the ambassadors and DCMs of just how capable their staffs were. I wanted to beef up before the advance teams got there those embassies that might have weaknesses in certain areas. This was a very high-profile visit and the assistant secretary at the time, Susan Rice, had earlier worked for Clinton in the White House and was particularly concerned that the trip be successful, as we all werw.

I remember having to make a second trip to one post. The advance team had made their initial call on the post and given their recommendations and observations of what the president wanted in that particular stop. The DCM said "No, we can't do it that way. Here's how we're going to do it." So the advance team contacted me and said, "We don't think your DCM understands. This is the president's trip, not her trip." I had to fly out to that post and talk to the ambassador and DCM and say, "You may be in charge of this post but you are not in charge of this trip. The advance team is, and the White House is. Your job is to salute and say, 'We'll make it happen.' What you can't do is say, 'We've decided he shouldn't do this on this day, he should do that on this day, and we'll come up with some other projects we think are more important.'"

Granted that particular advance team was not the most experienced or professional, and certainly not the easiest to work with, but that was the advance team we had. The ambassador finally had to pull the DCM off that responsibility, of being in charge of the POTUS visit for that site. We sent in an experienced admin officer from another post and put him in charge, and told the ambassador "This guy's in charge. We're going to do it the White House's way."

My whole tour as Executive Director was an experience in people and expectation management, and helping people understand how to get things done in the field and in Washington. I really enjoyed it, it was a good tour.

Q: What about trouble in Africa? At one point there are a bunch of countries where we're having to evacuate our people. What did you have?

BROWNING: We had a lot of instability in Central Africa; that's the case still. I remember escorting the new under secretary for management, Bonnie Cohen, to her first trip to the field. She'd just been in the job for just a few months and was ready to travel to see embassies in operation. I recommended she come to Africa first. I wanted her to see the environment in which we were working. We had just evacuated Brazzaville and initially had evacuated those folks to Kinshasa, right across the river. There had been a lot of damage to the chancery and the ambassador's residence. I wanted her to see the impact of that. It was quite sobering. She really didn't have a sense of just how much

damage can be done by civil unrest and the impact on our operations. I was glad she agreed to the trip. Then it was easier for me to explain to her and easier for her to understand when I notified her staff "We have to evacuate Bangui; there's civil unrest." I didn't get a bunch of pushback or questions from her office because she had seen the effect of this type of civil unrest.

As far as ongoing struggles, there was the constant fighting in Sudan and Somalia at the time. There was trouble in Bangui, Kinshasa, and Brazzaville. There may have been a coup or two in West Africa. And the after effects of the Rwanda/Burundi genocide were still a factor. It was just the nature of the business in Africa.

Q: How did you find our military? Were we able to keep a force out over the horizon of these places?

BROWNING: No, that wasn't the way they did things. It was when we had troubles in Liberia back when I was post management officer in '92-'93. The military kept a group of ships right off the horizon because the situation was so dicey. And we needed supply support, so they flew supplies from Freetown, Sierra Leone to the ship and then to Liberia.

But '96 to '98, when I was Executive Director, the situation was different. We had our reporting, intel and tripwires, and the military would have their own operations centers keeping track of our reporting and what was happening in different countries. If they sensed civil unrest in a country, they would contact us and say "We see problems brewing in Togo (or wherever), are you ready to evacuate?" We'd push back saying, "No it's business as usual, we can handle it." They'd say, "Well, don't wait to the last minute. We'll start revving up some engines soon and if you need to evacuate, we'll do what we can."

We got into a pretty routine pattern. It was always the preferred choice to evacuate by commercial means rather than military air. The military would charge us up the wazoo for all their expenses; commercial air was much cheaper. There was a constant tension among the security folks, AF, the ambassadors in the field, the budget people and the under secretary for management on when to evacuate a post. The ambassadors tended to want to wait to the last minute, thinking they had their fingers on the pulse of the country. The budget people would say, "Let's not wait until commercial air is no longer an option because it's going to cost us thousands of dollars more to pay for a military evacuation." The military would say, "We agree. Don't wait to the last minute." So there would be this struggle. The policy folks would say, "It's essential we stay here. We need to report on what's happening. If we evacuate, we're sending the wrong message to the government and people. They will think we're abandoning them and all hope is lost, the government will fall and the world will come to an end." The management folks would push back saying, "We understand all that, but we have different priorities. Our problem is we have 50 embassy employees, hundreds of family members and who knows how many more from other embassies who want to go with us, and we can't take them all at the last minute. We need to start planning these evacuations now."

We spent a lot of time trying to zero in on the right tripwires or benchmarks. When A, B, and C happen, that's when we'll authorize departure of family members and non-essential staff. If D, E and F happen we'll charter a commercial aircraft, take out our people, and evacuate the embassy.

Q: You're trying to make financial decisions based on human frailties. Who's going to attack whom, and that sort of thing. It's a game you can't win.

BROWNING: It's a very difficult decision making process. A lot of it depends on the reporting you're getting – the embassy reporting, reporting from other agencies, information from different sources. You're trying to put all that together and weighing the advantages and disadvantage of staying and leaving. Ultimately, it's the under secretary for management who makes the call. Some are quick to pull the trigger. Others are prepared to wait and see how it plays out. It's a matter of trust, at the end of the day. How much does the under secretary for management trust the assistant secretary, the ambassador and DCM, the people on the ground and all those with equities in the situation. It can really turn on that...trust. If an ambassador says, "I don't care what's happening on the ground, we're not leaving," well, that's an indicator that he or she really has lost touch. A Chief of Mission just can't say that; lives are at stake. This goes back to what I was saying earlier, how ambassadors were going through this process of loss of autonomy, loss of authority that many just weren't used to. Then as you say, you have to try to assess what's happening on the ground. Is this rebel group really our friend as the political officer says? She might be a second tour political officer with no prior experience in Africa who argues that we can trust the rebels but we don't know if we really can trust these guys, if they're really going to be our friends. We certainly don't know if they can control the situation on the ground. So at what point do you say, "We tried to make it work, but we can't stay. Lives are at risk, so we're evacuating"?

It's a continual process of assessment and evaluation of all the information at hand.

Q: There's a certain amount of posturing by an ambassador I imagine, "I can tough this out" even though lives are at stake. By an ambassador who might not want to leave even though common sense says "Get the hell out."

BROWNING: Exactly. There was also a misperception held by many ambassadors on Washington's capability. I can remember being in the Operations Center during the evacuation of our embassy in Mogadishu. I wasn't the executive director at the time but I had some role, post management officer or something, where I was up in the Operations Center. The ambassador said, "No, we're not leaving yet. We've got a 10-foot wall and good contacts and it's not as bad as you think it is. The Defense Department had another problem on their hands at the time, like the Gulf war, so they were unable to pre-position some ships off the Horn of Africa." It was a huge embassy. Later, the ambassador said, "OK they're scaling the walls. Now's the time. Y'all come right now. Hurry!"

Well, you can't do that! You can't just turn on a dime! The story was that the commanders in the ship were looking at a map of Mogadishu and where to send in the helicopters to evacuate the staff, and just by chance in that meeting was a guy, maybe a radio operator or some other lower-level participant, who had been a former Marine security guard in Mogadishu. He looked at the map and said "That map is wrong. It shows the location of the OLD embassy. They moved to a NEW embassy, and it's over here" – it was miles away. If he had not been there, that whole evacuation would have been directed to the old embassy site and they would have had no idea where the new embassy was.

It just illustrates that despite our wonderful efforts and all the time and energy and expertise we put into our preparations and operations, things go wrong! You can't take away the need for a margin for error. You really have to plan for the unexpected. You have to often pull the trigger sooner than you'd want because you have to build in time for contingencies, mistakes and human frailties.

Q: What was the spirit of the time? "Let's get them out there soon? Let's not do it too quickly?" I know sometimes in the Middle East we've evacuated people from posts that are having no problems at all, but back in Washington there was a panic and they weren't taking any chances. Other times, they WERE taking chances.

BROWNING: I entered the Foreign Service in January of '81, just as Carter was leaving office and Reagan entered. I believe it was James Baker, who served as Chief of Staff for both President Reagan and President Bush and eventually became the secretary of state under George H. W. Bush who set the tone. There was an intense desire to not be trapped like Jimmy Carter was with the hostages. When Baker was secretary of State and I had my assignment on the seventh floor with the under secretary for management – I was the special assistant – it was quite clear that Baker and the White House were adamant: "We are not going to risk this administration for some piddling little embassy in Africa. At the first sign of trouble, evacuate it. We're not going to be hobbled and crippled the way Jimmy Carter was by having hostages taken somewhere."

Some in State argued that that position was overly cautious. I think with the Clinton administration, it eased up a little bit and there was a higher tolerance for risk. And time had passed – it was then 12 years since the hostage crisis ended and memories faded, and capabilities improved. We had better intel, a more nimble military, we learned from our experiences. So there was a tendency to accept more risk and maybe wait it out another day or see what happens with this tripwire. And quite frankly, the embassies on the ground and DS (Bureau of Diplomatic Security) got better at defining the tripwires. "If they capture this bridge that is one of only two points of egress from the capital, then we're out of here."

It was an evolving process. The situation in Africa was a bit different than what you would have in the Middle East – very few of our national strategic interests are at stake in Africa. It's a different case in the Middle East. So evacuating an embassy in Togo or Malawi, for example, is not going to have huge foreign policy ramifications on the level

of evacuating Embassy Kuwait or Islamabad. Africanists have to keep in perspective just who we are and where we fit in the grand scheme of things. Some of our ambassadors had a hard time and were probably thinking to themselves, "No, we're not Embassy London but by god this is my embassy, it took me years to get it and I'm not going to evacuate!" So we'd say, "We're sorry but your embassy is not that important in the grand scheme of policy priorities or at the White House. We're not going to risk people being killed or captured; you've got to evacuate."

Q: People don't understand that people in the administrative field have to juggle with life and death decisions.

BROWNING: Right. This is where my DCM experience in Tanzania was so helpful to me. I saw that to be a good admin officer, you really had to understand the policy objectives and priorities of the embassy. It is only when you understand what we're trying to accomplish in a country that you can effectively and legitimately weigh in on security concerns and evacuations. Otherwise, you can't put the risks in context, you can't assess whether the risks are worth taking. Management officers can't limit themselves to budget and personnel and logistics and operations and housing. If they are going to serve their ambassadors and DCMs well, if they're going to help move the post's policies forward, they've got to understand what those policies are. And, it's not just in security and evacuations. As an admin officer, you're going to have to make decisions and choices on where resources go and how those resources are deployed.

In my job as executive director, I would travel quite a bit to the field. I had a list of problem posts; it was recommended that I visit these posts because there were problems of different sorts at them. And some posts were really significant to us – Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Angola. These really had a policy priority at the White House and the seventh floor so we needed to make sure we were doing all we could to move forward our policy objectives. I would sit in on country team meetings wherever I went, and I would watch the administrative officer, who is always a member of the country team. Some of these folks would limit themselves to discussions of the next hail and farewell, or about moving the motor pool from here to here. That would be their only contribution. The really strong administrative officers, however, would participate in policy discussions. They'd say, "I know that the economic officer is saying 'the economy is fine,' but my contacts are saying the opposite. I deal with bankers and merchants and port officials and shippers, and they're scared to death and are moving their assets off-shore. The people I come in contact through my administrative work tell me everything is NOT fine with the economy." As a former admin officer and DCM I saw the value of the management folks participating in the policy discussions. I would have some fairly blunt heart-to-heart talks with some of the admin officers, advising them that they were not serving their posts or their ambassadors or themselves well if they limited themselves to just dollars and logistics. They had to understand and participate in the policy process, and help shape it and it was only then that they would have a strong voice on security issues and evacuations. The vast majority understood and got the message. It's particularly important that admin folks in places like Africa do this because those embassies are so understaffed, under-resourced and unsettled. They need every set of

eyes, every brain focused on how to accomplish all the policy goals with limited resources.

Q: I imagine you would find getting Congress people out there would be a high priority, but there would be a lot of reluctance – they'd rather go to places with good shopping.

BROWNING: We had both. There are some really dedicated, committed, interested Congressional folks, both members and staff. They were good campers and would be prepared to endure long road trips over god-forsaken roads in Africa to see development projects or meet with some opposition leader or to see what we're doing with AID. Then there were others who tried to get a meeting with the president; if that didn't happen no big deal, don't push it, don't get anybody else; "I'll be out at this safari camp if anyone needs me." All in all, though, I was really impressed with the degree of interest and awareness of the Congressional visitors we did have.

Q: All of us shudder when you mention a visit, but it's a tremendous opportunity to let them see on the ground just what the situation is.

BROWNING: I had one visit in Uganda, a few years after my AF/EX tour. We were hoping to open up more of Uganda to our development programs. We'd helped the Ugandan military drive out the Lord's Resistance Army and we wanted to help the government rebuild the war-torn northern part of the country. We had a very high-level delegation from Congress, six members, bipartisan. They were going to Gulu which really was undeveloped; it was the capital of the northern part of Uganda but it was a pretty bare place. The contractors and NGOs we were working with put on a great program for the CODEL (Congressional Delegation) and laid out what the government's needs were and what our assessment was. The chair of the committee and leader of the CODEL, a very powerful woman, said "I'm really interested in education." The USAID folks, the contractors and NGOs said, "Education is certainly important but all the other donors are already focused on education and not on the unmet needs we've just described. The Ugandans really want us to put our efforts in these other sectors." She nodded her head and thanked them. Soon after the CODEL's return to Washington, there was a $2 million appropriation for schools in Northern Uganda! Just what we didn't need, but we had to take it; we couldn't spend it on anything else. It was her interest and she was going to do it regardless of what the experts in the field said.

Despite their concern and eagerness to be of help, sometimes they put their own interests ahead of what the folks on the ground say is needed.

Q: How did you find political appointees? Did they get much involved in Africa, or was it pretty much left to the career people?

BROWNING: We had half-a-dozen or so political appointees in Africa. We had a former congressman from Texas who was first in Burundi and then in Botswana who was quite earnest but did a fine job as I recall. In Tanzania, my first ambassador was a very experienced career ambassador; I was lucky to have had my first year as DCM under his

tutelage. He taught me so much about the mechanics of the trade, how Washington worked, what my role was. He went away because the White House wanted to put in a political appointee in Tanzania. I had been chargé for four months when the new guy showed up, J. Brady Anderson, who had been Governor Clinton's chief of staff in Arkansas. I thought "My gosh, what are we going to do with this guy?" He had no diplomatic experience.

Well, it seems that J. Brady Anderson had worked with the Wycliffe Foundation. These are the folks who translate the Bible into native tongues around the world. He had spent time in Tanzania. So he spoke Kiswahili. We had our first meeting to welcome him to post and give him briefing materials. I had been in touch with him long before he arrived, but in our first meeting he said, "Steve, I don't know all this foreign policy stuff. I'm going to let you run the embassy and take care of the policy stuff. My thing will be management of relations with Tanzania." I said that sounded fair.

We were planning his first substantive meeting with the minister of foreign affairs. When I went with Pete de Vos, the previous ambassador, the career guy, on these calls to Foreign Affairs, we'd shake hands, sit down, and Pete would pull out his list of talking points and say, "Mr. Minister my government asked me to talk to you about A, B, and C. And we'd like your support on X, Y, and Z. Thank you very much." And the foreign minister would nod and say "We'll think about it and get back to you."

When we got instructions from Washington for J. Brady Anderson, our new ambassador, to go in and try to get the Tanzanians to support us on some issue in the UN, I briefed Brady on how the meeting would go, based on my experience with Pete. We had a 45-minute meeting scheduled with the minister of foreign affairs. Brady walks in and in Kiswahili said "How's it going? So good to see you." We all sat and for the first five minutes the discussion was in Kiswahili, but I didn't know the language like Brady did. So he said, "Let's switch to English so my deputy can follow us." Much to my shock they talked about families, about farms, about the weather, about crops. It seems the foreign minister had a little farm. They talked about that. Brady had been in that area of Tanzania before when he worked with Wycliffe. They talked and talked and talked about everything but what we were trying to accomplish. I looked at my watch and saw we had only 15 minutes left in the meeting. So I started clearing my throat, pointing at my watch. Finally Brady says, "Mr. Foreign Minister, my deputy is giving me signals that we have to take care of business." Then he pulled out his talking points, and said "My government would really like your support on A, B, and C." The minister leaned in, shook Brady's hand and said, "Mr. Ambassador, whatever you want."

I learned a big lesson there. Diplomacy was people management as much as it was policy and resource management. Because Brady understood the Tanzanian psyche and the language, he was really able to win these folks over. I would watch him at diplomatic receptions like the Mozambican national day or some such that nobody wanted to go to but everybody had to attend. The Tanzanians would send one government minister to represent the whole government at these things, and all the ambassadors would rush over to this one poor minister and try to get some face time with him so they could report back

to their capitals, "I talked to this minister about this and such and I've done my job." The ministers would try to avoid these coveys of ambassadors that were constantly pecking at them. When Brady arrived, these designated attendees would rush Brady and start talking in Kiswahili. The rest of the ambassadors wouldn't know what was going on because they didn't understand the language. Brady really strengthened our ties and contacts and our knowledge of how the government was working.

I have had some very positive experiences with political ambassadors. Not all of them. Some negative experiences. Those who were pushing their own agenda that they brought with them into the job, as opposed to what the secretary of State and the assistant secretary wanted them to accomplish were a concern. But I've also had some very positive experiences, and Brady was a good lesson for me on how to be even more effective as a diplomat.

Q: I've talked to people who say an ex-Congressman will be appointed to a job and it seems like just a pay-off. But they get into talking to the president – they can talk politics, which our Foreign Service guys don't, they aren't politicians.

BROWNING: One politician to another, they can get down to business. They can understand each other's constraints and the pressure they're under. They can bring a lot to the position. There are others that quite frankly – not so much my experience in Africa but much later in my career when I was PDAS (principle deputy assistant secretary) in HR (Bureau of Human Resources) who caused us some problems. There were some political appointees who were doing some serious damage. They can be so disruptive that we've had to pull them out of posts.

Q: Somebody that's not doing well, more trouble than they're worth – could you get him or her out of there?

BROWNING: Not unilaterally. The ambassador is the president's personal representative. We had to coordinate this with the White House and couldn't do it on our own. But what we could do was go to the White House and say "here's what's happening at this post, and it's all going to reflect poorly on the president. So our strong recommendation is this ambassador be relieved of his or her duties." Then it would be the White House that would have to decide whether whatever it was that person contributed to the campaign – time, money, support, legitimacy, whatever it was – that caused them to get this position in the first place, whether that was outweighed by the damage they were causing. We would be very reluctant to make this recommendation if it weren't really necessary. They'd really have to be doing some serious damage. It was our job to make sure the White House knew the implications of keeping a person on.

Q: Where did you go after? Is there anything we haven't covered in AF/EX?

BROWNING: That's about it, covers most of it. My next assignment, 1998-2000, was at FSI (Foreign Service Institute). I was the dean of SPAS (School of Professional and Area Studies). I sought out that assignment. I contacted FSI and said I'd like to be

considered for it because of what I had seen in our staff in Africa. I wanted to help develop training programs that would better prepare our relatively junior and inexperienced folks who were going out to Africa and elsewhere. I'd been a college lecturer and school teacher before the Foreign Service and saw the value of training, and the lack of significance that the State Department tended to give to training. I wanted to help shift the thinking a bit in the department so it would value training more. Ruth Davis was the director, Ruth Whiteside was the deputy and they were happy to have me.

After I committed to FSI, AF came to me and said "We were thinking of putting you up for ambassador in Mauritius," a little island off the coast of East Africa. That's quite an honor to be the bureau's nominee, but I had already committed to FSI and really wanted to do that job. So much of new employees' initial few months is spent in the School of Professional and Area Studies. That's where consular and admin training are, A-100 (orientation class) for generalists and the equivalent for specialists – all of that was in the School of Professional and Area Studies. That's where one could really make an impact. I thanked AF and said I appreciated the honor, but I had already made the commitment to FSI and being dean of SPAS was what I wanted to do.

The other thing that was really attractive about the job was the pending merger of State with USIS and ACDA (U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency). Senator Jesse Helms had really pushed this merger. There were huge implications for FSI on how to absorb the training elements of these two independent agencies, and how we would play our role in orienting hundreds of new employees to Mother State. There's really not an office in the department that solely would have that responsibility. Certainly HR (Human Resources) was involved, but FSI took a lead role in bringing together orientation programs and "welcome to State" courses. It was an interesting time to be there; I really enjoyed it.

Q: Talk about some of the challenges you had.

BROWNING: The greatest challenge was the huge increase in new Foreign Service personnel, both generalists and specialists. In fiscal year '98 we had about 450 to 500 new employees that we brought on board. In FY (fiscal year) '99 we had about 1,000. So we doubled the intake in a year. The objective was to create a training float. I mentioned earlier how ambassadors were reluctant to let people get training because that led to staffing gaps in the field. The plan was to build up the numbers so that if you needed 10 people to do the job, then you should have 11 people on board so that at any one time, one of those people can be in training and your productivity doesn't suffer. Or the11th could be in transfer status or on medical leave. The goal was to build into the staffing numbers enough cushion so you can not only do the job at hand, but also meet all these other contingencies. State hadn't been able to do that. If we needed 10 people to do the job, we generally only had nine on board. Nobody could get sick or get training because we couldn't spare them.

From day one of the hiring surge we faced problems. We didn't have a room large enough for the A-100 class, for example. Also, we had designed our courses to meet

certain objectives which would take X number weeks and train Y number of people at a time. In order to double our training output significant changes had to be made in course design and length. Some of our leadership in SPAS (the School of Professional and Area Studies) were very protective of the courses they had designed and delivered over the years. I remember one course head of a specialist training division said "It takes three weeks to train a new employee in this field." I said, "You can't do that, because we've got all these people coming and we've got to get them through the pipeline and out to the field. If it takes three weeks per course and you can only have 12 people in a course, we're going to have all these specialists hanging out doing nothing for months. We have to have either put more people in each course or shorten the courses."

"Nope, can't do it," she said. I said, "That's really not the answer. So, how are you going to change it?" "Nope, can't do it." I said, "We ARE going to change it." We got into a brawl over the integrity of the course design versus the need to deliver the best training we could to many more people in a much shorter period of time. That was just one division head, however. Most of our folks saw the need to modify our training and were happy to make adjustments. We doubled the class sizes, we condensed training. We were able to provide quality training to twice the number of people in a pretty short period of time. Most of the staff was just great. They spent hours redesigning these courses, making sure all the essential elements remained. I was very impressed that they were able to make these adjustments and we could respond to this need.

We did things like increase the usage of distance learning. This is something State had not done much of. But with the increased availability of internet overseas, we could provide on-line courses so that OMSs (office management specialist) and political or econ officers or GSOs could sit at their desks in Bangui or Paris and take a course, learn new skills and keep their credentials up to date. But that took a lot of work back home at FSI to put in place.

Another challenge was crisis management training. I left AF/EX in June or July of 1998 and in August our embassies in East Africa were bombed. Up to that point, we were providing crisis management training to 15 posts a year. After the bombings, we increased the training to 100 posts a year. That was a huge undertaking logistically for FSI to find the staff and trainers, plus for the posts to absorb the training. We'd go out to the field and the embassies would have to dedicate three or four days of staff time for the training. We overcame some resistance from several different offices for our goal to include FSNs in the crisis management training. For the first time after these bombings, we included FSNs. It was just crazy that we hadn't done it before. If you're in a crisis and you need to move people from A to B, you want your FSN motor-pool supervisor and the people who know the ground to be part of this training.

So, our biggest challenges were redesigning our training courses to meet the needs of the increased number of entry level personnel, greatly expanding our on-line training, absorbing USIS and ACDA and expanding our crisis management training by over 600%.

Q: Could you explain a little what this training would consist of?

BROWNING: We hire at the entry level for generalists. We don't hire a mid-level political or econ officer. We hire people from all different backgrounds and walks of life. School teachers, preachers, economists, farm-hands – they don't even need a college degree. What they have in common is they have passed the Foreign Service written and oral examinations. With an entry level class of generalists – political, econ, consular, public diplomacy and admin – we could not expect them to have a common base of knowledge or experience. We had to assume that they were blank slates as far as their cones or skill codes go. We also assumed that all new hires were new to the State Department, its systems and culture. So initially in our orientation, which depending on how many people we had to get through the system can be three to five weeks, we welcomed them to the State Department…this is who we are, how we do business, how we are organized, how we relate to other agencies in Washington, how we manage ourselves, what your career will look like, etc.

They come in having chosen a cone or a skill code to pursue throughout their career. However, 95% of all newly hired generalists, despite their chosen skill code, will do their first assignment in consular work. We have such a need for visa adjudicators, for consular skills, that we meet that need by having first tour generalists serve as consular officers. So, in addition to orientation we have six weeks of consular training - visa and passport law, American citizen services, adoptions, Social Security benefits – the whole bit. This is the training you need as a consular officer whether you're going to Luxembourg or Lagos.

Typically in the next-to-the-last week of orientation, which for generalists we call A-100, you get your assignment, where you will be posted. We call this Flag Day, a little ceremony where your name is called out and you are given the flag of the country where you're going, and you're given a notebook with the training requirements for that assignment. So if you're going to Tanzania and you've got two portfolios, consular officer and environmental officer, after orientation is over we'll give you six weeks of consular training and two weeks of environmental training. If the position requires you speak the language then we'll also send you for six months of Kiswahili training. If there's time we'll give you two weeks of area studies to learn the history, culture, social norms, background, values, religion, strife – everything we can cover in two weeks about East Africa. Then you go out to post. Oh, and if you're going to be supervising staff (which you often do as consular officer) then we might give you some introductory leadership training and supervisory skills.

The operating assumption is that you may come to the State Department having been a hotel manager or tennis pro or oil field worker with only limited overseas experience. By the time you finish training, you have a good understanding of what the State Department is all about and what we try to do as diplomats. You also have training for the job you're going into and an understanding of the environment you're being sent to so that you arrive at post fully equipped to do your job.

For the specialists – doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, budget specialists, office management specialists, IT specialists, diplomatic security specialists – the training is a bit different, because you have already expertise in that field. We hire doctors who have a medical degree. We hire you to be a budget specialist because you have experience as a budget specialist. So the skills training for Foreign Service specialists is a bit different than it is for generalists. We still have an orientation to the State Department – who we are, what we're about, welcome to State, etc. We'll also provide some State-specific job training. To be a psychiatrist in the State Department, you need to know A, B, and C. To be an IT person you need to have these skills and understand how we do business. An OMS for the State Department has to know about State-specific issues, like official residence expenses for ambassadors and DCMs. So the training for the specialists is a bit different. Our goal for both generalists and specialists was to send them out to field with all the training they needed to be successful.

Subsequently what happens is, you finish your tour as consular officer in Tanzania, for example, and your next assignment will be in your cone, as a political officer say. So we bring you back to Washington and train you in political tradecraft – how to write cables, understand policy priorities, communicate with Washington, establish contacts. All the things a political officer does. If you need training in the local language or area studies, we give you that if we can. If you are going to be a supervisor, we give you leadership and supervisory training. Then you go off to your next post. The concept is what I called "just in time" training. We're not educating you in the philosophy of diplomacy or the history of international relations. You are not going to get a PhD at FSI. That's not what FSI's all about. We're giving you skills that you need for the job you're about to go into. Every time you go into a new job (the theory is), you come back to FSI and get training for that specific job.

When I went to the field as a consular officer in the Dominican Republic, I got training in consular law. In Kenya, before I went I had training in budget, personnel, logistics – all the things I needed to know to be a GSO. Same thing for Egypt. Because I was going into an admin job there, I got a bit more training. For Sri Lanka I didn't get much training; I did get area studies but not much skills training because I'd already had that for the job in Egypt. Then when I went as DCM in Tanzania, I had the three-week DCM course.

That's our philosophy of training. We have seen over the years that one of our weaknesses is in management and leadership. We really in the past had not spent enough time and energy in teaching and training people on how to be good managers, good leaders. We recently have invested quite a bit in leadership and management training, and I think it has paid dividends. In fact, while I was at FSI in this period, the director Ruth Davis created the Leadership and Management School. We shifted the leadership and training component out of SPAS and expanded it into a whole new school. That's where the locus is now for leadership and management.

So that's an overview of training at FSI.

Q: I like your expression "just in time." It's not academic; it's job-oriented.

BROWNING: It's not anti-academic. There's some history and some intellectual parts to it. But it's training, not education. It's practical real-life skills training that you need in order to do your job. You may need some history with that, and you may need some academic understanding particularly on economics. The goal is to send you to post with the skills you need to do the job, not just an academic understanding of what the job is.

Q: Also the people who are hired are intellectually curious and a good Foreign Service officer will certainly learn about the area. I spent five years in Yugoslavia, and boy did I know Balkan politics back and forward, back through Turkish rule. You're just immersed in history, but you have to know your job first.

BROWNING: That's right. What we found was that people were not limiting themselves to the training they got at FSI. They did their own reading and research and background preparation. We're a bunch of smart people and we like to know what's going on. We want to be well-read, to be educated. The vast majority of our staff, both generalists and specialists, would do their own outside preparation that supplemented FSI training.

Q: You went through a period of real revolution at FSI. Distance learning and all. Did you find much resistance to what was happening?

BROWNING: There was some resistance. When you're the instructor or trainer and you've invested years in developing, designing, testing, fine-tuning, delivering a training program and then some new guy comes along and says, "that's great, but you've got to cut it in half" or "you have to add twice as many people," there can be some resistance.

For some, there was real possessiveness towards what they had developed. You want that; you want people to be proud of their work and to own what they've done. On the other hand, you have to accommodate and adjust to new realities. Quite frankly, I think during this period of increased hiring and the development of the leadership and management school, there was a much-needed focus on training needs in the Department. When Secretary Powell came on board, he was shocked at the lack of training that State Department personnel went through. He would talk about the training that military officers went through – years of training. And we would talk about the three-week DCM course! It was jarring for some of the folks at FSI who were used to an established routine, an out-of-the-limelight existence. The changes were tough for some, embraced by others. Most saw the need, the opportunity, the possibilities and they embraced it.

One of the best initiatives we had was development of a training continuum focused on the individual employee…what training should you expect to have at any certain point in your career. If you're FS-05 OMS and you want to work toward a promotion to FS-04, what training does the Department expect you to have had? What training do we expect for an FS-01 aiming for the Senior Foreign Service? The continuum was not a boiler plate and certainly not hard and fast or mandatory, but for the first time employees and

supervisors had a general idea of training needs and expectations. It was a useful tool for long range career planning.

On top of all that we had USIS and ACDA joining us; we had to make room for them. Physical space was a problem. We had doubled the number of entry level folks coming in, plus we needed to provide training for personnel from two new agencies that we hadn't done before. It was a time of disruption and change and realignment that was quite exciting for most of us but quite disturbing for some.

Q: Did you find the Washington community represented a good source of trainers?

BROWNING: Yes. We didn't suffer from a lack of talent in the Washington area. We were eager to look beyond the beltway for folks because it's also good to get folks from the outside to offer a different perspective. The only area where we were sometimes constrained was in language training. If we needed a qualified Sinhalese language instructor, for example, we might find somebody who spoke Sinhalese, but wouldn't necessarily be a good instructor. That was in the language school; it wasn't my area so I didn't have to worry about that.

Q: How did you find Ruth Davis and her office?

BROWNING: Ruth Davis was the director, and her deputy was Dr. Ruth Whiteside. They very much set the tone and the pace. It was incumbent on us to keep up with them. They were the right combination at the right time for FSI. Ruth Davis had a vision of where she wanted to take FSI, what she wanted to accomplish. Ruth Whiteside was a very experienced State Department player. She had entered State as a Foreign Service officer and after a tour or two overseas converted to Civil Service. So she was ideally placed to understand the training needs of both the Civil Service and the Foreign Service. I need to add that FSI training is not just Foreign Service; we also train Civil Service employees, people from other agencies and FSNs from our embassies.

The two of them together were a very good team. And, they had a good team working for them. I enjoyed working with my colleagues at FSI, the other deans. The Ruths had access to Department leadership. So much of what you can accomplish depends on who will listen to you, who you can get in to see at Main State. They both had good contacts, and used those contacts and that access for the benefit of FSI. I was quite pleased with the leadership I had there.

Q: I was in Personnel at one point. We used to talk about training officers. When it happened that training officers said we needed more people studying something at FSI, the organization would pick the least productive member of their team and send them to training, because they had a job to do. The zeitgeist of the officer corps was not in training, but getting out there, getting a good EER and moving up.

BROWNING: Primarily due to the hiring surge, the merger with USIS and ACDA and eventually Secretary Powell and his strongly held views on training, the role and

influence of training shifted in the State Department. The "training officer" function in HR that you talked about was merged with the assignments function. So in HR, you had a CDO (career development officer) who was also your training officer. The CDO was better able to put together a training program for the assignment you were going into. The bureaus also had training officers, but that was more of a mechanical function, not in deciding who should get what training but doing the paperwork to make it happen.

There's one thing I haven't discussed enough. During my time in SPAS, we set up a whole new training division for FSNs. We realized that we had this tremendous asset in our local employees that we just weren't exploiting well enough. We weren't training them. So we brought in a trainer, established her as an independent division head within SPAS equal to OMS or political training, got her a nice budget, and she put together training programs for FSNs on how to work in a U.S. embassy. We'd never had that before, a centralized orientation to the State Department for FSNs. Each embassy did it on their own if they did it at all. This was very helpful to the FSNs, to see where they fit in the big picture. We would include FSNs in some of the training we gave to the American staff. We brought FSNs back to Washington to a degree we never had before. We gave them six weeks of budget training, or political tradecraft or contracts management. We'd have FSNs in our political offices overseas, but rarely did we train them on how to write an effective cable, how to communicate in a way that the message was heard in Washington. They'd have their current supervisor who'd say, "This is the way I want it done." Then the next guy would say, "No, I want it done another way." So to have this foundation of training that the central system had put together was invaluable. I think that as much as anything we accomplished during that period, the emphasis on training for FSNs really paid dividends in the long run.

Q: Where did you go next?

BROWNING: Next I went to the University of Southern California (USC) as a diplomat in residence (DIR). My wife needed to participate in some elder care responsibilities for her parents who were in southern California, so I sought this position to be a recruiter for the State Department, based at USC. That gave her an opportunity to be with her family.

Q: Today is the 30th of September 2016 with Steve Browning. Steve, you're off to the University of Southern California as a diplomat in residence. You did it from when to when, and what did that involve?

BROWNING: I was two years at the University of Southern California. Then at the request of the department I stayed for a third year in California and moved up to the University of California-Davis, in northern California. I originally sought the assignment so my wife could undertake some eldercare issues with her parents. I was happy to be able to continue serving the department while also taking care of some family needs.

The story goes that the DIR program started when an undersecretary for management – or maybe it was a director-general – got tired of having returning ambassadors without an ongoing assignment just walking the halls. They would come back to Washington with

nothing to do, waiting for their next job. They'd go bother people in their offices and tell them how to do their job. So the Department developed the concept of sending these senior officers to university campuses and getting them out of the department. They could share their experiences, teach a few classes, be talent scouts, etc. But the main objective was to get them out of everyone's hair.

By the time I got into the program, it had really changed. It was a much more professional operation and it was focused almost exclusively on recruiting. Secretary Powell had recognized early on that the department was understaffed for all that was expected of it. So he worked with the White House and OMB (Office of Management and the Budget) and the Hill and got us an additional 500 positions. It's not automatic to just increase your staffing by 500; there's a lot that goes into it. You want to get the best and the brightest. According to the Foreign Service Act of 1980, we are required by law to ensure that the Foreign Service is representative of the American population. And we still weren't. We were still very much skewed towards white males. So the Office of Recruitment in the director-general's office assigned DIRs to locations around the country where we could target minority recruitment.

For me in California, that was primarily Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics. We established relationships with universities around the country. Mine was with the University of Southern California (USC). If you know anything about collegiate competition, it can fierce. We would base the California DIR position for a couple of years at USC. Then the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) would get unhappy because we were favoring USC, so we'd move the position to UCLA, be there a couple of years, then move back to USC. I was housed in USC's School of International Relations (SIR), sitting among the professors who taught international relations. That was my base. From that base I would travel to universities throughout the West. I covered Washington state, Oregon, California, and Hawaii. I went to career fairs, I would guest lecture in university classes, I would speak at special events focused on foreign policy or international relations. I'd meet with Rotary clubs and World Affairs Councils. I would take advantage of any opportunity to educate Americans (primarily students) about who we in the Foreign Service are and what we're trying to accomplish. Then I would try to zero in on organizations which were rich with our target recruitment opportunities. So I'd look for Native American tribal councils, for Hispanic organizations. I'd talk to the Hispanic CPAs (certified public accountant) and say, "Here's an opportunity for you to serve your country and work for the State Department as a budget officer. You can serve anywhere in the world you want." And Asian-American lawyer associations – "Come and join us. Help us accomplish our mission as a consular or political officer."

It was a great opportunity to wave the Foreign Service flag and also reconnect with the U.S. outside of the beltway, to get a better sense of what people outside of the Washington nexus understood about foreign policy and our role in the world.

Q: What was your impression of the students and with your other outreach? What did they know about the business? Was this a revelation that we were interested?

BROWNING: There was a very small hard-core group of students who were really interested in and knowledgeable about the Foreign Service. They had become aware of it by whatever means, maybe international study abroad or a professor who was a retired FSO. They followed our website and they'd known for years they wanted to be a diplomat. But I'm talking dozens or hundreds in this group, not many more. The vast majority of the students I met with really didn't understand that the world of diplomacy was open to them. They thought it was for rich East Coast Ivy League white guys. Having Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell as secretary of State opened up some minds. Having our diplomats in residence reach out to these communities really helped these students and their parents and faculty understand that this was a real opportunity for them. But by and large, even on university campuses the degree of ignorance of what we do and try to accomplish and how we accomplish it was mind-boggling to me. I had forgotten just how little I knew about diplomacy and the Foreign Service as I was growing up in high school and college. It reminded me that our profession is really not well known or appreciated around the country.

One of the responsibilities I had as an office tenant in the School of International Relations was to do an in-service training presentation which every faculty member in SIR was expected to do. It would be open to other faculty members, other schools at the university, graduate students – whoever wanted to come. It was a brown-bag presentation for an hour or so. So, here I am in an academic institution where their focus is on 18th century international policies or 19th century relations between Lithuania and Estonia or some other such esoteric subjects. I'm struggling with what I could present, what could I offer? The more I interacted with these professors, the more I realized they were also pretty clueless about the State Department and the Foreign Service. They had a good handle on international relations and maybe the history of diplomacy and on the intellectual aspect of it. But when it came to the day-to-day, nitty-gritty business of implementing that foreign policy, they didn't have a clue. I did my presentation on the State Department's planning and budgeting process of all things. If I had tried to do that in the State Department, not one person would have come to that brown bag! How dull and boring could you get?

But I explained in my presentation how we in the department and foreign affairs community take the resources available to us---human, financial and physical---and deploy them to achieve our policy objectives. I went through standard mission program planning and budgeting, and how that was aggregated at the bureau and then the department level and how it all supports and furthers the president's national security objectives. They were fascinated, particularly the professors. They had no idea how we transformed the theory and the policy into reality.

When I first arrived, the dean of SIR took me to lunch and welcomed me to USC. He asked me to teach a course. I said the State Department had asked us not to get tied down three days a week on one campus teaching classes; they wanted us to travel as much as we could and recruit, recruit, recruit. I said, "My primary objective is recruitment." He said, "Oh you're not going to have any success here at SIR. Our students don't want to

do this stuff, they want to research this stuff and teach this stuff." Well, it wasn't a week before I had students lining up outside my door, saying they didn't want to study diplomacy, they wanted to DO diplomacy.

It was really quite a tour for me. I enjoyed opening up eyes and helping young people throughout the west understand how they could contribute to our nation's security.

Q: Were there any issues or things happening while you were doing this that opened the students' eyes?

BROWNING: The big thing was 9/11. I was in California when 9/11 happened. The country was in shock. I was inundated with requests by TV stations to give interviews to explain what it all meant. The Long Beach school district asked me to videotape a seminar or presentation on the causes of terrorism that teachers in the district could draw from. Professors asked me to guest lecture in their classes. Some of the universities had study-abroad programs and were petrified about sending their students overseas. Should we cancel these programs? What do we do? How can we guarantee our students safety?

It was an opportunity for me to interpret and bring home to the people I had contact with the reality of this kind of terrorism, what it meant for the United States and what the implications were for the future. The impact of 9/11 was enormous for all of the three years I had this assignment. There was anxiety, fear, concern. I used that as an opportunity to help people understand that we're not helpless in this. There are things we can do. Here's what we can do to counter that.

Q: Coming back to the faculty – one of the things that has struck me has been when talking to our Foreign Service corps, I sometimes ask if you read <u>Foreign Affairs</u> or such publications, and the answer is pretty much "No." Usually because they say they don't have it right, these are academics writing this. It's way above the heads of the practitioner. Did you find any of that going on in your time there?

BROWNING: What I found was there's this tremendous pressure particularly at the research universities to publish. These folks, their fields are really pretty narrow but their research is very deep. When your area of expertise is pastoralists in the northeastern Middle East, you don't necessarily follow what's happening in the peace process and certainly not in Ecuador or Laos. While they're certainly very smart folks, their bread and butter is to establish themselves in academia, get more recognition, publish more articles and books. That really doesn't leave them much time to follow the broad scope of current foreign affairs. I met many professors of international relations and foreign affairs at USC and Davis and many other campuses on the West Coast. There were very, very few professors whose specialty was diplomacy. And most of those study the history of diplomacy, not the current practice of it.

Q: Did you get into negotiating or saying how you deal with a situation?

BROWNING: What I would typically do is plan my travel schedule for a week-long visit. I would look for a wide variety of events in which I could participate. I would identify an anchor event, like a career fair at Portland State University, for example. I would sign up for the career fair, book my ticket, and send emails to the university career center and to faculty members and department heads, the school of government or foreign affairs or whatever the appropriate offices were and say "I'm going to be on campus for two days. My goal is to recruit for the State Department but I'm also happy to guest lecture in a class. Here's my background, here's what I do, here's what I can speak about. If you would like me to speak give me a topic and I'm happy to work that into the schedule. I would send the message to other schools in the region and always ended up with more invitations than I could accept. There would be some very specific requests, like at the University of Oregon in Eugene there was a retired FSO, a friend of mine, who was an adjunct faculty member in the law school. He said "Come talk to us about international negotiation. Any insights you can bring to it would be useful."

But that was rare. Most of the time I was asked to talk about really broad-stroke stuff. Most of the classes were undergraduate. The grad students and their professors were very focused on getting that degree, getting that thesis or dissertation out and had no time to be distracted by this other stuff. But undergrads – they were open to a wide variety of things.

The second year at USC I agreed to teach a course – one day a week, Monday night. At SIR's request I taught a course on how to use a degree in international relations in the workplace. As I was putting this course together I realized that so many of the skills we focus on in the Foreign Service – leadership, management, interpersonal, communication – can be translated directly into other workplaces. So Monday night on a college campus, a three-hour class on a fairly unknown topic, the dean of SIR and I are thinking maybe I'll get a dozen students, and that would be fine. As word spread, we had more and more students trying to get into the course. We had to move rooms a couple of times to get increasingly larger rooms! We had students from the business school and law school. Some just came to audit – they were anxious to hear how they might use their degrees in international relations, how they could apply that to a job as a lawyer or in public service. I brought in guest lecturers – retired FSOs who would talk about things like negotiation skills, businessmen, teachers in international schools. We really were able to help students understand that the knowledge you gain studying international relations can be used in any number of places. You can use it overseas, in the domestic workplace or with your neighbor next door.

Q: Were you careful about saying "You can get blown up if you come into this business"? It's not like selling insurance; there's an element of danger.

BROWNING: There is, and I was very up front about that. As aggressive as our recruiting efforts were, we didn't have to work hard to get people to apply to join the Foreign Service. We are more selective than any university in the country. We eventually end up taking one or two percent of all the people who start the application process. There's no need to sugarcoat it. In fact, just the opposite. What you don't want

to do is get somebody into the Foreign Service just because they have the ability to pass the exams (written and oral) and then have them realize, "I have to separate from my parents? I don't want to spend two-thirds of my career overseas." And "No, you can't spend your whole career in Luxembourg – you're going to have to go to some pretty dangerous places."

Because of my own background – my whole career has been in the developing world and every posting has been to a hardship assignment. Many had danger pay. And in light of 9/11, I was very up front. I said this is the reality of life in the Foreign Service. That turned some folks off. But that was OK. If they can't deal with risk, you don't want to invest a lot of their time and energy and our time and energy in pursuing a career in the Foreign Service if they're not prepared to accept the realities of it.

Q: It is a turn on, too.

BROWNING: Absolutely! You've got the adrenaline junkies and you've got to be careful about those folks.

Q: Did you feel we were getting the people we wanted to apply?

BROWNING: There's no way to tell. I was doing probably three campus visits a week. If I was at a career fair at UCLA, I probably handed out a flyer on the Foreign Service to a thousand students in a day. I would maybe guest lecture in a half dozen classes of between 10 and 60 students each, talk for 20 minutes, answer questions for 20 minutes, get a few hands raised. You have no idea what to expect. Did that presentation, did the answer to that question, did my engagement with that student in that classroom cause her to go to our website and pursue a career in the Foreign Service? The only way we were really able to track this was through university career centers. These are staffed with counselors whose job it is to help students navigate the process of getting a job after they leave college. Usually in the field they're studying, but not always. These counselors will have a student come in who says "I'm a junior, I'm getting a liberal arts degree and I have no clue what to do with it. Help me." These counselors would then advise the student on options.

So I spent a lot of time at career centers, introducing myself to counselors, giving presentations for career center staff on what the State Department is all about, the jobs we have to offer for political science majors, lawyers, people who study accounting, law enforcement students, science, MBAs (masters in business administration) – whatever they're studying, if they're interested in foreign affairs, there might be a place for them in the Foreign Service. In my email contact or personal visits with students who contacted me either because of a career fair or through the classroom – those were folks I would try to keep in touch with. There would be some who would keep in touch and say they decided to take the exam or tell me they took the exam and passed. I'd say, "Great! Now let's talk about the oral exam."

I can count in the dozens the number of applicants I was able to really track as they progressed through the process. The vast majority of my time was spent just being out there, handing out information, sparking interest, making myself available, providing guidance. Later on in my career I did encounter in the halls of the State Department a woman who came up to me and said, "I know you! You came to Chico State University and spoke to my class on the United Nations and because of you, I joined the State Department!" But that's rare. I don't know if there are hundreds like that, or if she's the only one!

Q: I know one time I was in Yugoslavia taking my car to Italy to be fixed. On the way back I saw this guy hitchhiking and I was getting a little tired of driving. I picked him up and it was an American. He asked what I do, and I told him. He was very interested. Much later I interviewed him – he'd been an ambassador somewhere! I got him started, you know?

I've heard that diplomatic history is not well regarded in schools. I saw one person who said it's just one clerk writing to another, the Foreign Relations series and all. Did you find diplomatic history had a following or not?

BROWNING: Not really. In the big research universities, UCLA, University of Oregon, USC, if they were pursuing it as an academic career and they planned to spend the rest of their lives researching diplomacy, writing books about it – yeah, they might be interested. When we test people to join the Foreign Service, both the written test and oral exam, diplomatic history is not what we test for. We test for a broad, general knowledge base, not their knowledge of the concept of Westphalian sovereignty. We want people who are good managers, leaders, communicators, with good interpersonal skills and who know a little bit about a lot of stuff. If they know diplomatic history, that's a wonderful thing – but how often are you going to use your knowledge of diplomatic history when adjudicating a consular case? Or when sitting with an opposition political party in Uganda urging them to play by the rules? Or arranging an exchange program for newspaper editors in Costa Rica?

It was an interesting divide, academics versus practitioners. I met one guy at USC, an Australian, who had been in his country's foreign service and then decided to pursue a doctorate in diplomacy. He taught diplomacy as a profession. I spent quite a bit of time in his classes, lecturing and answering questions. But he's the only one I ran across in three years who did that.

Q: Looking at other foreign services and the ones such as Brazil which have very fine reputations. They essentially hire people with legal training. Frankly, legal training at least as I see it in the business is really not terribly important. We hire our legal people for their legal expertise, but we're not a legal-oriented service.

BROWNING: As the father and the brother of lawyers, I have to be careful what I say here! It's not their knowledge of the law so much, but their critical thinking skills and analytical skills and ability to present issues. We did an assessment of the backgrounds

people came from when they joined the Foreign Service. What were they doing? Was it law, medicine, public service, accounting, business, education? The single largest field was law. My suspicion is that in our society, you get your undergraduate degree and you don't know what you're going to do so you get a teaching degree or a law degree or an MBA. I suspect people would graduate with their undergrad degree and not know what they were going to do, so they would go to law school. Then they might try law, and decide that it wasn't for them. Diplomacy is not a bad fit for many degrees. You look at consular work – 90% of that is adjudicating immigration law. They're not practicing law, but I would argue that folks with a legal background can use the research and analytical skills they developed in law school – they can apply that to diplomacy.

Q: I also think – maybe I'm reading myself into this – that law for the most part can be pretty boring. Often it pays well, but it's boring. The Foreign Service, whatever its problems, is certainly not boring.

BROWNING: That's exactly right. My A-100 class had 52 people in it. We had half a dozen lawyers, a half-dozen school teachers, we had a university professor, a dentist, a microbiologist, hotel manager, tennis pro – we had all kinds of backgrounds. I would say for the vast majority of us, what attracted us to the Foreign Service was the excitement. The ability to live and work overseas and pursue a profession that allowed us to serve our country, to see the world, to live in other cultures, to experience things that our friends from high school back home couldn't even dream of. So there is a degree of excitement and personal growth that is really appealing about the Foreign Service.

Q: I was amused by the number of people who say, "I joined the Foreign Service just to give it a try for a little while, then I was going to go on and do something else." It's like a Venus fly-trap; once they're in they couldn't get out.

BROWNING: One of the little tidbits I used in my recruitment pitches was – and it has the advantage of happening to be true – the Foreign Service has one of the lowest attrition rates of any federal organization. Part of it is, once you go through the horrible intake and assessment process we've designed – take the written exam, write the essays, sit through the oral exam, get a background check and security and medical clearances - you have already invested a tremendous amount of time and energy to just start the career. It took me years to go through that process. So that's quite an investment before you even get your first paycheck. Then you show up at A-100 and boom! It's amazing. For me, I thought "How did I get selected to be among all of these bright, smart, fascinating people? It must have been a mistake!" But you work with these people and you're surrounded by all this energy and intelligence and enthusiasm. And the issues…the issues have global impact. It's addictive. Where else could you get that? For me, there's nowhere else I could have gotten the kind of stimulation and reward as I did in the Foreign Service.

We do have attrition; there are people who do have to leave. But our data show it's primarily because of family reasons: children's education, spousal employment, elder care responsibilities. It's not primarily dissatisfaction with the career. "I would like to

pursue this, but for family reasons I can't" – that's the primary reason people leave the Foreign Service.

Q: There was a book written about the Foreign Service in the '30s, and it was titled A Pretty Good Club. In a way I've always looked at that as a damn good title – where are you going to find so many interesting people gathered together dealing with problems. At a certain point – I never had it – you're involved with matters of great importance.

BROWNING: Absolutely. On the global level and also on the personal level. You look at the influence a consular officer has on the lives and futures of individuals – it is awesome in the dictionary sense of the word. It really is breath-taking that a consular officer has the ability to influence lives and futures to the degree that she has. Think of the security officer who is responsible for the safety and security of embassy personnel in high risk posts. Not to mention the issues of national and global importance. We've really got an opportunity in the Foreign Service to have a great impact, and that's part of the appeal to people.

Q: One of the things I've noticed in the last couple of days – Congress has passed without much debate a bill allowing people to sue the Saudis for 9/11. This opens a tremendous can of worms for anybody who knows our position in foreign policy – we've got troops out there and our own people, it leaves them open to suit, too. It shows there is no real knowledge – these are people who are elected who really didn't know the ramifications of what they were doing.

BROWNING: I don't expect to ever sit for a Senate confirmation hearing again, so what I will say to that is, I think the majority of them knew, and knew when they voted, the ramifications of the bill, but decided to vote for it anyway. You realize I have just ensured that I will never get a Senate-confirmed position again. They're not stupid people, and their staff are not stupid. They're aware and they were briefed by the secretaries of Defense and State on the ramifications of this bill, on how it would affect U.S. government personnel all over the world. The White House, the NSC also warned against it. My own sense is they knew exactly what they were doing and they chose political expediency.

Q: And now we're moving into the silliest but most dangerous election period in our careers.

BROWNING: I agree with that.

Q: Is there anything more we should discuss – any incidents or things that surprised you in the time you served at these universities?

BROWNING: I would close by saying I was really impressed with America's young people. I was disappointed in the very weak knowledge base that students and most faculty had about our work in the Foreign Service – what we do, our role. But that was far outweighed by the enthusiasm, energy, passion that I saw on college campuses. We

are really a very lucky nation. It's across the board – community colleges and research universities, male and female, white and black and brown and red, it's really impressive to see that there is a young generation that is so positive and engaged. If the rest of us can keep from screwing it up, I think we've got hope for the future.

Q: What were some of your impressions of the groups we were after – Hispanics, African-Americans, Asians, women in general? Do you have any comments about how you saw them?

BROWNING: First, you have to remember that we don't hire at the mid-level generally; we hire at entry level. So when we take a snapshot of the Foreign Service today and look at ethnicity and gender, those of us in the Senior Foreign Service now came in 20-30 years ago. There were different priorities and objectives then, and that cohort reflects who we were recruiting and who we were at that time. You have to look at today's entry levels and the mid-levels to see the effect of changes in our recruitment efforts.

I found among all the ethnicities – you can't compartmentalize, you can't generalize. There's a wide range of experiences and hopes and dreams and objectives within each of these groups. But generally I found that I had the most difficulty recruiting Native Americans. I think it was due to the tribal leaders; they were reluctant to have their brightest kids look outwards and leave the tribe. They wanted them to stay home and help the tribes grow and develop. I did not get warm receptions among Native American groups. Now, Native American individuals are a different story. But as a group, boy that was a tough crowd. Hispanics also – and I think a lot of it depended on the generation. First-generation Hispanics have close familial ties and reluctance to separate from the family. Third- or fourth-generation, those familial ties may not be as strong.

There are few generalizations you can make, but I found that diversity within each of the ethnic groups is one. You really have to talk about individuals and not groups.

Q: I came in in 1955, the Eisenhower generation. One of the most impressive things I've noticed has been the revolution of women. At last we have the first female candidate for president. But beyond that, we've had so much – has the revolution in women's opportunities reached the point where it's no longer even an issue?

BROWNING: It is almost to the point of not being an issue. I had as many female applicants, expressions of interest from females, as males. There was no sense among the female students I met that this was a career that would not be welcoming to them. I did find – it's important to note that my outreach was not just to students, but also to working professionals. I would go to the Association of Hispanic Lawyers and go to their convention in San Francisco. Or the Asian-American Accounting Association and go to their convention in San Diego and meet with them. At that level, there definitely was more concern among women about family issues. Mobility with children, daycare concerns. I was able to speak to those concerns since I raised two kids overseas and had a working professional wife who was able to work overseas. But I got more questions from women about those issues than men. While I think we've made a great deal of

progress, there are still some structural problems that are going to affect women in ways they don't men. We've got to deal with those. Secretary Clinton certainly looked at that and tried to address it, but it's not a one-off deal. It's something you have to keep working at and make sure we organize and manage ourselves so that women have the same opportunities for career advancement and assignments as men have. I think we have a good story to tell, but we're not at a point where we can say there is no distinction, there is no separate impact between men and women.

Q: There are challenges particularly of family care. You're working in the area with probably the greatest concentration of Asian-Americans who would strike me as being prime candidates. Yet you don't see many Asian-Americans in the Foreign Service.

BROWNING: The numbers are growing. "Asian-American" is a broad, broad category and it's self-defined. It includes East Asians and South Asians – Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans. The numbers are growing. When we look at the law, the Foreign Service Act of 1980, it says the Foreign Service should reflect the diversity of the nation. Does that mean raw population percentages? In HR, they look at the numbers several different ways. They also look at college-educated folks within ethnic groups, so, for example, while Hispanics might be 10% of the population, they might be only six percent of the college-educated population. So what would be the appropriate Hispanic representation in the Foreign Service, since 99.9% of us have college degrees – six percent or 10%?

I think the struggle that I found with Asian-Americans was the role of parents in helping their children define what appropriate career objectives should be. This is a gross generalization, but diplomacy's not one of them. Business, law, finance, medicine are appropriate career choices. Not yet on the radar screen – and I'm talking early generations, not fourth or fifth – is public service or Foreign Service.

The great thing about a college campus or the college opportunity is that it's a chance to branch out and try new things. Your parents aren't there, your high school friends aren't there, so you can try things that are new and different. I had a good representation of Asian-Americans at many events I did. At USC and at Berkeley, when you talk to the Asian-American Student Association about careers, there'd be 50 or so students there. They know it's a recruitment pitch for the Foreign Service and they show up and ask questions. Whether or not they pursued it, we have no way to track that. All we have is the numbers upon entry into A-100 or the specialist equivalent.

Q: Where'd you go next?

BROWNING: I went to Malawi as ambassador. This was August of 2003, and I left in May of 2004. It was a short but interesting assignment.

Q: Today is October 6, 2016 with Steve Browning. So you are off to Malawi. How did you get that assignment?

BROWNING: My name was put forward by the Director General and was seconded by some other assistant secretaries. But it's the D committee which vets all the candidates for Chief of Mission and decides which ones would be appropriate for each post. So the D committee submitted my name to the Secretary as the right candidate for Malawi, and that recommendation was forwarded by the Secretary to the White House.

Q: Did you have any problems with confirmation?

BROWNING: (Laughs) Well, there's a story there. I was still out in California at this time doing recruiting work. The Senate and the State Department like to bunch the hearings together, so they'll have several candidates from Africa appearing before the Africa subcommittee. So the subcommittee had a group hearing for several candidates going to posts in Africa, but I wasn't able to make that hearing. The paperwork wasn't in and I couldn't sit for it. I was left dangling; there were no other candidates for Africa in the wings. So the State Department proposed to Lamar Alexander who was the chair of the Senate's subcommittee on Africa that they have my hearing tacked on to the end of a hearing that the subcommittee held on HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) in Uganda. They were going to have all the subcommittee members there for an hour to discuss how Uganda was addressing HIV/AIDS. Uganda was a leader in the field; they had brought down their HIV incidence rate dramatically. The Senate subcommittee wanted more information on that success. Senator Alexander agreed that after the HIV/AIDS hearing they would change the nameplates at the table and we'd have my hearing to be ambassador to Malawi.

I sat through the hearing on HIV/AIDS in Uganda, which was very informative and interesting. Then my turn came. All the senators left except for the chair, Lamar Alexander, and the ranking member, Russ Feingold. They welcomed me and were very gracious. I gave my opening statement on what I hoped to accomplish in Malawi. Then Senator Alexander's first question was, "You just sat through an hour-long hearing about HIV/AIDS in Uganda. I would like your comments on their program." Well, I hadn't prepared for that at all because I was heading to Malawi, not Uganda. But I was paying attention during the hearing and taking notes because Malawi also had a horrible HIV/AIDS problem.

The keystone of the Uganda program was called the ABC approach – abstinence, be faithful to your partner, and if you can't be faithful, use condoms. ABC. I said "The ABC method of abstinence, being faithful and using condoms seems like a well-balanced approach." Alexander interrupted me and said "Surely you don't advocate the use of condoms? Surely you believe that abstinence is by far the best approach?" I said, "Well you need a well-balanced multi-faceted approach…" Then Russ Feingold interrupts and says, "Surely you're not advocating that abstinence is a viable approach?" Then Alexander chimes in. That went on for minutes and minutes. I felt like a ping-pong ball between these two guys who had different approaches on how to deal with HIV/AIDS. Finally they agreed to disagree and quit using me to pursue their own positions on HIV/AIDS. They asked me a question or two on Malawi, and that was it. They forwarded my name to the full committee who forwarded it onto the Senate, and I got

confirmed. My hearing was really not a full, thorough discussion on U.S.-Malawian relations. But it got the job done as far as I was concerned.

Q: What was the situation in Malawi, and American interests when you went out there?

BROWNING: First, let me give you a sense of American interests in Malawi. I had my Senate hearing which gave me an idea of how much the Senate cared. Then I called on the NSC (National Security Council) director for Africa. I had asked the AF desk officer to set up a courtesy call for me to go to the NSC and introduce myself and talk about any issues they had with Malawi. I said to the desk officer, "We probably only need 15 or 20 minutes." She called back and said, "No they want a full hour with you." So I thought an hour on Malawi, this'll be good. I went over and introduced myself and got ready for an hour-long discussion on Malawi. The director for African affairs launched into this monologue about things that I had never heard of before. I had no idea what she was talking about. I didn't know the names, the issues. I was totally clueless. I was thinking to myself, "Man I really have not been briefed well. I am not prepared well for this assignment." It was about five minutes into this before I realized she thought I was going to Mali, not Malawi. So I informed her I was going to Malawi in Southern Africa, not to Mali in West Africa. She thanked me very much, didn't really have any issues to discuss with me, wished me luck and sent me on my way.

Then I called on the assistant secretary of African affairs, saying "Boss, I've been confirmed, the president's attested my appointment, my bags are packed and I'm heading to Malawi. Any last minute instructions for me?" He said, "The only thing I want from you is to never hear from you. I've got so much going on, Africa's such a busy place, so many places are falling apart around me. I need you to not bother me." So after these three exposures to the U.S. government's perception of our relations with Malawi, the Senate, the NSC and my own assistant secretary, it was very clear to me that Malawi was not at the top of anybody's list. I went to post with a very clear understanding of what Washington cared about. And it sure wasn't Malawi.

The main issues for those few who really cared about Malawi were development issues. Development was the alpha and omega in Malawi. It had been a democracy for less than 10 years, so it was still finding its way after the colonial period and after the decades-long rule of Hastings Banda. He was the president-for-life who had really run the country with an iron fist.

The UN has indicators of national development. Infant mortality, girls' education, food security, GDP (gross domestic product) – all of the indicators that give you a sense of where a country falls compared to other countries in the world. Malawi was chronically and consistently in the bottom 10 of all of those indicators of development. Name any indicator, and there's Malawi at the bottom of the list. What's fascinating to people was that Malawi was the only country on the list that had never experienced a civil war or been at war with its neighbors. There was no external determinant, no external cause for the country to be so undeveloped. It was the most donor-dependent society I'd ever seen. I had worked and lived in Africa, had traveled extensively through Africa when I was

executive director, and this was a country that just could not get any traction. Forty percent of its budget came from donors – the U.S., UN, EU, British and Germans. Not just financial dependence, they were also dependent psychologically. I was just flabbergasted at the lack of ownership of their own future.

When I first got there I went on a tour of the country – to meet people, get my bearings, visit Peace Corps volunteers, etc. I met one volunteer who was working on education issues. He handled several villages, and invited me to walk around with him. So we took a day long hike from village to village, seeing where he worked and meeting people. He introduced me to a farmer. This was during the hungry season in Malawi, when they run out of their food supply, their maize. Every year there is about a month when they've run out of the previous year's harvest and before the new crop is ready to harvest. So there's no food, and they depend on the government and donors to provide food. They call this the hungry season. I asked the farmer, "Why don't you plant earlier? The growing season is year round. Why do you have this hungry season year after year?" He said, "We have to wait for the rains to come before we can plant." We're standing within sight of Lake Malawi or Lake Nyasa – whatever name you want to use, it's one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. I said, "There's all the water you need right there! You can irrigate it, you can carry it up in buckets and plant your crop sooner and harvest sooner. Your kids don't have to go hungry." He said, "We don't do it that way."

I was struck wherever I went – here's a country blessed with good soil, plenty of water, a great climate, and they still couldn't figure out how to take advantage of those assets. It was really quite an awakening for me. I went to post with this awareness that Washington really didn't care what we were doing out there. And I learned the Malawians didn't seem to care all that much either. So that was the environment when I started my tenure there.

Q: What was the government like?

BROWNING: They had just less than 10 years' experience being a democracy. The current president was a guy called Bakili Muluzi. He was a businessman, a very wealthy guy with a huge ego. He was finishing his second term, and the constitution said two terms was the limit. He wanted to stay in power longer, but parliament wouldn't change the constitution, so that was a good thing. He hand-picked his successor, and went around the country campaigning on behalf of this guy. I went to one campaign event and watched the president at the podium with his identified successor sitting on the stage next to him, and Muluzi was saying "Vote for him and you'll really get me. I'll be the real power behind the throne." The candidate never said a word at this rally. It was a government that was still in formation. They had a parliament and a civil service bureaucracy, but they were mainly inexperienced and very much in the developmental stage. They were friends of the West. Malawi had maintained relations with South Africa. Unlike all of its neighbors it remained on good terms with them. So there was that dynamic, too, that Malawi was sort of isolated among its neighbors. The army was well-respected; they were one of the most professional and apolitical armies on the continent, and had a good human rights record. They served as peacekeepers in Kosovo

and Rwanda and the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo). There were a few strong institutions in Malawi, but not many.

Q: Was there the equivalent of tribal problems in Rwanda and Burundi? You were some distance removed, but not that far away.

BROWNING: There really wasn't. Tribalism is just part of Africa. I don't remember there being a big divide or tension between regions of the country or various tribes.

Q: What about the bureaucracy? Ministry of foreign affairs and all, problem dealing with them?

BROWNING: No. One of the things we did in the embassy was try to break this dynamic of dependency on donors. We successfully pitched our case to the U.S. agencies in Washington that provided assistance to Malawi, as well as the IFIs (international financial institutions). We did a lot of interacting with other donors there in Malawi to get them to join us in this effort. Everyone agreed the situation was not sustainable, but no one had been doing anything about it. I would call on government ministers and say, "We can't continue this. You guys are going to have to start taking more responsibility for your own development. We've seen no progress here." I got very little pushback. The elected folks, the ministers, and the civil servant class all agreed. One minister said, "The best thing you can do is just leave and take your money with you. All the donors should go. It's going to hurt for a while but then maybe we can finally get our act together." These were well-educated folks; many of the top civil servants and members of parliament had been educated in the West and were knowledgeable and experienced. There was plenty of good will there and individually plenty of talent and expertise. But they were having a hard time bringing it together and having it coalesce to get some traction and get some real development going on the ground.

Q: Where did they look? It was a former British colony, right? Were the educated class educated in England?

BROWNING: Most of them, I would say.

Q: Were there any ties to the United States?

BROWNING: Not any strong ones that I remember. The U.S. is pretty far away. There wasn't a core of Malawi immigrants or students in the U.S. that would draw even more. I'm sure there were some. Often in Africa, particularly in East Africa, American missionaries have an impact and might fund the education of particularly bright students; that was the case in Uganda and Tanzania and Kenya. But I don't remember that in Malawi. Most of their off-shore education was in the UK.

Q: What was the capital? Blantyre or Lilongwe?

BROWNING: Lilongwe is one of those purpose-built capitals like Islamabad and Brasilia. My understanding is the South Africans designed and built it as well as the airport right outside of Lilongwe. Blantyre, down in the south, was the commercial capital. That's where the money was, the tea and coffee plantations. We spent a lot of time on the road between the two cities.

Q: What were the principal exports?

BROWNING: Tobacco – that was the primary commercial interest between the U.S. and Malawi. They were big tobacco growers. Not big farms, but individual farmers would grow tobacco and sell it to tobacco buyers from Europe and the U.S. Malawi also welcomed a sizeable number of white Zimbabwean farmers who had been evicted from their farms by Mugabe.

Q: Did you have a problem? By the time you were there, tobacco was not looked at with great favor by the United States.

BROWNING: That's right. And we had a healthy debate inside the embassy. Some folks struggled with it more than others. I was not particularly keen to be promoting tobacco usage. But it's a commercial enterprise that could help counter that horrible dependency on donors. It's a legal enterprise in the U.S. and it helps promote American business. We were advocates for American business and industry.

Q: How about tourism? You have that beautiful lake.

BROWNING: There was some tourism. Malawi didn't have the attractions that most Europeans and Americans and East Asians are looking for when they think of Africa. They didn't have the wild game and the huge game parks where you could see elephants and giraffes and rhinos. They did have some national parks, one in particular that was lakeside; part of the lake was in the park. It was a specialized type of tourism. There would be those hardy folks who wanted to trek from Cape Town to Cairo, that kind of thing. And you'd get freshwater aquarium enthusiasts. A major export of Malawi was freshwater fish for aquariums. I can't remember all the species they had, but it was a wide variety and very colorful, so there was this little niche market for freshwater fish for aquariums. But tourism wasn't a major economic driver in Malawi.

Q: Coffee?

BROWNING: There was some coffee and tea in the higher parts of the country. Lilongwe was pretty flat; tea needed higher elevations. But yes, they had coffee and tea along with the tobacco.

Q: What was the Peace Corps doing?

BROWNING: There were over 100 Peace Corps volunteers around the country. The Peace Corps work with the local government wherever they go. The government would

say what they wanted the Peace Corps to focus on, this issue or that sector, and the volunteers would spend their time doing that. Some of it was education, some was agriculture, micro-enterprise. There was also a big emphasis on HIV/AIDS training. We briefed the volunteers so they could also bring HIV/AIDS awareness to whatever they were doing. Fifteen percent of adults in Malawi were HIV-positive. That had a horrible effect on the society. It was becoming a society of children and grandmothers as all the others were getting infected.

In Africa, when someone from your village dies you really have to go back to the village to be there for the funeral ceremonies. I don't know if anyone did a thorough study on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the economy, but just from our own staff at the embassy, we were constantly understaffed in our offices because our employees had to go back to their home villages to attend yet another funeral. The impact on productivity was huge. The life expectancy in Malawi dropped 20 years; it was almost 60 before HIV/AIDS and it was below 40 years because of HIV/AIDS. The impact on the social and political fabric of Malawian society was also huge. So our volunteers, in addition to their sectoral work in education and agriculture and micro-enterprise, also really tried to help educate folks on HIV/AIDS.

Q: Did you have any problems with the volunteers?

BROWNING: No. We had a couple of problems with the Peace Corps staff but not the volunteers. We had a few early departures from post because of the problems.

Q: Maybe without names could you tell me what the problems were?

BROWNING: Just some issues of misuse of government property and abuse of position. That's about all I can say.

Q: What about Malawi and the UN? Obviously it had a vote. How did they stand, UN-wise?

BROWNING: The UN was present in Malawi and was focused on economic development. Like I said, the Malawi military was active in peacekeeping. As far as Malawi's votes in the UN, they were not standouts or leaders in any concern or area. I think they again were trying to coalesce as a society and a government. They were generally pro-West. If I remember correctly, they were one of those African countries that retained relations with Taiwan and did not have relations with Beijing; I think that eventually changed. That's a residue of the president for life, Hastings Banda. He was a real conservative dictator. I don't remember Malawi ever being a major force in the UN.

Q: You were saying it didn't have problems with its neighbors; it has about four or five different neighbors. Any difficulties while you were there with neighbors?

BROWNING: No. During the apartheid era, they were really isolated because Tanzania primarily and other front line states were really anti-apartheid and were giving sanctuary

and safe haven to the ANC (African National Congress), Nelson Mandela's group. But after the fall of apartheid, Malawi worked its way back into the good graces of its neighbors. They joined regional organizations in Southern Africa.

The drive from Lilongwe down south to Blantyre the commercial capital was interesting to me. The road would occasionally veer off into Mozambique, its neighbor to the east. You really couldn't distinguish between the two– there were no border posts, no guards, no fences, the road just weaved in and out of Mozambique. The villagers were – you know, the typical colonial map-drawing pattern of drawing straight lines, they would split tribes and villages in half. But the villagers ignored the colonial borders and would move freely back and forth. It was a pretty open society in those regions. There was a bit of a problem with Mozambican villagers going to health clinics in Malawi because it was a mile from their houses as opposed to 20 miles to the nearest clinic in Mozambique. But they seemed to work that out on the ground. I don't remember any conflict with any of its neighbors at all.

Q: How about your staff? How did you find them?

BROWNING: Young! (Laughter) It was a small embassy; 28 direct-hire staff from all agencies – State, AID, CDC (Centers for Disease Control), Peace Corps staff. On the State side there were 13 State Department employees. Eight of them were serving in their positions for the first time. So we had a first time ambassador, first-time DCM, first-time management officer, first-time econ section chief and others. They were very bright, very eager, but the inexperience was evident. That's fine; you deal with it. And, as I said, Washington wasn't paying attention. We really didn't need a wealth of experience in Malawi. I think a third of the State staff were on their first tour. So there was a lot of acculturation and training going on.

I had previously served on a promotion panel for seniors – OC (counselor) to MC (minister-counselor). I remember reading an efficiency report of one senior serving as ambassador in West Africa who had developed what he called "State University." He had the same situation I had – a very young, inexperienced staff. He set up a regular program of classes on the State Department, its culture, career development techniques, the way we do things, strategies for bidding on next assignments, that sort of thing. So I set up something similar in Malawi – regular sessions for these new employees on who we are, how we get things done, recommendations on career development. That was very helpful; it was appreciated by them to have a senior officer help them navigate through the State bureaucracy. Most of them hadn't served in Washington yet, so it was still a big unknown to them.

One of the first things I had to do when I got to Malawi was help the embassy staff understand where Washington placed Malawi on its list of priorities. When I arrived at post, I did what every new ambassador does – I sent out a cable to Washington and neighboring posts saying, "I have arrived and seized power and I'm now in charge." An ambassador in a neighboring post who happened to be an A-100 classmate of mine sent me back an official-informal cable saying, "Welcome to the neighborhood, Steve, glad

you're here. By the way, Malawi sends out more reporting cables than all of the other embassies in the region combined, and nobody reads them."

I wanted to maintain the enthusiasm and eagerness and productivity of my young staff, but I also wanted their efforts to be productive and appropriately focused. So in my first few months, we spent a lot of time re-orienting the efforts and workload of the staff. I wanted much less reporting and much more interaction with Malawians and their government and our counterparts in other donor embassies, trying to get a handle on how to break this cycle of dependency. At first their egos were bruised and they were unhappy that the secretary wasn't reading every weekly cable that they had been sending on the tobacco crop in Malawi. But eventually they understood. I said, "This is really a very liberating thing for us. If Washington doesn't care what we're doing, we can do anything we want short of declaring war on Malawi. We have a lot of freedom. Let's take advantage of that." Eventually they understood. So we were able to shift their focus from a very heavy emphasis on reporting to one of getting to know the country and seeing what we could do to help them develop.

I was very impressed and proud of the staff. They shifted gears, really got with the program. It was a good staff. I was happy to be with them.

Q: What was the human rights and role of women situation in Malawi?

BROWNING: It was pretty good. The military had a very good record on human rights, and that's often where countries in Africa have human rights abuses. The government was extremely conservative; this is a carry-on effect from Hastings Banda and his almost Victorian attitudes. There was some problem with human trafficking, but compared to other countries in Africa, it wasn't as big of a problem. I don't remember human rights being a major focus for us or for any of the other Western governments who were working there.

Q: You were there when to when?

BROWNING: August of '03 to May of '04. I was there nine months.

Q: Then what happened?

BROWNING: (Laughter) I got volunteered to go to Iraq.

Q: Shall we move to Iraq now?

BROWNING: Yes, but only figuratively not literally! Here's what happened.

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was established right after the war ended and was acting as a proconsul in Iraq. The coalition and the United Nations and all parties agreed that in June of 2004, the Interim-Iraq Government (IIG) would stand up and the CPA would stand down and hand governance of the country back to the Iraqis. The CPA

was an international coalition, but it was primarily an American entity. Similarly, the military force, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), was multinational but heavily staffed, structured, supported and led by the Pentagon. The civilian folks, Jerry Bremer and the CPA who managed the political, economic and development efforts in Iraq, depended exclusively on the military folks, MNF-I, for sustenance, security, housing, logistics, transportation – everything. In June of '04, with Iraq independent and an interim Iraqi government standing up, the plan was for the CPA to be replaced by the IIG and by bi-lateral embassies. Since the CPA was overwhelmingly American-staffed, the bulk of the CPA assets, functions and personnel would convey to---would become---the U.S. embassy. The plan was for the MNF-I support apparatus for the CPA to eventually disband and for the embassy to assume responsibility for setting up its own security, logistics, personnel, housing, communication, transportation and sustenance capabilities.

Colin Powell was secretary of State and his deputy was Richard Armitage and the under secretary for Management was Grant Green; these were all military guys. They understood that it would be tough for the State Department to take over from the Defense Department this massive support operation. The military is trained to take things, not give things away. As you know, our military is very rank-conscious. Washington leadership knew that a title, a rank would be essential in dealing effectively with the military. So they went looking for folks with ambassadorial titles to help open up the embassy. John Negroponte, a multi-time ambassador, was going out to Iraq as ambassador; Jim Jeffrey, our ambassador in Albania, was going out as DCM; Ron Neumann, our ambassador in Bahrain transferred to Iraq to head up the embassy's Political-Military Affairs section; I was invited to leave Malawi and go to Iraq as the first management counselor.

I went in June and had a two week overlap with my CPA counterpart. At the end of June the CPA went away and the American embassy was established – in name only. (Laughter)

Q: Do you want to describe your initial impressions of the place?

BROWNING: I now truly understand the concept "fog of war." With all due respect to my CPA and MNF-I colleagues who labored under serious constraints, the place was a bureaucratic mess. In a war time situation, you do what's necessary to win the fight and all the bureaucratic niceties are second and third tier considerations. I understood that, but my task was to turn the CPA bureaucratic structure, such as it was, into a fully functioning U.S. embassy with all of the required rules, regulations and internal controls.

Let me give you some examples of the challenges the management section faced. In the first country team meeting Ambassador Negroponte asked me how many people in Iraq there were under his chief of mission authority. I told him I had no idea but hoped to have an answer for him within a year. We had a pretty good idea that there were about 1,000 civilian U.S. government direct-hire civil service and Foreign Service personnel from 11 U.S. government agencies on the ground at any one time. In addition, we estimated that there were about 4,000 U.S. civilians in Iraq hired under a legal provision

called Section 3161. Ambassador Negroponte was responsible for their safety and security and for their activities, but the personnel and contracting records were so poor we really had no idea how many folks were there.

We estimated we had about 5000 civilians, some living in tents, many sleeping in cots in the presidential palace in ballrooms, hall ways and dining halls. The CPA started the process of bringing in thousands of containers and trailers so people could live in their own self-contained housing but administrative controls were inadequate. After we'd been there a while, we found out there was a brothel in one of these shipping containers. We found a black market in keys to the containers. Why? Because some of the 3161's decided not to leave the Green Zone when their contracts were terminated. They wanted to stay and find another job. So, you have people there with no reason to be there. They have no job – they're looking for a job. They buy a key from someone who is leaving and then they just squat. They're taking up bed-space and eating in the dining hall free of charge. We don't know how many are there; we don't know who these people are. There was zero record-keeping.

I asked to look at the motor-pool logs to see how many vehicles we were responsible for; there weren't any logs. I went to the political section's office in the palace. There was a baseball cap on the desk with a bunch of keys in it. If a political officer wanted a car to drive to meet a contact in the Green Zone, he just went to the baseball cap, got a key, went to the parking lot and took off. Then if he wanted gas, he went to the filling station that KBR (a defense contractor) controlled, filled it up with gas, charged it to the political section – no accountability, nothing. Occasionally a rocket or an RPG, a rocket-propelled grenade, would hit the parking lot and vehicles would be damaged or destroyed. So those keys were taken out of the cap and thrown away, but the cars are still there. It was just incredible.

I found one 3161 who was working two full-time jobs. He was given a contract by one office to do a job. He was paid a full salary. At the same time another office hired him to do a totally separate full-time job. He was getting two paychecks. He would show up at his desk in one office, work for a couple hours. Then he would disappear and go to his second job! He was getting two salaries to do two jobs simultaneously. He got away with it because everyone worked 80 hour weeks and it wasn't unusual for folks to sneak away for a nap and then come back and work until 2:00 in the morning.

During the war the telephone system in Iraq was destroyed. So the MNF-I set up a cell-phone system for CPA and its Iraqi contacts that was based in New York state. It had a New York state area code. They handed out cell phones to all their staff and to their interlocutors in the government. Take the Ministry of Energy, for example. The CPA would give them dozens of phones so the folks working energy in the CPA could call and conduct business over the phone. These conversations were from the CPA office in the presidential palace in the Green Zone to New York state back to the Ministry of Energy in Baghdad. They gave a cell phone to the only pizza parlor in the Green Zone! If CPA folks wanted a pizza, they'd call this pizza guy, order a pizza, in a call that was routed through New York. Then when it was ready he would call them – again a long-distance

call through New York – saying the pizza's ready, you can pick it up. There were hundreds of thousands of dollars in cell-phone charges each month. There was absolutely no record of who had the phones, why they had them, and whether they really needed to have them. One employee in our communications office did nothing but call the numbers we had for those cell phones and ask, "Who are you and why do you have this phone?" We found out that some guy in the government would get three or four phones and give them to his kids so he could stay in touch with them. But they had no reason – they weren't working for the CPA. We were getting the bill for these phone calls from his office in Baghdad to New York to his home in Baghdad so he could talk to his son.

It was just bizarre. I had never seen anything so apparently unstructured as the CPA. I'm not criticizing these folks, I'm not trashing them. They operated under severe stress and severe situations and did what was necessary to get the job done. But for a bureaucrat to be told "you take this and turn it into an embassy with rules and regulations and procedures governed by the FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual) and all the things an embassy has to do" – that was just a daunting task for us in the management section. It was just an amazing experience for all of us.

The management section had responsibilities for managing some of the Green Zone activities. There were 30,000 people in the Green Zone: Iraqis, NGOs, diplomatic missions, the UN, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and a pizza parlor– they were all based in the Green Zone. MNF-I managed the Green Zone in the CPA era with an outstanding military unit of 150 personnel or so called the Joint Area Support Group (JASG) with whom we worked very closely. MNF-I detailed the JASG to the embassy and its commander reported to me. When the JASG eventually went away, those responsibilities were to be handed over to the IIG and to the State Department management section. "Here you go, now provide housing and water and sewage and energy and traffic control to 30,000 people in the middle of a war zone!" Nobody at State had ever done anything even remotely like that before. This was really a huge undertaking for the State Department and, as you can imagine, for the Interim Iraqi Government which was still establishing itself.

Q: What did you do?

BROWNING: (Laughter) We prayed a lot! There were 43 of us, State Department management section employees – GSO, personnel, budget, communications, logistics, housing, medical. They were just an outstanding team of volunteers from Washington and embassies all over the world. We would interact with our Defense Department and IIG counterparts. We transitioned from Defense to State those discrete activities that were of an embassy nature as we were able to assume responsibility for them, and transitioned activities that were of an Iraqi governmental nature from Defense and State to the IIG as they were able to assume responsibility for them.

Our personnel section – three or four folks, some people there for a year, some TDYers (temporary duty personnel) who came in for a couple of months at a time – would write and establish personnel procedures for Embassy Baghdad. The communications section

would interact with their Defense counterparts – and naturally they don't have just one office, they're spread out everywhere doing different things; computers, radio, phones, etc. They would work out a transition time table and mechanism for handing over to State an activity or function. Budget was the same way. We're talking billions of dollars under CPA and MNF-I control! You get a budget officer who's been a solid budget officer in an embassy and had a few million dollars to manage, and now trying to figure out how to oversee or track billions of dollars in all kinds of activities, much of it in cash wrapped in plastic moved by forklift. We also recruited to the best we could Iraqi nationals to join us as FSNs. Those brave souls literally risked – and some lost - life and limb to work for us. Most received bomb threats and threats against their lives and their families' lives. Some just stopped showing up for work. We had no idea what happened to them. It was quite a challenge.

We certainly weren't doing all this alone; there was tremendous support from Washington, neighboring posts and around the world. We had 1,600 State Department TDYers visit us in Baghdad the first six months alone! Frankfurt was a regional center for the department and they were providing us a lot of support. We had support units in Amman, Kuwait – we had four direct-hire State Department FSOs there plus a dozen or so FSNs. What I was trying to do was to get as much workload as possible out of Baghdad to somewhere else, to lessen our footprint and keep as many people as possible out of harm's way. If we didn't have to be there, we shouldn't be there. We had never before gone into a warzone and set up an embassy from scratch. Or taken an existing, still-functioning entity that was so alien to what the State Department was and how we did things, the CPA, and morph it into a recognizable American embassy.

I remember the first meeting I had with the full management staff at the end of June– I'd been there a couple of weeks before most people showed up. Most of them arrived right at the end of June. Remember, everyone there in the management section was the first incumbent in their positions; there were no predecessors, no handover notes, no long-term employees to whom you could ask questions and find out what the hell was going on. Everything was being built from scratch; no, that's wrong. If we could have started from scratch it would have been much easier. We had to take a huge dysfunctional entity and twist it and contort it and force it into being an American embassy, all while people are trying to kill us.

I said, "Here's how I see this. We have this giant Rube Goldberg contraption made out of one huge Erector set. There are incredibly complicated and complex connections and bridges and pulleys and thousands of moving parts. It's very rickety and unstable but holding together somehow. That's what the CPA is. The embassy – we're going to go around and tighten screws and bolts and where we can, and as we can, we're going to tighten the place up, bit by bit. What we're not going to do is go in wholesale and say, 'State has arrived, and we're in charge. Here's the FAM; we're going to do it this way.' That approach just won't work in this environment. Those of you who are really bound to rules and regulations, you're going to have a hard time for your first few months here; this will be a new experience for you. We have to do things in a way you aren't used to until we can grab control of this thing."

That's how we did it. We'd find an area where we could assume responsibility, where we had the staff and the capability. So we'd take that away from Defense. Then we'd identify another function that we could handle and take that away from Defense. We slowly over time created an embassy.

One of the hardest encounters I had was with a three-star general who was roughly my counterpart on the Defense Department side. Early on, I had said to my staff, "I'm no longer an ambassador. I was called 'Ambassador Browning' in Malawi but I'm not ambassador here so call me 'Steve.'" They said, "Absolutely not! We have got to call you 'ambassador' and we want everybody to know you ARE an ambassador because that helps us when we're dealing with the military." My ambassadorial title put me on an equal footing with a general.

One example of the challenges we had working with these folks. I met with this general, my counterpart, and said, "One of the first things we need to do is set up office hours and a work week." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I've got a lot of people on my staff who are entitled to overtime pay. But I don't know when to start that clock. So we're going to have a designated workweek, Sunday through Thursday; Friday and Saturday are off. And the office hours will be eight to five." He went ballistic. He said, "Are you telling me you State Department people (although he didn't say "people") are going to lock the doors and go to your hooches at five o'clock?" I said, "No. What I'm saying is we have to establish regular office procedures in this embassy. We will be there at six in the morning but we're not going to open the office doors until eight. And we're going to lock the door at five and keep working till midnight just like your folks. But people are going to be paid overtime for doing that."

Another example. This same general was responsible for providing support services, roughly equivalent to what a management office would provide, to the MNF-I and earlier to the CPA. With the CPA now gone, we were assuming responsibility for supporting the embassy. Before we came along, this general and his staff occupied one whole section of Saddam's presidential palace. When we arrived they had to give up some office and operational space and give it us. You can imagine how much fun, how collegial those discussions were. I was getting nowhere with this guy; the negotiations, such as they were, were painfully slow. One evening, the commander of those great JASG folks, the military unit detailed to us, came to my office and said, "Ambassador Browning, I have a confession to make. As you know, the JASG is responsible for running the palace until you guys can take over. One of my guys happened to be in General X's office after hours and made copies of his plans for office space negotiations with you. We have a copy of all of his 'must haves,' 'willing to discuss' and 'give aways.' I'll understand if you don't want to see them, but I thought I'd offer." "Gimme those," I said. After that the negotiations went remarkably well.

The most mundane things that you'd think would be easy to do were incredibly difficult. The CPA was a 24-7 operation. People were used to working non-stop. Part of it was safety; nobody wanted to go out to a tent in case a rocket or RPG came down on them.

They wanted to be inside the hardened facility in the palace. At 2:00 in the morning you'd see people at their desk; they may not be working, but they're at their desk. Our goal was to try to bring some normalcy or a regular approach to business. That was a struggle, because the military was really in a mindset of battle and battle rhythm, and we were trying to bring about a structure of normalcy.

Q: There was obviously a whole panorama of different problems. How did you solve the telephone problem?

BROWNING: We designated one employee to focus solely on the phone issue. This employee was calling people asking, "Who are you and why do you have this phone?" If it was a member of government and we could verify that with the corresponding office in the embassy, we'd let them keep the phone. If it was the pizza guy, we just turned it off. If it was the son of some member of government, we just turned off the number. So over time, we were able to narrow this down and ensure that just the people who were entitled to them had them. It was a problem on our side, too. Someone would get terminated from his 3161 job. But there was no record keeping or accountability from the hiring office, so this person would keep his cell phone and would sell it to somebody else. "Here's a phone for $2000." Our person would call around and ask "How'd you get this phone?" "I bought it from a guy." "But we're paying the bill! Who are you? Give us our phone back." It was slow retail work, phone number by phone number, thousands of them, trying to figure it all out. Eventually we got a handle on it and saved the government hundreds of thousands of dollars a month in phone charges. It was incredible.

Q: Could you rather than have a New York-based number, move it to Baghdad?

BROWNING: That depended upon the local capacity and much of that was destroyed in the war. Eventually they did develop local cell phone capacity that we could join, but that takes time and infrastructure and power and technical expertise.

Q: The other one that strikes me – who got the hooch or the trailer? And who could go in and get food? If these people were no longer employed, what did you do?

BROWNING: Both of those were areas we had to focus on and it was much more difficult than you'd think. For the hooches, the trailers, we set up a huge initiative to bring in as many trailers as we could, so every employee under chief-of-mission authority would have a trailer to him or herself, or at least a private bedroom. They might have to share a bathroom, but over time the goal was privacy. We had to find space in the Green Zone to do that, so we had to bulldoze some areas and put in the infrastructure – water, power, sewage – and bring in the trailers. Most of them came from Turkey and sometimes the convoys were attacked and we'd lose some trailers and have to bring in more. We had this aggressive effort to expand the number of hooches that we had. We also took advantage of the downsizing of the military presence. The military was moving people out as the State Department was assuming responsibility for certain activities. As the military (many were National Guards folks who were happy to go home and get back

to being lawyers and doctors and carpenters and school bus drivers or whatever they were doing before the Guard called them up) left, space would open for us in their trailers. Then the 3161s, we drew down those numbers – we really didn't need 4000 as the Iraqi government got its traction. Over time, through various initiatives, we were eventually able to give everyone some privacy.

On food – this was tough, because there was very little food available in the Green Zone other than in the dining halls in the palace or in the military units around the zone. The food was brought in according to U.S. military protocol from off-shore. They would not buy any local produce, any food, any drinking water – nothing locally, for security reasons. So we had convoys from Kuwait and Jordan and Turkey bringing in lettuce and tomatoes and canned sardines and chicken and rice and bread – the whole bit. For the military, in a war or combat kind of setting, the chow halls are open to all. If you're in a uniform and you've got a weapon, you might be based in some unit hundreds of miles away but you're welcome to eat; come on in. For the civilians, we initially followed that procedure. It's mealtime so you go to the chow hall and eat. There were no controls. Some places over time would try to initiate a sign-in sheet, but you could write "Mickey Mouse" down as your name and walk on in. Nobody checked.

As State began taking over this responsibility and footing the bill, we had to get a handle on the expenses and had to know who all these people were. How do you do that? How do you control access to food, to the health unit, to trailers and housing, to motor pool, to telephones, to office space? All of these things were an access issue, and we had to figure out how control it while still providing all the services? We came up with a system that I called BLiSS – Baghdad Life Support System. It would be a barcode like you have on a loaf of bread, and that barcode would be on your ID (identity or identification) badge and every time you accessed a service – food, health, the housing office, motor pool – your barcode would be scanned and we would have a record of who you were, who you worked for, and who we could charge the expense to. It was not fully developed when I left; I heard later they dropped the concept. That's how I was going to try to keep track of all this. I don't know how they did it after we left – I left in June of '05 – I'm sure my successors came up with ways to manage and control all of this. Over time there were fewer people and more stability and things became routine because we weren't at war. There was still the occasional rocket or RPG that would hit the facility and do some damage, but we really weren't in a wartime setting.

Q: I've heard stories about the 21-year-old so-called "expert" on the stock exchange coming over from Casper, Wyoming or somewhere. Did you run across a bunch of people especially with political connections who were obviously unqualified but well-connected?

BROWNING: Yes. I don't know that I would say "well-connected politically." I didn't see that so much as people who passed the vetting process. The CPA used the Heritage Foundation as their personnel vetting mechanism, particularly for 3161 hires. Heritage, I'm told, had on their website job openings in Iraq. People would apply and upload their resume and then have an interview that included some questions that would not be

germane to performance of the duties, such as your personal position on abortion and that kind of thing. They were looking for a certain political orientation or mindset.

Q: The Heritage Foundation has a reputation of being a conservative organization.

BROWNING: Yes. But hiring was very decentralized and diffused, and as with everything else, record keeping was not a priority. There were U.S. government employees from several agencies and departments that helped staff the CPA, but the vast majority of CPA personnel were 3161's.

I was in the dining hall one day and heard a guy with a thick Texas accent, so I went up to him and introduced myself and said "Your accent sounds really familiar; sounds like home." It turns out he was from Midland, Texas, and I'm from Odessa; that's 20 miles apart. So we started talking and I asked, "What brings you to Baghdad?" He said, "It's an interesting story." Back home in Midland, he was a building contractor. Through a friend of a friend, he heard about a job in Baghdad to help rebuild a lot of structures that were damaged, through a contract from the CPA. So he got the contract, got a ticket, flew to Baghdad. Then because of the chaos and freneticism and the fog of war, he couldn't find the office that hired him. He could not track down who he was supposed to work for. So here's this guy from Midland, Texas, in the Green Zone. No place to live; no return ticket; no contact with anybody, and he's hanging out trying to figure out what to do. Somebody comes up to him and offers him a job as a police trainer, to go out and help train Iraqi recruits to be police officers. I asked, "Did you have any experience in that?" He said he hadn't. No experience at all. But they hired him and gave him a salary, a place to live and food to eat, so he did it.

So he's doing that for a few months and he's in the dining hall and hears a conversation next to him. One of the guys was saying, "We really got behind schedule. I hired a guy from Texas to rehabilitate these buildings but he never showed up." This guy from Midland said, "I'm that guy!" He severed his police trainer gig and went to work for the guy he was supposed to work for originally and do the job he was hired to do.

That is not at all an unusual story. That was the atmosphere and environment in Baghdad at the time.

Q: How did you feel about personal safety?

BROWNING: It was the overriding concern of everybody. We were always obsessed with it. The CPA came in right after the military had finished the fighting. There was a period when Baghdad was relatively accessible and peaceful. Remember the hat with all the keys to the vehicles? Political and econ officers and people working for CPA would just get a car and go meet people all over town. They'd go shopping and go to night clubs. They were really mobile and out there. Then the resistance started and the attacks against the coalition. The military fortified the Green Zone and we had suicide bombers we had to look out for. By the time I got there, the ambassador was responsible for the safety and security of some 5000 people. So his security specialists, the DS folks, made

recommendations on access outside of the Green Zone. Some of these CPA hands who stayed on to work for the embassy really got unhappy when they were told they could no longer leave the Green Zone unless they were in an armored vehicle and had an escort and were wearing body armor. They were used to more free-wheeling ways and got very unhappy that these security standards were imposed on them. It's one thing when you're an independent operator; it's another when you are under the authority of the American ambassador.

That was one thing. The other was there were constant lobs of rockets and RPGs. One hit our communications unit. No-one was killed but we had people lose eardrums and suffer some real damage. Another rocket came through the roof and killed an employee from another agency. That happens, then you go to your hooch which is a tin can that wouldn't stop a BB, much less an RPG. You sleep underneath your bed, hoping that thin mattress will provide some protection. Some folks slept in their body armor. You're constantly aware. It's always a concern. There was one rocket that hit a generator right outside our health unit. Luckily, nobody was in the health unit – it was at night – or we would have lost people. There was a trailer nearby with showers and toilets and sinks, a wet trailer – it looked like a cheese grater after that rocket hit. Pieces of rocket and the generator went through the exterior walls and the interior walls of each stall, right through the other side. It was perforated from end to end. So you see that and you realize at night while you're in your hooch, there's nothing there to protect you; if an RPG or rocket comes, you're toast. When folks are living that way day after day, it really wears on them. The concern for your own personal security was a constant drain; some of us were also responsible for the security of others which greatly added to the burden. Our DS agents, the ambassador and the DCM would have to make decisions on whether or not the gains to be had by sending out a political officer to meet with some tribal leader was worth the risk of getting him blown up by an IED (improvised explosive device) on the roadside. They had to make those decisions on an hourly basis. You can just imagine the pressure.

So yeah, security was the primary concern by far.

Q: How did you feel when you left? Where were things going – were you optimistic? Pessimistic?

BROWNING: My focus was on establishing an embassy. That absorbed the totality of my mental and physical capacity. I was not spending any time thinking about whether the war was the right call or whether we should be there or political, economic or social developments. I was 110% focused on establishing a platform that would allow the rest of the mission to do their jobs. I really didn't leave Iraq with thoughts on whether it was the right thing to do or whether we should leave or stay. I purposely did not want to expend energy or divert my attention from the task I had in front of me. I didn't spend any time analyzing that. Since, then, of course, I've given it a great deal of thought.

Q: I can relate to that. When I left Saigon in 1969 or 1970, I was interested in getting a good consular section running and that was it.

BROWNING: You've got to stay focused. As we got into a routine – one of the things we did was force people to get out of the office. Initially, people were working until 2:00 in the morning. That's unhealthy. I'd go around and say, "Go home. Get out of here." When people had more free time on their hands, though, they'd sit around talking about what we were doing there, should we be there at all, was it worth all the effort, that sort of thing. So there was some discussion and awareness. But for me, I really avoided the analysis and second guessing.

Q: When did you leave? And then what?

BROWNING: I left in June of '05. The deal was, if I would give up the ambassadorship in Malawi and go to Iraq, the department would propose me for another ambassadorship. So they asked me what my preferences would be after Iraq. Looking at the list of openings, I quickly identified Uganda as my preferred destination. So the Africa bureau and the under secretary for management and the DG made representations to the D Committee, which makes these decisions, and they recommended my name be put forward to the White House for Uganda.

Q: And there you went?

BROWNING: Yes. Not immediately. I didn't get there until March of '06, so I had nine months in transit. Again, it was a matter of paperwork, getting clearances, having the hearing, that kind of stuff. So I did some special projects for the department. I did some recruiting, worked on issues at the nexus of personnel and FSI on how to expand training opportunities in light of staffing shortages. That was interesting stuff.

Q: What was the situation in Uganda?

BROWNING: Uganda had been in a constant state of upheaval and turmoil from the arrival of the British through Idi Amin and a series of short-lived governments and coups until 1985 when current President Museveni arrived. The LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) continued the disruption although its impact was felt primarily in the northern part of the country. The LRA was a manifestation of decades of ethnic and regional conflicts primarily between the north and the south. The Brits had set up an indirect rule arrangement with the Buganda kingdom in the south and to balance that equation they recruited most of the army from the northern ethnic groups. And that exacerbated religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants.

Museveni was the president at the time I arrived. He had been in power for eleven years and had brought a degree of stability to Uganda. When I got there, the economy was chugging along. The Lord's Resistance Army was in peace negotiations with the government of Uganda, although that never panned out. Museveni's government had brought the incidence of HIV/AIDS down from about 15% to six percent of the population. There was a positive and forward-looking attitude and atmosphere at the time. There were some negatives from our point of view. One was corruption in the

country. Museveni was positioning himself to run for yet another term; our thinking was it would be a good time for him to hand over the reins to someone else and let the people decide. But he was not inclined to do that. It was on balance, however, a good atmosphere. There were some issues where we had some differences, but by and large our relations were strong and positive.

Q: You went there for how long?

BROWNING: I went in April of 2006 and left in July of 2009. A bit over three years.

Q: Can you talk about your first meeting with Museveni?

BROWNING: It was the presentation of credentials. The U.S. had established a really strong relationship with Museveni personally. He was oriented toward the West. He was a firm believer in capitalism and economic development. We saw a lot of promise in him. I was always greeted warmly, both professionally and personally, when I met with him. I brought the senior members of my country team with me to the presentation of credentials, so all of the agency heads – USAID, defense attaché, CDC – joined me at the ceremony. I went through the traditional talking points of how I was looking forward to working with him. He went beyond the formalities and was personally engaging; it was a very positive and upbeat first meeting.

I had been well briefed on Museveni before I arrived. INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) set up a briefing in the Department that was attended by many of my predecessors as ambassador to Uganda. I quickly learned that Uganda had a personality-driven government and Museveni was that personality. It was fascinating to hear my predecessors talk about him as they went in chronological order. The first to arrive after Museveni came to power described how he would gather the diplomatic corps together and they would sit in white plastic chairs under a mango tree as he sought their advice. Later on he shed his bush persona and moved the sessions inside his office where everyone sat around a conference table. Later he started sitting behind his desk, separate from the group. Eventually he started using a chair on a raised dais. The sessions were no longer advice seeking in nature, but him "instructing" the dip corps. It was all very nice and congenial, but it was easy to see how he had changed in the job.

I remember one trip with Museveni that was particularly revealing. He summoned the dip corps to meet him at his ranch, which was several hours from Kampala, deep in the southwestern part of the country. We had no idea what it was all about, although it was during a time when the western embassies were really pushing hard for north-south reconciliation. Protocol loaded us all onto a bus and in comes Museveni who takes the microphone and starts acting like a tour guide. We drive all over the Luwero Triangle, a part of the country where Museveni's NRM had some of their fiercest battles against the government. We'd stop, unload and he would lead us to a metal-lined hole in the ground with a hatch on top. A soldier would open the hatch and Museveni would grab the nearest ambassador, point a flashlight inside and say, "Look at that." Inside would be dozens and dozens of human skulls and bones. He grabbed each of us, one by one, and

forced us to look inside. And he did this at every stop. On the bus he explained these "shrines" contained the remains of his fellow southerners, innocent civilians, slaughtered by soldiers from the north. He made the point that he knew that reconciliation was important and that he was working on it, but all this had happened just 30 years ago and it takes time to heal those wounds. That was Museveni in full force, "I know what needs to be done; back off and give me room." And then we all went back to ranch for a catered meal outside with white linen table cloths, crystal glasses and fine wine.

One last insight into Museveni. I had a meeting scheduled with him. The night before, an army truck ran off the side of the road and a dozen or so soldiers were killed. At the start of the meeting I expressed my condolences. His response was, "It's unfortunate the driver died. If he had lived I would have court marshalled him for destruction of government property."

Q: How firmly was he in power?

BROWNING: Oh, he was definitely in power! In the '70s there was this horrible period of Idi Amin. We closed our embassy in the '73 and reopened it in the mid-'80s. Museveni started his National Resistance Movement and the military wing, the National Resistance Army. He fought and eventually helped overthrow Idi Amin which they eventually did with a little help from Tanzania. Museveni lost the 1980 elections to Milton Obote, which Museveni and most others considered to have been rigged He went underground and waged a guerrilla war against Obote. In1985, Museveni and the NRM, which eventually became his political party, came to power. They were definitely in charge and never loosened their grip. Through the interaction with Western governments – the U.S., the British, the EU, and others – he understood the importance of popular support and elections, but he was reluctant to jump right in to full democratic governance, afraid it would lead to instability. It was clear his first priority was stability and providing the foundation for economic development before he got into elections.

Museveni wrote a book in his early years called <u>What Is Africa's Problem?</u> His basic thesis was African leaders stay in power too long. But he didn't follow his own guidance; he stayed in power and is still there over 31 years later. But over time he saw the need to have elections, helped along by a 2005 national referendum which overwhelmingly endorsed multi-party elections. So he held elections for parliament and the presidency, and he won the elections. Of course, the process was heavily skewed toward NRM success and there was no way Museveni and the NRM were going to lose. There were some complaints of fraud, but the foreign election observers felt the results of the election which endorsed Museveni as president were in fact a reflection of the will of the people. I remember escorting Senator Russ Feingold to a meeting with Museveni. Feingold's sole message was that Museveni should not run for a fourth term. After Feingold made his pitch, Museveni leaned in and said, "Once you convince the United Kingdom and Israel to institute term limits, come back and we'll talk." His party, the NRM (National Resistance Movement) was definitely in charge, but there were some internal struggles within the party. The guys who fought with him back in the '80s were called "historicals;" they had been around a long time, with Museveni. The younger

members of the party, who hadn't been active fighters, joined later. There was some tension between the younger generation and the historicals over the direction of the party. The historicals wanted the younger folks to wait their turn before they got in to positions of power and authority. The younger folks were saying "we're ready now." So there was that tension in the party. There was certainly grumbling among the historicals, several of whom wanted to replace Museveni as president. He had his hands full keeping peace within the party and keeping competitors at bay while still holding the party together so they could run the country.

He continued to allow some political opposition. Very typical in Africa, the same thing happened in Tanzania, where the ruling party would allow very weak opposition parties to spring up to show the world they did have elections. So the opposition's there but it really is pretty ineffective and not much of a threat.

Q: Let's talk about the embassy – how big was it? What was its main work?

BROWNING: We had almost 100 American direct-hire employees. State, USAID, CDC (Centers for Disease Control), National Institutes of Health, the Defense Department, Peace Corps – we had a huge Peace Corps contingent, 150 volunteers. We had a very, very strong embassy, across the board, all agencies. There were several issues we were facing. One was development, particularly health. President Bush had launched PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and had invested a lot in Uganda because of Museveni's forward-looking approach to combating HIV/AIDS. In many African countries they didn't want to talk about it because of modesty and cultural sensitivities. But Museveni addressed it head-on and said "we have to deal with it." So the U.S. found a strong partner in Museveni. Our development budget in Uganda was huge; it was almost $500 million a year. The bulk of that was focused on fighting HIV/AIDS, helping set up clinics and labs, getting anti-retrovirals out to the affected population. So that was one big issue, HIV/AIDS.

Another issue was the Lord's Resistance Army. The fight against the LRA was the longest-running armed conflict on the African continent. For over 20 years Joseph Kony fought the central government, although virtually all the fighting and death and destruction was in the north. His objectives were blurry at times, but basically it was to force the central government, dominated by southerners, to address marginalization of the north. He was from the north (where the first Ugandan presidents and early army leaders were from) and wanted to overthrow the government (Museveni was from the southwest) and give power back to the northern tribes. He would attack villages and kidnap kids and turn them into sex slaves and child soldiers. At the time the estimate was the LRA was responsible for 20,000 deaths in northern Uganda, southern Sudan, the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), and the CAR (Central African Republic). He probably kidnapped 40,000 kids all together. Then he just traumatized them. He's a horrible guy. He forced kids to kill their own parents and chop off their mothers' breasts, fight each other to the death. Just really horrible ways to traumatize them and make them become his soldiers. As a result of this, the whole northern part of the country was in turmoil. People had left their villages and moved into camps, IDPs (internally displaced persons) they're called.

They're like refugees within their own country. Uganda had the world's fourth largest IDP population. The Ugandan army was providing protection against the LRA. The IDP's were living in these camps, totally dependent on the UN, the West, and the government of Uganda for food, water, security, healthcare and education. The whole northern part of the country was a wreck; it was devastated. With our help, Uganda partnered with South Sudan and Congo to form a military coalition that had driven the LRA out of the northern part of Uganda and into the Congo and the CAR. That drove Kony to the negotiating table. Our folks worked very hard behind the scenes to facilitate the steps up to the negotiations. We provided some intel to the Ugandans, offered negotiating tactics and advice to all parties and provided logistics support to the UN mediator. In the end, Kony never signed on the dotted line; six times he showed up to sign, but never did. There was at least one positive development, though. This was the first time that governments in the region had joined in a military operation to counter a threat to regional stability.

Once the LRA was driven out of northern Uganda we wanted to go there and help them rebuild the primarily agriculture-based economy, so these folks could get out of these IDP camps. That was the third big initiative we were working on in Uganda. I worked with two outstanding USAID directors who lead their staffs to do some great work in northern Uganda. And Peace Corps. And CDC. And the State Department and DOD (Department of Defense) got heavily involved in development and rebuilding activities in the north. One of the biggest challenges I had in northern Uganda was forging a team out of all the USG folks and all the many NGO groups working there. I really wanted to bring in uniformed U.S. military to work with us. The Ugandan military had not done a good job of building civilian-military relations. In fact, the relations were very poor, particularly between their military and the IDP's. I wanted the Ugandan military to see the kinds of positive activities that military can be involved in and wanted our U.S. military to model that behavior. First, though, I had to negotiate a treaty between DOD's European Command (EUCOM) and Central Command (CENTCOM). Uganda was in EUCOM's jurisdiction, but CENTCOM had the civ-mil teams ready to go that EUCOM didn't have. We finally got that worked out and then I had to get our own folks to work together. Many of the USG development professionals and all of the NGO civilians were very reluctant to partner with DOD, particularly with uniformed, armed military and certainly in public. They were afraid that the IDP's would associate them with the only military they knew – the Ugandans – and that association would inhibit their work. Over time and after tons of lunches and dinners and other bonding sessions we got a tentative team together. And then, while working together, the USG team – civilian and military – really took shape. Now, of course, after so much time working together in Afghanistan and Iraq, it's not that big of a deal.

The fourth issue was regional security and stability. Museveni saw early on that Islamic fundamentalism in Somalia, for example, could be really destabilizing for East Africa. So he was the first African leader to send troops, under AU auspices, to help the Somalis fight Al-Shabaab. We provided planning and logistical support for this. He said he was working to stabilize and normalize relations between northern and southern Sudan, although we saw that he was really weighing in on the side of the south. We brokered a

deal between DRC and Uganda and helped them develop a joint security plan for Lake Albert, which they shared. Oil and gas had just been discovered there and if ever there was a flash point just waiting to happen, that was it. Museveni was a regional player, and we were supportive of a lot of what he was doing. He was the first African leader to call President Bush after 9/11 and offer his support; he said "We're a small poor country, but you're an ally and if there's anything we can do, let us know." That was a big issue for us – partnering with Uganda to see what we could do to bring stability to the Horn of Africa and East Africa.

Those were the four big issues. We were also working on the traditional goals of the administration, promoting democracy and economic growth, that kind of stuff, the traditional issues one works on in Africa.

Q: In talking to various people in this program, I do run across elements of George W. Bush's great interest in Africa. He often is not given much credit for it. Did you find a personal interest there?

BROWNING: Oh, yeah. I think the key to understanding George W. Bush is to focus on his human and emotional side. Committing two or three billion dollars to fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa was not an automatic reaction that you would expect from a Republican president. But I think Bush really was emotionally affected by the impact. Arguments can be made, as Susan Rice and Obama's NSC have made, that HIV/AIDS can also be a national security threat to the United States, because of the destabilizing nature of it. When a third of your working population is dead or dying and you've got grandmothers and kids trying to feed the continent, you've got a very unstable situation. But I don't think that was the primary way Bush looked at it. He really had a tender heart and he was looking at the impact on individuals and families. That was certainly the case on fighting the LRA. There was consensus on Capitol Hill that the United States should support Uganda in fighting the LRA, but there was deep division within the executive branch. President Bush was given the wide range of policy alternatives on what the issues were. He really was affected by the impact on the kids. He was deeply affected by the trauma that was visited on these children. I think that was a big motivating factor for him. I don't mean to diminish his foreign policy chops at all, but as far as motivating factors, to understand Bush in Africa you need to focus on the emotional aspect.

Q: How did you find the Peace Corps? It was a big contingent – how were they doing?

BROWNING: They were doing well. When Peace Corps is in a country, they work with the government to determine what the Peace Corps volunteers will focus on and where they'll be placed throughout the country. There was a big growth; I was there for three years and they probably grew by 50% while I was there. Most of that growth was so that we could establish a presence in northern Uganda. When the LRA was pushed out, there was this devastated landscape, almost two million people living in these camps, villages abandoned years ago. There was a great need for the Peace Corps to move into the north and partner with the governments and ministries to work on agriculture, health and

education. They were very responsive; I was quite pleased with the response of Peace Corps in northern Uganda.

Q: Idi Amin – he was in Saudi Arabia, wasn't he?

BROWNING: Yeah. He ended up in Saudi Arabia and eventually died.

Q: He was not a factor at all, was he?

BROWNING: Well, the residue of his time in power certainly was still a factor. You could talk to people who were in Uganda during Idi Amin's time. You would see a visceral reaction to him even though he had been long gone. It was just horrible. There was a forest outside of Kampala where it was known that he and his henchman would kill and leave people. Ugandans would avoid driving by that place because of that association. Plus he had driven out all the Asian-Ugandans; that had a big impact on the economy. While I was in Uganda, the government sent a high-level delegation to India, urging Indian-Ugandans who had been kicked out by Idi Amin to come back and re-invest. The impact and legacy of Amin remained, but the man personally, he was not a factor.

Q: How about Rwanda, which borders Uganda? Was there any aftermath from the troubles there?

BROWNING: Yes, there were. This gets back into tribalism. Museveni is from the far southwest part of Uganda, which is very close to the Rwanda border. So there's an ethnic connection there. Then Kagame, the current president of Rwanda, was for a while part of Museveni's bush rebellion. So there were Rwandans fighting with Museveni to take over the Ugandan government. When the genocide started in Rwanda, Kagame and his group broke away and went into Rwanda to try to stop the genocide. The understanding or the story was that Kagame was a protégé of Museveni and that they had a strong positive relationship. But then when Kagame became president of Rwanda, he considered himself to be an equal to Museveni, which Museveni took umbrage at. Then, you'll remember there was this "African world war" where Zimbabwe, of all countries, and Rwanda, Uganda and others sent troops into the DRC. That was a mineral and resource grab, and multiple African states were present in eastern Congo, which borders Uganda. I don't remember all the details but it eventually got sorted out. The issue with Uganda was I think Museveni was trying to keep the region stable. There were some folks in his own party who were trying to get some resources there in Congo and enrich themselves. It was an uncomfortable, unstable, unsettled neighborhood.

Q: Were there many private Americans in Uganda? Were they a problem?

BROWNING: There were about 1500 if I remember correctly. Missionaries, a few businessmen, some students. There were some American citizens married to Ugandans. Tourism was on the upswing. The missionaries were a good resource for the embassy in many regards. Many of them had been there for quite some time and had relations with

local government and tribal leaders. They were a good network for passing information; whenever there was some security risk we would rely on some of the missionaries. They had a radio network which they used to contact each other, and we could get information out pretty quickly. There were – and these were not resident in Uganda so much as passing through – but there was some concern with evangelical zealots who would come and push their anti-gay agenda. It was American evangelicals who got the Ugandan parliament to pass laws that made it illegal to be gay or homosexual. That caused some discord within the country and between Uganda and Western countries. But by and large, Americans were liked and respected in Uganda; I think it was mutual. There were no real big problems to my recollection.

Q: Did you and the embassy get involved in this evangelical anti-gay move?

BROWNING: We did. Part of our agenda was improved democratization and enhanced respect for human rights. That included respect for gay people. I can remember having some pretty frank discussions with the minister of foreign affairs for one who, honestly, I felt was being quite genuine. He just could not understand why we cared. I tried my best to get it across to him, but for the life of him he could not understand why we cared about this community. It was so alien to him that we would bring this up as a cause or an issue that might have an effect on our bilateral relations. At one point he said, "Mind your own business, this is an internal Ugandan thing. It's against our African culture." We'd say, "Well, we are minding our business and this is important to us." So we'd go back and forth. At the end of the day, President Museveni did not sign the legislation that imposed the death penalty on people who engaged in homosexual acts. There were some pretty deeply felt cultural norms. Yeah, we pushed the agenda. It's still going on. I read the other day that one of my successors was still very actively engaged in promoting gay rights and human rights in Uganda.

Q: Was there much in the way of imprisonment or squelching the opposition?

BROWNING: There was, particularly for the very visible political opposition. The opposition had very few tools at its disposal. They would hold a march, calling on their supporters to protest some decision or action. The government would call it a riot and throw them in jail. They'd be released, then a few days later opposition leaders would be thrown in jail again. I don't believe there were mass executions of opposition leaders or members of opposition groups. It was more like extreme harassment. Throw them in jail, let them out, then back in jail for a couple of weeks. It was harassment; it was a horrible thing to do; but it wasn't like you would find in some other African states. The government was sensitive to the opinions of Western countries. Uganda was still very heavily dependent on foreign aid; about 40% of their budget came from donors. They were sensitive to our thoughts and observations. So yes, there was some pushback against the opposition but not as you would see in some other countries.

Q: What was life like there for you and your family?

BROWNING: Uganda was called the Pearl of Africa by Winston Churchill. It's a verdant country. It's got great weather – predictable rainfall. The southern part of the country is green and forested near Lake Victoria. The northern part of the country is more of a savannah landscape, but also very productive agriculturally. The weather was nice. The people were friendly, very pro-Western. A lot of Ugandans had been educated in the West so you could have very engaging discussions on a wide range of issues from climate change and democratization to Redskins football. It was a country and environment and culture that I very much enjoyed and was comfortable in. We had good access to all levels of government and society. The schools were good. There was crime for sure; Kampala is a big city. Traffic was horrible. But, all in all, we had a high rate of our embassy employees who asked to extend; they found it an enjoyable place to work and raise a family. All in all it was quite nice.

Q: How about relations with Kenya?

BROWNING: The Kenyans are the big kid on the East African block, economically and militarily. There was a big effort to strengthen the East African Community, the EAC, that included Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. They were looking at a regional airline, rather than each country having their own airline. A regional currency and a common market were goals. So there was a lot of interaction among the three big countries. I think Uganda and Kenya were closer as far as economic development goes; Tanzania was lagging behind because of their socialist background. Kenya since independence had the occasional coup attempt and there were some messy elections, but they were able to keep their economy moving, while Uganda had to deal with constant turmoil – Idi Amin and war and revolution. Uganda has never had a peaceful transfer of power since independence. That wasn't the case for Kenya. So there were many cultural and social ties and a shared world outlook between Kenya and Uganda. But Uganda was very much in catch-up mode, and they knew it. They were struggling to grow their economy. And Museveni was very keen to increase the population. Kenya had a high population growth rate, but Uganda's was just out of sight. It was the highest in the world at one point. Museveni was really promoting that. There were some bilateral efforts on HIV/AIDS between Kenya and Uganda because of the truck routes they shared. There was work on railroads going from southern Sudan through Uganda into Kenya to Mombasa on the coast. There was some tension, but all in all, it was a positive relationship with significant interaction.

Q: How did you find Uganda's support of causes we were interested in in the UN?

BROWNING: They were basically supportive, but they were also members of the African Union and of the Islamic Council. There were times they would vote with their developing world colleagues and not with us. By the time they began a two-year stint as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, I had recognized a worrisome change in their voting pattern that, if continued, would be harmful to our efforts in the UN. So, I engaged in a months-long intervention with the minister of foreign affairs to undertake a course correction. Eventually Kampala instructed its Permanent Representative in New

York to more closely align their votes with ours. On balance, we considered them to be a reliable ally in the United Nations.

Q: How much of Uganda is Islamic? How did that play in the terrorism equation?

BROWNING: Roughly 15% of the country is Muslim. There was not a real hardline radical Islamic faction that I was aware of. They took a moderate approach to their theology. I can remember an American cultural group we had visit, a gospel choir. I held a concert on my lawn at the ambassador's residence and we invited delegations from three universities – a Catholic university, a secular university, and an Islamic university. We had three groups of students there. The gospel choir encouraged sing-a-longs. At the beginning, the Christian university and secular university students were singing right along and clapping and having a good time, and the Muslim students were hanging back but by the end of the evening they were joining in and everybody was having a grand ole' time singing gospel songs. That to me is indicative of the attitude in the country.

There are multiple Islamic factions. It would be hard – it would be wrong to say there was not some fundamentalism in Uganda. But it was not a factor about which we were overly concerned.

Q: How about exchange programs and visitor's programs?

BROWNING: We promoted them. We were believers in getting folks to the United States and seeing how we lived, worked and did things. We were particularly active in getting female parliamentarians to the United States, to travel the country and meet their counterparts. We would bring cultural and educational groups to Uganda. It was an essential part of our outreach effort.

Q: How did you and your wife find the social life?

BROWNING: My experience has been that it's in tiers or compartments. Socializing with Ugandans was very easy; it was enjoyable and engaging – they're delightful folks. But as the American ambassador there are limits on what you can say or do. So you have to be on guard in some respects. Among the expat community and other diplomats, you can approach social engagement a bit differently; I didn't have to be quite as guarded. Within the American community, again there were delightful folks we worked with and expats living there – but you have to remember you're the ambassador and people are watching you; there are some things you can say or do and some you can't. An ambassador is never off duty.

We enjoyed the social life. My wife Susan was very active; she's a very engaging and outgoing personality. The public affairs officer approached Susan and asked her if she would participate in some outreach activities. The USAID director and others also asked her. They'd send her to dedicate some project that the U.S. government had financed; she'd represent me and the government at these different events. She's a teacher by trade, so she got involved with reading and literacy programs. The PAO (public affairs

office) was the action office within the embassy on engaging with female parliamentarians and they asked my wife to meet with the parliamentarians. And we'd bring in experts from the U.S. on constituency outreach and the various efforts a representative could engage in, and Susan and the PAO and the parliamentarians would participate in the program. Susan was so effective that it got to the point where I'd have a reception at my house and would greet a female parliamentarian, and she'd say, "Good to see you; where's Susan?" and rush off to find my wife.

The Ugandans were engaging, genuine folks and we were happy to be there when we were. We found the social life great.

Q: It sounds like this was a very positive experience for you.

BROWNING: For sure. It was a great embassy staff. The issues were meaty and interesting. The interlocutors we had, both Ugandan and other partners, were good people to work with. I had a very positive experience in Uganda. I came away from there with strongly held positive thoughts.

Q: Were there any Americans getting in trouble there? Tourists can stumble into things…

BROWNING: (Laughter) Yeah, a couple. I can't remember his name but there was a movie made about this guy, a heavily armed missionary who felt the call to go to northern Uganda and free the child soldiers who'd been kidnapped by Joseph Kony. His heart was in the right place, but you really can't invade another country despite your good intentions. We had some other folks who ran afoul of Ugandan authorities when their hearts and emotions got ahead of their brains and thoughts. Other than that, I don't remember any serious problems with American citizens.

When you came back, was this the end of your Foreign Service career?

BROWNING: No. Let me interject one period during my Uganda tour. In October of 2007, the DG (director general) called and again volunteered me for a project that I had not sought out. This was a period when all kinds of problems were surfacing in Iraq. The secretary and the deputy secretary, John Negroponte, asked me to leave Uganda and relocate to Washington for a few months and focus on Iraq management issues. So I agreed. The assignment ended up being four months – October, November, December, and January of '08. I had a strong DCM in Kampala and the programs, directives and everything were all in place so I wasn't worried about being absent from Uganda for an extended period.

They called on me because of my prior experience in Iraq. There were several problems facing the US government and the US mission in Iraq during this period. You'll remember the gruesome pictures of the security contractors who were hung from a bridge and burned. There were problems with the new embassy compound. There were all kinds of horror stories with contractors. But the biggest issues were conflicts between

State and Defense. We were still trying to establish a civilian diplomatic and development presence in Iraq while the military was exercising its authorities.

I focused on two primary issues. One was private security contractors. DOD can use troops and national guardsmen to fulfill their mission. We don't have those kinds of personnel numbers so we have to rely on private contractors to meet all kinds of needs, including providing security as security details, body guards. How do they fit into the relationship between State and DOD? They are hard charging folks who have big guns and get direction from State. Those directions might conflict with what DOD wanted and how DOD wanted to handle things. Who was responsible for what and how do you set the boundaries for those responsibilities? Who's in charge when you have a heavily armed embassy in a war zone controlled by a more heavily armed military? So that was one issue I worked on. We ended up drafting an MOA, a memorandum of agreement, between State and Defense on the respective roles of Diplomatic Security, private security guards, and Defense personnel.

The other was freedom of movement. The American ambassador and embassy personnel, in order to do their jobs, needed to move around and travel in country. DOD owned that space. They were in charge; it was their territory. We would want to go out to some town or village and meet tribal and government leaders and different factions and religious leaders. But we needed DOD permission to do that! That was something we were not used to and it grated. And, we needed access to their convoys and armored personnel carriers. They had their own agenda and priorities, while we had ours. Their agenda certainly did not include babysitting a bunch of civilians. It was a huge conflict. That was the second issue I worked on. I spent a lot of time at the Pentagon sorting out details.

We ended up with two MOAs – one on the role of private security contractors, and the other on DOD supporting State in its diplomatic endeavors. The good news is Defense Secretary Gates and Secretary of State Rice testified before Congress that our differences had been worked out and that the MOAs would guide all future activities in combat zones. That was something I was happy to play a role in.

And there were a few other problems I worked on. When I first assumed the role of senior advisor on Iraq management issues, Secretary Rice sent out a cable, a department notice and a press release announcing my assignment. I got a few emails from friends congratulating me or offering condolences. The very first meeting I attended in the deputy secretary's office was quite contentious over some Iraq management issue I can't remember now and I thought to myself, "This is going to be more challenging than I thought." Right after that meeting, one of the participants, an assistant secretary, announced his resignation. I immediately got emails from friends saying "Way to go, Browning!" and "You work fast!" I, of course, had done nothing but they didn't know that. A couple of weeks later I attended another meeting and saw an assistant secretary-level official whose office was having some problems in Iraq (and in Washington). Since I had not met him before, I decided to sit next to him and introduce myself to him. When I stuck out my hand (which he did not take), he said, "I know who you are and why you

are here." A short while later he also resigned. And, I got more emails, "You da' man!" "Two down, how many more to go?" Again, I had done nothing, but was developing a reputation. I felt like Forrest Gump! I was there and all these things were happening around me but I really didn't do anything.

Other than our relations with DOD, the department's biggest management problem in Iraq was the new embassy compound (NEC). For a variety of reasons --- its huge cost, the unprecedented scale (Baghdad was the largest US embassy in the world), the extraordinarily short construction schedule and the dangerous and difficult circumstances under which it was being built --- of course there would be problems. The NEC was under intense scrutiny from congress and the media. And, the FBI and State's OIG each had investigations underway. When I first met with OBO (Overseas Building Office) leadership I was told that everything was under control and there was nothing for me to look into or worry about. After my meeting with others in Washington and my trip to Baghdad I learned the problems were worse than anyone knew. After a few "frank exchanges of views" with OBO leadership, OBO's director, yet another assistant secretary-level official, told me that he would soon be resigning.

The assignment was challenging and interesting, but it took me away from Uganda and focused my attention on Iraq again. I was happy to return to Uganda

Q: I can see how you had developed a reputation as a guy to go to if you had military-State problems.

BROWNING: Yeah, because of my tour in Iraq as management counselor. That was a big part of what I did in my year in Baghdad – figuring out how we share our responsibilities and duties, and how we do business together. We had never done that before. That's why I think they identified me to come back to Washington for the senior advisor assignment; not because I'm the smartest guy on the block but because of the experience I had dealing with the military in Baghdad.

Q: Should we move to retirement?

BROWNING: Well, I've got a whole other five years to go… but if you want to retire me early… (Laughter)

Q: Oh no! Did you want to stop here, or keep going?

BROWNING: I've got two more tours after Uganda. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) in HR (Human Resources); that was for three years. Then another tour as diplomat in residence.

Q: As I recall, we left – when did you leave Uganda, and then what did you do?

BROWNING: I left Uganda in July of 2009. I went to Washington DC as the PDAS in Human Resources.

Q: You better explain what that all means.

BROWNING: The director-general of the Foreign Service is in charge of all human resources and personnel matters for the Foreign Service. That position is dual-hatted, because the incumbent is also director of Human Resources, which includes Civil Service, Foreign Service national employees, and family member employment. The Human Resources bureau is responsible for providing the bureaucratic infrastructure for 61,000 State Department employees world-wide. The office is headed by the director-general. He or she has several deputies. When I was there, there were four deputy assistant secretaries. One of those is designated as the principal deputy, the senior among the deputies – and that was my position. I was the principal deputy assistant secretary for HR.

It was a great job and I was in it at a fascinating, challenging time. The bureau had 15 offices, over 500 employees and an operational budget of $63,000,000. The position requires that you be fully engaged in both long-term strategic planning for the Department as well as day-to-day operations. It's one of the few jobs that gives insight into and influence over virtually every aspect of State Department policy and management objectives.

Q: In my world, going back a long way, it was Personnel, wasn't it?

BROWNING: That's right. Several iterations ago a director general felt that Personnel didn't encompass the full range of activities and responsibilities, so he changed the title of the bureau from Personnel to Human Resources.

Q: What were some of the resources that weren't covered under "Personnel"?

BROWNING: The range was everything that would impact the employment of our staff. So you start at recruitment. There's a recruitment office that manages the process for identifying new employees, both Foreign and Civil Service. That same office will manage the intake – bring folks on board, make sure they meet all the qualifications. Then, for the Foreign Service, there's another office that focusses on career development and assignments. Every two or three years, Foreign Service employees rotate into new positions. That has to be a transparent process, one that does the best job of matching an employee with the right qualifications, the right interests, at the right time with a position that's available. It's a very complicated process that needs to meet the needs of each employee and each receiving embassy or domestic office. The transfer season is in summer, but the assignment process begins in the fall as we identify open positions and look for appropriate candidates for each of those positions.

There is another office focused on family needs of Foreign Service personnel. One of its biggest, and toughest goals, is family member employment which helps reduce attrition among our employees. We found that one of the greatest reasons for attrition, the biggest reason people leave us in the Foreign Service, is the lack of employment opportunities for

family members. In order to reduce attrition and hold on to those very valuable employees, whom we've trained and developed – we can keep them longer if we can provide employment opportunities for their spouses. So we have an office, the Family Liaison Office, which works hard to do just that.

We have another office responsible for statistics and data, helping us manage 61,000 employees, with accurate data and hard stats. Are we in compliance with the law, with rules and regulations that the Office of Personnel Management imposes on us? What are the implications 10 years from now of the hiring freeze Congress is proposing today? How do we manage a staffing increase of 25% in five years? Are there enough positions for everyone, at the right grade level, at the right locations?

Other offices focus on long-range planning and policy coordination, civil service issues, locally engaged staff issues, performance evaluation, conduct and suitability problems, grievances, casualties and, of course, the executive office which keeps the whole bureau running.

Finally, there is an office that helps people transition out of both the Foreign and Civil Service and ensures that their process of retirement is smooth and seamless, so our employees can after 20 or 30 or 40 years of employment, enjoy a good retirement.

So HR covers the full range of activities and procedures that any large bureaucracy would have in managing their employees…if that bureaucracy had 61,000 employees in 200 plus branch offices all over the world.

Q: It sounds like you had a complicated game going on all the time.

BROWNING: It is one of the most complex jobs I ever had. Over the years, you discover what your learning curve is – how long does it take you to get a good handle on the new job you've just begun. Over the years, I realized my learning curve was about six months; it took me about six months to get a handle on a new job and feel comfortable with it, whether that new job was as first-tour consular officer or second-tour GSO or ambassador. After about six months I felt I knew the job.

But in this position, HR, it took me a year before I felt like I had a handle on all the moving parts and all the procedures and processes that we were responsible for. So it is a very complicated, complex job.

Q: How did you find your support staff, Civil and Foreign Service?

BROWNING: Very strong. Very dedicated. I was extremely pleased with the quality of talent, the dedication, the commitment to making HR a strong bureau that served the department well. There's no way we could have functioned without this talented staff that kept the wheels turning.

Q: Personnel is always going through changes and challenges; the government is always pushing on one particular theme or another. What was the situation when you came on? What was the main problem you had to deal with?

BROWNING: There were probably four big issues that really we had to focus on. I arrived at the same time as the new director-general, Nancy Powell, in August of '09. The Clinton team at State had been in place for just a few months, but was still staffing its senior positions among the career employee ranks. One focus we had was to help Secretary Clinton fill senior positions with career FS and CS employees throughout the State Department. We would get an inquiry from the secretary's office; they're looking for a senior official to do this particular job or to serve in this office, they need this particular skill-set. We would check our database and our contacts and see if we could find somebody who met those qualifications and was interested and would try to match them to that position.

That was certainly a high priority; when the secretary wants something you focus on it. It wasn't a huge time sink because I arrived towards the end of that process. Most of the positions had already been filled. One of the things I learned in focusing on this – we were extremely frustrated that there didn't seem to be as many folks out there as we thought there would be. It seemed that 99% of the requests were for Senior Foreign Service personnel. I asked our office that manages data and statistics to run some computer models for me – why are we having such a hard time finding qualified Senior Foreign Service? What we found out was that about 17% - over 200 positions – in the Senior Foreign Service were working outside the department. They were working for somebody else. They were working as political advisors for the Pentagon. They were seconded to think tanks. They were working in the White House, at the NSC. They were off somewhere doing other things, but weren't working directly for the department. That's 17% of our senior leadership working elsewhere, costing us $30,000,000 a year in salary and benefits. That really was a sobering statistic. No wonder we were having a hard time finding qualified seniors! We then started the process of really examining all of these extra-curricular activities. Did we really need to send three Senior Foreign Service officers to this little think tank; we kept filling the positions because we had been doing it historically. So I directed that we do a ground-up review to make sure all these details really were in the best interests of the department.

So that was one priority; filling senior positions for Secretary Clinton.

The biggest and most urgent initiative, however, was filling all of our positions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. We called these the AIP (Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan) posts. We had 900 positions at these three posts, Foreign Service generalists and specialists, most of them newly created. It was vitally important that all of the personnel who went to these places be volunteers. We did not want to exercise the authority that the director-general has to direct an assignment, to force somebody to go to an assignment. The DG has that authority, but we really felt it was important that all of our personnel in these critical posts be volunteers.

How do you do that? How do you encourage people to volunteer for these dangerous assignments, under extreme hardship? We developed a series of incentive packages. If you volunteer to go to Iraq for a year, you get three R&Rs. You get extra pay. We'll give you special consideration – you'll be first in line to look at your next assignment; we called it a linked assignment. If you volunteer now to go to Iraq, after you leave Iraq we'll assign you to Luxembourg or New Zealand or wherever you want to go if, of course, you are qualified for the job.

We were able to do it. I'm very proud of the fact that our staff volunteered to serve in these posts. This was the highest priority for the White House and the State Department could not fail. We had to be in those posts. We had to do our job and play our role alongside the military in these countries. That took up a huge amount of time and energy in staffing these AIP posts. One of the residual effects was that the other posts felt like they were second fiddle, second class citizens. Why was all the attention on Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan? Why weren't we just as focused on staffing Paraguay or Paris? We just had to spend a lot of time working with the bureaus, helping them understand this is a priority for the White House and the country and we've got to do it.

So we spent – this was certainly our highest priority. We eventually got a good mechanism in place. Certainly through my time there – I left in June of 2012 – we were able to fill every position with a volunteer. No one was forced to go to these places against his or her will.

Q: At one point, there was a story I think came out of the Pentagon that the Foreign Service wasn't getting any volunteers.

BROWNING: That's just not true. We did get volunteers. Unlike the Pentagon, we don't have a brig. We don't throw people in jail if they don't follow our directives. I can't say that every position was filled 100% of the time with no gaps. It was a logistical nightmare in getting people prepared and trained, both in security procedures and in the requirements for their positions. Often we would have to break people out of their existing positions early in order to get the training to go to Iraq. After that training was over, they would show up in Iraq. We needed to do that to coincide with the end of the assignment of the predecessor. If you agreed to go to Iraq for a year, we wanted to make sure your successor was there a year later, ready to take over the job as soon as you left. There may have been times when there was a gap of a week or two, but that story out of the Pentagon was just not correct.

Q: I went to Vietnam during the war. That was an 18-month tour, and we got two R&Rs. They certainly upped the ante.

BROWNING: Yes, we did. Each country had its own incentive package, tailored to the conditions in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Pakistan. We looked at different things. One of the biggest constraints in getting volunteers was separation from family members. So we looked at putting family members in India for those employees who served in Pakistan, so they could take a weekend trip and see their families. We were constantly looking for

ways to meet the requirements of the employees; they were telling us what it would take for them to volunteer, and we were looking for ways to do that while still meeting the staffing requirements of the rest of the Foreign Service. It was a very complicated process. I'm very pleased the department was able to succeed in doing this. It wasn't just the HR bureau – every bureau in the building contributed to the effort in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. The European bureau, the Latin American bureau, they were part of the effort because they released employees early and agreed to linked assignments. So if someone said "I'll go to Iraq for a year if my next assignment is Argentina or Luxembourg", he might not be the candidate of choice for those bureaus, but they understood if we're going to make AIP staffing work, we had to do it this way. So there was cooperation across the board, for sure.

Q: What about other problems? Health or alcoholism?

BROWNING: The stress in serving in those assignments was intense. Working 16, 18 hour days seven days a week. Rockets and RPGs landing near you. Some of our folks were in the Green Zone in Iraq. Some were not, but were out in the field, embedded with the military. It was an extremely stressful time, and people looked at different ways to deal with the stress. We had in Iraq, for example, for the first time in the department's history, social workers on the staff. A social worker was housed in the medical unit whose job was to look out for people who were having a hard time dealing with the stress. We started in Iraq when I was there, a program called no-fault curtailment. What we did not want was to have a disgruntled, frightened employee who didn't want to be there. We couldn't manage folks who were struggling to the point they couldn't function or were being a distraction to others. I remember one employee who volunteered to serve in Iraq. She was anxious to go, went through the training, and knew exactly what she was getting into. She was fine until the first rocket attack on the palace where we were working. She came to me and said, "All I thought about last night was my grandkids. I want to be there for my grandkids. I thought I could do this. I can't. I need to leave." So we let her leave. There was no criticism or negative remark in her efficiency report. It cost us a bit of a gap, but we dealt with it. You deal with the stress in different ways. You have to manage it so that people have options other than alcohol and drugs.

Q: How about in the Foreign Service out in the field? Were there posts giving you particular problems – leadership was wrong or what have you?

BROWNING: It's a department of 61,000 human beings, so you will have the full range of human frailties and personality quirks. Sometimes the civilian mindset was not perfectly synched with the military mindset when our folks were embedded with military units. But we had very few problems of abuse or folks who were abusive to their staff or couldn't function. If we had directed assignments and forced people to go against their will to these positions, we more than likely would have faced those problems. But I think because we only sent volunteers, people self-selected. As a result I think basically we were pretty good as far as our comportment and behavior. The employees and their supervisors functioned well. There might have been the odd one here and there who let

the stress get to him or broke under pressure. But those were rare exceptions and if we needed to, we got them out immediately so they wouldn't disrupt the operation.

Q: How about ambassadors? Did you have any difficulty between political and career?

BROWNING: Not in the field. For both Afghanistan and Iraq, where we had a very significant U.S. military presence, we recruited career ambassadors to fill the senior-most positions – deputy chief of mission, chief of the political section, head of the political-military section. We really wanted that ambassadorial title to be well-represented in our country team so we could go up against the generals who were part of the Pentagon team. If you've got an ambassador coming out of her assignment and she's used to being number one, then goes to country team where she's one among five ambassadors, it might take a few days for her to get used to the fact that she ain't number one anymore. We didn't have many political appointees during my time in Iraq. We did have one political ambassador in Iraq who had been active in the administration on these issues. He was fine. Later on we had another one, former military, who had some initial adjustment problems leading a civilian team. The thing to remember about these three posts is that the White House was focused on them like a laser. There was little opportunity for any of the senior leaders at these posts to stray too far from the White House priorities. Plus we had the special representative working out of the department who focused entirely on these three posts. I'm not aware of any errant senior leaders, career or political, who caused us any serious problems.

Q: How about Congress? Overall in your job, did you have a problem with Congress people looking for special dispensation for particular people?

BROWNING: No. What we did find – in Iraq we had an office with two full-time employees who did nothing but manage congressional visits. It seemed every senator and representative wanted a picture in their office of them shaking hands with uniformed military in Iraq and Afghanistan. So we had a tremendous number of visitors from the Hill, both members and staff. They would fly in, depending on the security situation. In the early days in Iraq, the ambassador wouldn't let them spend the night. That upset them a bit because they had very long days flying in from Kuwait or Jordan, spending a few hours on the ground, then flying out. But the security situation was such that we couldn't let them spend the night. Over time, that changed and they could spend more time in country. I'm not aware of Congress trying to interfere with personnel or staffing decisions. There were disagreements with the White House over strategy and tactics, but that was all fought out in Washington not on the ground in the field.

Q: Beyond the three countries, what about other places? Your resources must have been stretched very thin.

BROWNING: They were. We added another country to the AIP list, Yemen, in that it was under siege by Al Qaeda and there were some bombings right at the embassy gates, and we were really hunkered down. This was another post where we had to extend special incentives to get people to go. There definitely was a stretch on resources. One

of the really great things was we anticipated this staffing constraint early on. It was Secretary Rice who worked with Congress and the White House and OMB to set a goal to increase staffing in the State Department by 25% over five years. It was called Diplomacy 3.0. The rationale was that these three (and soon to be four) posts were just sucking us dry and absorbing all these personnel. These three posts had 900 positions, most of them at the mid-level and most of them Foreign Service; it was just incredible. She saw this early on, and HR put together this massive recruitment program. And Congress funded it, initially. The goal was to grow the department, Foreign and Civil Service, by 25% in five years. We went three years and then the funding dried up. So we had a growth of 17% in the Foreign Service and five percent in the Civil Service in three years. The goal was to bring these people on board, which would give us the additional staff to go to our high-priority posts and still have personnel to fully staff the rest of our important missions.

One of the complicating factors is that for the Civil Service, you hire somebody to fill a particular position at a specific grade level. So if you need a GS-15 contract specialist, you hire a GS-15 contract specialist. For the Foreign Service generalists, we hire everyone at the entry level. So we brought in all these entry-level officers, but our biggest need was at the mid- and senior level. We really felt we needed to stick with our tradition of a Foreign Service where people come in at the ground level. The military doesn't go off and hire majors and captains and lieutenant-colonels off the street. They recruit junior officers, train them and give them experience as they work themselves into positions of rank and leadership. The Foreign Service is the same way. Occasionally we would have a mid-level hiring program where we'd hire somebody to come in as an FS-3 or FS-2, but the consensus was that it didn't work well because they came in without an understanding of the culture of the institution. They weren't able to mentor junior officers. So we start with entry level employment. In three years we increased the size of the entire Foreign Service by 17% and they were all junior officers. So we've got this huge bulge at the entry level, and we've got to have jobs for them to go into. We have to keep them employed and trained. So working closely with the bureaus and FSI, we took a lot of mid-level positions that on the books indicated the incumbent needed, say, 10 years of experience and would be supervising three U.S. direct hires and 10 Foreign Service nationals. Well, those mid-level bodies just weren't there; 900 of them were in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen and there weren't many left for the rest of the posts. But, we had tons of new, entry level officers. So we would reconfigure the position – take away some of the responsibilities that only experienced officers could handle - so that it could filled by an entry level officer. Other mid-level officers at that post would have to add to their duties the supervisory responsibilities that were taken away from the newly-minted entry level position. You can just imagine the disruption worldwide; it affected every post we had.

What we found was that in 2010 a third of the Foreign Service employees had less than five years' experience. Two-thirds had less than 10 years of experience. This is the backbone of the Foreign Service, those employees with 10 or 15 years of experience, three or four assignments under their belts, still ambitious, working hard, and anxious to make Senior Foreign Service and get their first ambassadorship. The bodies just weren't

there. We really spent a tremendous amount of effort and time working what we called the "pig in the python" through our system. Promotions for entry levels were accelerated in the early days. In my time and your time you might spend four or five years as an FS-4 before you become an FS-3. We were pushing through – two years as an FS-4 then as an FS-3, now magically you're an FS-2 in record time.

Well in the olden days, you could count on an FS-2 having 10 or 15 years of experience. Now they've got five or six years' experience, maybe only three tours. We had to look at our expectations. What can we reasonably expect of someone with that little amount of experience to be able to do in that position? A large part of the solution was training. We established very strong working relations with FSI to help us compensate for this lack of experience with enhanced training and focusing on the skill sets they would need.

The good news is we were able to get a 17% increase in personnel in three years. They are still with us. They have settled in now at the midlevel and we slowed down the accelerated promotion process; our staffing in Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan has leveled off or shrunk in many cases. We can now send those entry level positions back to the bureaus who can reconfigure them back into mid-level positions and we can absorb all these D3.0 hires. I've been out of HR for a few years and I'm not privy to how it's working out, but presumably they are being absorbed into the regular cohort of the Foreign Service. It was quite a logistical and management problem to solve. To make sure the right person with the right training and experience was assigned to the right job at the right time, when you're dealing with this massive influx of new folks.

Q: Was the military having the same problem?

BROWNING: No. For example, if I remember correctly, the Air Force would assign personnel to Iraq for a four month tour of duty. The difference between a 12 month tour and a four month tour is significant, and they would have few problems getting people to go. Plus, the Pentagon doesn't ask! They tell! And we chose not to do that. Plus, their ability to expand to meet growing needs was greater than ours. They had tremendous flexibility with the National Guard and could call upon these citizen-soldiers – lawyers, doctors, plumbers, truck drivers, carpenters – who are in the National Guard. They could say, "Now's your time. We're pulling the National Guard from Connecticut to go to Baghdad for six months." They were able to fill their needs that way. They had the same problem we did as far as rapid turnover. It would have been great to have had somebody in country for two or three years who built up expertise and contacts and knew the job really well, but to ask people to stay that long in those environments was too much. To my knowledge, they had no problem filling their positions.

Q: Were you getting screams and yells from the rest of your posts?

BROWNING: Big time. The DG and I would get emails and phone calls from ambassadors saying, "I have given as much as I can. You've already taken three of my employees who've volunteered to go to Iraq or Afghanistan or Pakistan and now I'm told I've got another who wants to volunteer, and I want to say 'no.'" We had to push back

and say, "You can't do that. I know you think your post is at the top of the list as far as policy priorities go. But unless you're the ambassador in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Yemen, you're not. These are the highest priorities. You may be in London or Luanda or Laos; doesn't make any difference. You have to help us accomplish these goals." There was resentment. There was pushback. But we worked hard at educating folks and explaining the policy priorities. I traveled a tremendous amount in this job. I went to India and China and Latin America and Europe and Africa and just said, "I'm happy to be here in Luxembourg but let me tell you, you're not at the top of the list. You need to do what you can to help us accomplish our objectives in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan." Ninety percent of the people understood and were cooperative. There were a few ambassadors who couldn't get over the fact that their posts were not the White House's highest priority. But that was a minor problem.

Q: What about wounded or killed? How stood that in the Foreign Service? Were we losing people being killed or badly wounded?

BROWNING: Yes; it's hard. When I was in Iraq for example a rocket hit our communications office. We had people who were injured in that. Some lost hearing from the concussion. We had one employee who suffered severe PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) as a result of that; I'm sure that will be affecting him for the rest of his life. Those environments were ones we hadn't previously rushed into. The risk of death and injury has always been with us. We've had embassies in Islamabad, Tripoli, Beirut, Kenya, Tanzania and several other places around the world where we've had people killed while on duty. But our posture had been to protect these people as much as we could from these types of risk, and if we couldn't protect them we would evacuate the post. What was different about these three posts, and eventually Yemen, was that we deliberately, purposefully, sent people into a war zone, into harm's way. We deliberately assigned people to these posts knowing the risk was very high, knowing we might lose some to death or injury. It was a totally different mindset for the department. I had been in 30 years I guess when I started with HR and to my knowledge we never deliberately, purposely assigned people into a warzone. My time in the department was after Vietnam, so I didn't have that experience. During the Carter years with our hostages in Iran, then James Baker as Secretary of State, we were evacuating people left and right to get them out of harm's way. That was the mindset. When the Somalis overran our embassy in Mogadishu we shut down and pulled people out, didn't return for years. Now things were different. We were saying, "We're going to send you into harm's way." I can remember taking an emergency medical class before I went to Iraq, and remember the instructor saying, "Here's how to use duct tape to keep body parts together and attached to the body in case somebody's in an explosion."

That's not your typical Foreign Service training. In Baghdad we had a rocket hit an office that was staffed with civilians, not from the State Department. The rocket came through the roof, bounced off the floor and took a woman with it up into the ceiling. It killed her. As management counselor I was responsible for the maintenance of the facility, and I remember meeting with the KBR hazmat (hazardous materials) team gathering up the body parts so we could return them, cleaning up the blood, repairing the

facility, so we could resume operations as soon as possible. Back in my hooch that night I was thinking, "My gosh, I'm managing the loss of a life as if it's a plumbing problem." It was a jarring experience for all of us in the Foreign Service to rush into these environments that were so alien to what we had had been doing before.

It affected us. We really increased counseling services. There were some who felt we hadn't provided enough counseling and support for people when they went from an AIP post to their onward assignment, so our folks in MED (Bureau of Medical Services) responded to those requests. I think the whole department was affected by this new concept of what diplomacy was about.

Q: Was there much acceptance of what the State Department was going through in the public, or was there a feeling that 'nobody cares'?

BROWNING: Within the federal bureaucracy there was a great deal of respect. State was not the only civilian agency that was serving at these posts. You had Agriculture, Treasury, Justice, Commerce – all kinds of civilian employees were serving in these three posts. I think there was a great deal of mutual respect for the fact that all of us were serving in environments that were new to us. This was an unheard of experience for all of us.

But outside the Beltway? No. It's typical. The American public doesn't focus on diplomats or the Foreign Service. Congress doesn't. Our family and friends care and those policy wonks who look at foreign policy as an avocation, they're aware. But the vast majority of people only see the uniformed military in these assignments. I suspect most congressional offices have a photo or two on the wall of the senator or congressman with members of the military from his or her district. And I suspect there's not one photo with the member of congress and State Department employees.

Q: How about recruitment from colleges? Any problem there?

BROWNING: It was amazing, the response. You would think it would be more difficult to recruit people when they realized we were serving in these posts, but just the opposite. We had people who wanted to serve. They wanted to make a difference. Later, after I left HR, I went on to my last FS assignment in Berkeley as a diplomat in residence, recruiting to help fill these positions. The tragedy in Benghazi happened. We lost Foreign Service personnel, we lost others. Our post was overrun. It was a tragedy. Coincidentally, Chris Stevens, the ambassador who was killed there, was a Berkeley grad, so there was a lot of interest on campus and in the San Francisco bay area in what was happening. I was sitting in my office one day. A guy knocks on the door. He's wearing a uniform, a worker's uniform. He asked if he could come in. He has the contract for maintaining the turf on the Berkeley football field. He said, "I haven't been able to sleep since Benghazi. I don't have many skills, but if I can join the Foreign Service, I want to do that. I want to go overseas and serve my country."

It was mind-boggling that here's a middle-aged guy who owns his own business, doing well, and he's ready to give all that up to serve his country in a diplomatic position. And that was not unusual. Students would say, "I want to go but can I finish my degree first?" "Do I need military experience if I go to Iraq?" I never found that our presence in these three posts hindered recruitment. Just the opposite. It was incredible that so many young people were prepared to serve in these kinds of posts.

Q: Were you getting any after-action reports of people who said "I'm out here getting rocketed and the work I'm doing doesn't mean much"?

BROWNING: Yes, we did get some of that. During the time I was in HR, 2009 to 2012 – remember we went into Iraq in 2003 as the CPA, then we established the embassy in '04. Six, eight years later the fighting is decreased. We're heavy into nation-building, helping reestablish the economy and the infrastructure. We've gone through several cycles of staffing these positions. Now we're getting people whose motivation is not so much the initial patriotic fervor and the desire to serve we saw in the early days, but it's more like, "Well my daughter's getting married and I want to earn a 60% differential so I can pay for a wedding." Or, "I couldn't get along with my boss in Luxemburg so I volunteered for Iraq so I wouldn't have to work with that idiot." Or, "I always promised my wife we'd serve in New Zealand one day so if I go to Pakistan, my linked assignment will be New Zealand." So you start getting people with different motivations volunteering for these places.

During this time period social media usage increased. We had one guy who wrote a blog about all of the problems and deficiencies in our efforts in one of the AIP posts; that got notoriety. The press was now looking more closely at us. And the Office of the Inspector General and the special inspector general for Iraq and Afghanistan were looking at a lot of failures in those places. So there was a lot of frustration. We're pouring billions of dollars into these countries and sending hundreds of our best and brightest employees and service members, and nothing's changed. There was a lot of frustration. More and more people were expressing that. We dealt with it the best we could. People have the right of free speech, but on the other hand if they're working for us and being paid by us, we expect certain things from them. We saw some of that. It wasn't as severe a problem as I would have expected. In the early days we had a few Foreign Service officers who resigned out of protest at the policies. Some were quite vocal in saying that invading Iraq was just wrong.

Despite all the frustration, disappointment, and criticism, things could have been so much worse. All in all I think the Foreign Service conducted itself well and we did an admirable job under very difficult circumstances.

Q: Is there anything else in HR to discuss?

BROWNING: A couple of things. One, Secretary Clinton was in the lead in the federal government when it came to embracing same-sex domestic partners. Universally, the spouse of a diplomat is issued a diplomatic visa from the accrediting country. In addition,

the State Department had its own policies for family members. A spouse when assigned overseas can apply for spousal employment opportunities, can be admitted to the medical unit. A spouse is factored into the housing policy. But we had never before granted those same rights and privileges to same-sex domestic partners. Secretary Clinton said, "We shall do this." So in HR we went through our FAM, the Foreign Affairs Manual, and looked for every incident, every mention of 'spouse' and working with our lawyers, would determine whether or not, under the secretary's authorities, we could extend to 'same-sex domestic partners' the same policies and benefits that we had for spouses. It was a tremendous undertaking to look for areas where we could issue them a passport, for example. Before Secretary Clinton, we never did that. Before Secretary Clinton, if an employee wanted to take her partner with her overseas, the employee had to pay the airfare. The government wouldn't pay to ship the partner's household effects. This was all a burden shouldered by the employee, and Secretary Clinton changed all that. This was a big shift in the way we looked at relationships in the department.

It also affected assignments, because we did surveys with our posts and asked specifically, "What is the host country's attitude toward accrediting an employee with a same-sex partner? Would the country issue the partner a diplomatic visa?" We found that about a third of the countries would welcome same-sex domestic partners with no problem; they would provide them diplomatic immunity and they would be treated just like spouses. About a third of the embassies told us "We can make this work if you don't make it into a big issue; keep it under the table and keep it quiet, and we have found ways to accommodate domestic partners before and we'll continue to do so." Sort of a "don't ask, don't tell" position. And a third of our embassies reported back, "The host government is actively opposed to credentialing same-sex domestic partners. They won't do it." So if we assigned an employee to Uganda, for example, the government would not give the partner diplomatic immunity and would not recognize them as part of the embassy community. We could do whatever we wanted inside embassy walls – pay airfare, ship household effects, and give access to the med unit – but the government of Uganda would not give them a diplomatic visa or diplomatic immunity.

So we had to work this issue on multiple levels. As a former ambassador, I was very sensitive to the fact that one of the strongest tools for protecting the staff under my authority was diplomatic immunity. If a teenage son of an employee is in a car wreck and somebody's killed and that son has diplomatic immunity, I can use that to protect him. If the partner is there without diplomatic immunity, as an ambassador I am unable to provide the same protection. So that was a concern.

Our employees, on the other hand, after the secretary had said, "I want partners treated the same as spouses," our gay employees were saying, "This is the secretary's intent. I want to be assigned to Uganda; it's the best job for me and I want to go." We had this tension built in between the employee's ability to pursue his or her career and the department's responsibility to provide safety and security in those areas where it might be problematic. There were also concerns of fair share and worldwide availability. These are two fundamental principles of the Foreign Service, that every Foreign Service employee – specialist and generalist – is worldwide available. You must be available to

serve in any position in the Foreign Service. So if you're gay and have a partner, you still have to be available to serve in Uganda even though it's against the law to be homosexual in Uganda. If you are the employee with the best experience and best fit for the position in Uganda, you should be able to go there. But if the local government is saying, "We have the right to throw your ass in jail because you're gay," well with diplomatic immunity we can protect against that. But if the partner doesn't have immunity, there's a risk. We considered risks to the gay employee and partner, risks to the embassy and risks to the US government. It was yet another issue that we wrestled with on multiple levels – policy, legal, bureaucratic, regulatory, and personal. How do you ensure everybody's right to pursue his or her career and the posts' obligations to protect their employees – how are all those addressed?

Initially, it had to be addressed individually, one by one at each post. I'm using Uganda as an example because I served there. I know the current ambassador in Uganda is still working very hard with the government to ensure all of our employees have an opportunity to serve wherever they can.

Another issue, one that's still plaguing us I'm sure. You'll remember this from the old Consular Corps days which were gone by the time I entered the Foreign Service in '81. The struggle now facing the Foreign Service is we've got this huge demand for consular adjudicators in China, India, Brazil --- throughout the developing world where economies are taking off and people want to travel to the United States. Historically, our visas are adjudicated by first and second tour officers. All of us chose our cone or career track – management, political, econ. Virtually everyone served their first or second tour, regardless of cone, as I did in the Dominican Republic, adjudicating visas. Then you go off and pursue your chosen career track. Well, the need for visa adjudication is just burgeoning. It is huge. So in HR we were looking at ways to fill those positions and address the need. We were looking at second and even third-tour visa adjudication tours. So rather than do one consular tour and then go off and be a political or econ officer, now we're considering have entry level folks do two or three such tours; six years of doing consular work then you can pursue the career you signed up for as a public diplomacy or management officer.

This would have created huge problems. One of the ways we were looking to address it was to hire folks into limited non-career appointments (LNA). For example, for five years, you join the Foreign Service and you do nothing but visas. After five years, at the end of your limited appointment, you go back to whatever it was you were doing before. We were doing this toward the end of my time in HR – recruiting Mandarin speakers, Cantonese speakers, maybe second-generation Chinese Americans who had the language, who were prepared to go to China and spend five years and do nothing but interview people to see if they're qualified for visas. We did the same with Portuguese speakers for Brazil. Spanish speakers for Mexico but also the rest of Latin America. If we could use these personnel to fill this huge need, that would release the career Foreign Service folks who could do a tour or two of consular work and then go on and pursue their chosen field.

We had a similar problem, not on the same scale, in DS. We had a huge need in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan for protective personnel – essentially, bodyguards. How do you address that need? You don't want to hire a bunch of entry-level DS officers who serve a tour or two on a protective detail if there are no jobs for them in the midlevel of the Diplomatic Security service. So we used the same technique, the limited non-career appointment, to fill these protective details.

Great idea; and we had some success. But what we found was that these people now wanted to join the Foreign Service. The question was, do you have them go through the same entry procedures as everybody else? Do you bring them in at mid-level because they've had five years working in an embassy? Why would they want to start as an entry-level officer if they've already served five years at an embassy? That was an issue that was being addressed as I left and I'm not quite sure how the department is now dealing with it. But again, it's one of those issues that you really don't focus on if you're not in HR but has a huge impact throughout the system.

Another fascinating issue also involved worldwide availability and the fair share principle. As you know one of the core tenets of the Foreign Service is that everyone serves his fair share of hardship tours. Another is that all Foreign Service personnel must be medically able and available to serve anywhere in the world…worldwide availability. You can't join the Foreign Service and rotate just between Luxemburg and Copenhagen. Right in the middle of my HR tour, President Obama issued an executive order that directed all federal agencies to increase hiring of individuals with disabilities. Well, the worldwide availability requirement had already been under constant attack in the federal courts and the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) for some time. EEOC had been telling us they thought our worldwide availability requirement violated the American with Disabilities Act. And the courts had not been at all sympathetic to State's long held medical clearance requirement that every employee had to have the ability to serve in 100% of our posts. So we're already under siege in the courts and by EEOC. Settlements were costing us big money, huge amounts of staff time and State's reputation as a preferred employer was suffering. And then Obama said, "Up the numbers."

So we formed a working group of lawyers, medical folks, our own EEO folks and the office in HR that crunches all the numbers. The number crunchers built a statistical model and analyzed all past, current and projected assignments of employees with all classes of medical clearances and their ability to serve at posts with 15% or higher differentials. What we found really surprised us. Folks with medical clearance limitations had a higher propensity to bid on and be assigned to hardship posts than we thought. In fact, we found that they were assigned to hardship posts in the same numbers, same proportion, as their fully medically cleared colleagues, even though, because of their limited medical clearance, they couldn't bid on more than half of our hardship posts. I was really surprised. I think most of us just assumed that folks without full medical clearances spent their careers in non-hardship posts. Not so. This allowed us to bring into the Foreign Service even more folks without full medical clearances, knowing that they would be serving their fair share of time in hardship posts. The

lawyers were thrilled because they were tired of fighting so many losing battles in court; the budget people were happy because we wouldn't have to be paying such huge monetary settlements. Plus, it was just the right thing to do.

These types of issues are why I really enjoyed working in HR so much; the issues have a significant and permanent effect on the nature of the Foreign Service and the ability of the department to fulfill its mission.

Q: You had challenges that in my era weren't around at all.

BROWNING: That's right. You had your challenges with assignments to Vietnam and I am well aware that the department has faced difficult challenges all along. But I think the ones we're facing now in this asymmetrical, fast-paced world are particularly challenging and some of them unprecedented.

Wikileaks. What is the Department's responsibility to those employees, Foreign Service and locally engaged, who were outed and now in danger because of wikileaks? And how do we meet that responsibility?

Today, 62% of all Foreign Service positions are in posts with 15% or higher hardship differential. Is that sustainable? What changes, if any, do we need to make to our recruitment and retention policies?

Facing stagnant if not decreasing budgets for the department what can we do to maintain our operational capacity? For the cost of what it takes to transfer and maintain a Foreign Service Officer overseas, we can employee three to four eligible family members. Is that an initiative we should undertake? What are the long-term implications for the Service? There is great interest among our Civil Service colleagues in serving a tour or two overseas. Should we do more to tap into that talent pool? Again, what are the long-term implications for the Foreign Service?

I realize this is really deep in the management weeds kind of stuff and it's probably boring as hell for most folks. But for those of us who care deeply about the department and its mission and are really focused on how the department manages itself and want to make sure that we can always fulfil our diplomatic mission, this stuff is really interesting.

Q: We're coming up to your last assignment, right?

BROWNING: We are. By now it's August 2012, and I'm facing my time-in-class (TIC) limit. I'm a career minister and have to get promoted to career ambassador or I get TICed out. One month after reaching my TIC date, I reach my age limit, 65. So the only way to complete a full tour is to get a Senate confirmed position – ambassador or assistant secretary where the TIC and age limits are waived. I thought about pursuing those, but thought, "I've had such a great career and the Senate is so dysfunctional, I don't know if it's worth the struggle." So I sought an assignment as a diplomat in residence in Berkeley. That met several of my professional and personal needs. I was

able to relocate to California and my wife could continue her elder care support that we had been providing for several years. And, it gave me an opportunity to pursue on the retail level a lot of the policies I had been working on at a wholesale level back in HR.

We focused on minority outreach for the Foreign Service ranks as well as the new limited non-career appointments. So the challenge was, how do you recruit and target people for what is similar to an extended Peace Corps experience but with much better pay and benefits? How do you approach people and say, "Why don't you leave that job teaching Spanish in high school in Portland and go live in Tijuana for five years and use that Spanish language facility and adjudicate visas?" That was a whole new experience, recruiting for a temporary position as opposed to the career Foreign Service. I spent a couple of years of recruiting throughout the Pacific Northwest – Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Montana, northern California. I had a delightful experience – meeting college students, professors, working professionals, high school students. I considered it a great way to end my career.

I had thought I would quietly do that until retirement, and then Ebola reared its ugly head. In the fall of 2014, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa got really serious and we had Ebola in the United States for the first time and there was panic everywhere.

Q: You might explain what Ebola is.

BROWNING: Ebola is a viral hemorrhagic fever. It's a disease that is highly contagious and causes, if not treated immediately, a very painful death, bleeding from every orifice. It's passed through bodily contact and transfer of bodily fluids. There were Ebola outbreaks in Uganda when I was there. It was really not as dramatic or dangerous of a concern there because what would typically happen is Ebola would present itself in a small, isolated village. The villagers wouldn't know what was happening or what to do. They would infect each other. Everybody would die and that would be the end of it; it wouldn't be transmitted widely because of the rural isolation.

Well, Ebola got into West Africa. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea – urban areas like Monrovia in Liberia. It spread so rapidly that the public health institutions in those countries were overwhelmed. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and Doctors Without Borders (MSF) recognized early on that there was this horrible situation that nobody was focused on. CDC also became aware of it, and USAID and our embassies. It just mushroomed as it spread. Then it got to the United States and we had people in the U.S. with Ebola. The public health infrastructure here was not focused on how to respond to it. One of the problems is public health responsibilities are diffused; each state is responsible for its own public health response needs. One state responds one way, another state another way. CDC provides guidance and information, but it has no enforcement capabilities. There was just mass hysteria. The White House was overwhelmed with the press. Congress was demanding immediate action. Screaming headlines in the press. It was a horrible situation.

The State Department was on the front lines of the U.S. response efforts, trying to respond at a diplomatic level. Plus the State Department's relationship with USAID was very key to an effective response. I was minding my own business in Berkeley and Nancy Powell who had been the director-general in HR when I was the PDAS there had retired, but was recruited to lead the State Department's response to Ebola. She contacted me and said she could do it for a few months but had other obligations, and asked if I would take over that position. I'm on the payroll; I'm a State Department employee and I can't hardly say that recruiting in the Pacific Northwest was more important to the nation's security than heading up the department's response to the Ebola outbreak. The DG chimed in and said, "We need you more in Washington than Berkeley." So I was reassigned to Washington and took over as the State Department's Ebola response coordinator, trying to manage and direct all of the moving pieces involved. I went in November and served as a direct hire employee until my retirement. I retired December 31 of 2014 then immediately became a rehired annuitant, WAE, on January 1 of 2015 and worked through March of 2015.

It was a fascinating experience and challenge, to see all the moving pieces in the health sector of the U.S. government, working mainly together, but not always, to address these issues. The NSC was having meetings every day. You'd be summoned to a briefing at the White House on Friday at 7:00 at night or on Sunday morning. The issue was to make sure that the State pieces of this U.S. government-wide response were in synch internally, within the department, as well as in synch with the rest of the federal government – the Pentagon, HHS (Health and Human Services), CDC, the National Institutes of Health. The need at the department was not so much medical experience or knowledge as management ability. You didn't need a degree in public health or biology to deal with the issue; you needed international and domestic management experience in a big bureaucracy. How do you get all these pieces to work together? What is inhibiting our ability to respond appropriately? What's slowing us down? Who's getting in the way? That's where my experience came into play, having done similar work as an executive director and management officer and ambassador. What an assignment that was!

That reminds me, also, while I was serving as a diplomat in residence, I got a call from the director-general asking me to go to Pakistan and look at their staffing levels. The tension was, every agency wanted to increase its staffing levels. The ambassador was keen to keep those levels down. For security reasons and for providing services, it was a struggle for the embassy to support the people they already had, much less significantly more. So the ambassador asked for a neutral outsider to look at U.S. staffing in Pakistan – first in Washington to go to the headquarters of different agencies. Does the Department of Agriculture really need 20 people in Pakistan? Why does the Department of Transportation need five people in Pakistan? What are they doing? Can the work be done in Washington or maybe in New Delhi rather than Islamabad?

I was happy to take on that assignment. I had to spend a month away from my diplomat in residence duties, spending time in Washington and in Pakistan interviewing people and putting together a report for the ambassador and for the under secretary for Management

on what appropriate staffing levels should be in Pakistan. My point in sharing this is that one of the great things I have enjoyed about my career has been that, in addition to my regular tours of duty and assignments, I've had opportunities to do these special assignments like Ebola, Pakistan staffing levels and Iraq management issues that have utilized my experience and interest and have expanded the things I've been able to learn and experience. I really enjoyed those. Serving on promotion panels was similar. I served on the OC (counselor) to MC (minister counselor) board in 2002 and on the MC to CM (career minister) board in 2008. Both were great opportunities to get a sense of the incredible talent and ability we have in our senior leadership.

Q: You were very much a go-to person, weren't you?

BROWNING: It felt that way in the management field. I was lucky to have the experiences I had. I was in positions where I was able to be pulled out and given other tasks for short periods. Yeah, it's one of the things I like about the Foreign Service and the management career track particularly – you develop skills and abilities that transfer readily to a wide range of topics. You can take the experience I gained in Sri Lanka working in a multicultural society that's at war with itself and use that to help determine appropriate staffing levels in Pakistan, for example. When I was PMO back in the early '90s I had visited Liberia and Sierra Leone, and later Guinea as AF executive director. I had worked with the three U.S. ambassadors in those countries previously. That all fit together to help me in the five months I worked on Ebola response for the State Department. So yeah, it worked out well that I was able to exploit those experiences in different ways.

Q: You worked for a while when Secretary Clinton was secretary, didn't you?

BROWNING: Yes. She came in spring of '09 and I was in HR from summer of '09 to summer of '12, when she was still secretary.

Q: She's poised to be the president. How did you feel about her method of operation?

BROWNING: I was able to see during her tenure as Secretary of State some of the characteristics we're seeing now in the campaign. A heavy reliance on staff who had been with her for a long time; I think she respected and appreciated career Foreign Service folks but I don't know that she really confided in them. I think there was a core of her closest advisors who came with her from the outside that was almost like a cocoon. Not that she was alienated from career folks, not that she was at all disrespectful. Just the opposite; I think she worked hard at strengthening the institution and by taking advantage of the talent that was around her. I think if she's elected she'll bring the same approach to the presidency, on a larger scale. So I think what we'll see is she will appoint a Secretary of State and a National Security adviser and chief of staff who I think would be appreciative of the State Department professionals. Certainly there will be political appointees in ambassadorships and senior levels of the department. To what degree she lets the Secretary of State make these appointments, I don't know. My understanding is when President Obama asked her to be Secretary of State, she asked for and got pretty

much free rein over filling senior positions in the State Department. If as president she gives the same leeway to her Secretary of State, is still to be seen – I think all in all the State Department will be treated with maybe more respect than other presidents might have treated us. Not because of any ill will but because they weren't as familiar with the abilities and talents in the department as President Clinton will be if she's elected. I think all in all, it'll be a net plus for the department if she's elected.

Q: You've been around the State Department a long time. Could you talk about the impact of electronic communications – have you seen any differences, changes, good, bad, or indifferent?

BROWNING: (Laughter) Huge changes at multiple levels and we haven't even begun to understand them, much less manage them.

When I was management officer in Sri Lanka back in 1987 to '90, the commercial officer asked that I purchase and have installed a fax machine so that American businesses could send faxes to him so that he could better facilitate trade between the U.S. and Sri Lanka. I said, "Sure." Once word got out, I got summoned to the front office and the ambassador and DCM said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm just trying to be responsive to an embassy need." The ambassador said, "Absolutely not." He did not want any communication coming into or leaving his embassy that he did not see. If we had a fax machine, he would not see that information! Now that was in '88, less than 30 years ago; that's your base line right there. Prior to that, information came into and out of an embassy through cables or airgrams, and the ambassador and front office were able to monitor and control and see and influence everything. So we started with fax machines and the tight grip the ambassador and DCM had on information loosened a bit. Then emails came.

I can remember as ambassador in Lilongwe really having a hard time with one of my employees over a human rights report. I kept asking her and her supervisor and others, "Where is this information coming from? What is she basing her opinions on? How come I don't see what the problem is, and she's adamant that there's this problem?" Well, it seems that she was getting emails from an action office back in Washington, almost demanding that her human rights report include a certain paragraph interpreting data differently than how we saw it in the field. I was saying, "I don't see why this is paragraph is in here if we don't have any hard evidence." It turns out that the office in Washington was working with her bilaterally, through email, and that was shaping her judgement on the issue, not the facts on the ground. So that's one level of impact, the lessening of chief of mission power to control information and shape positions.

Another level of change is personal, individual responsibility. I can remember in HR, having to admonish employees over their Facebook accounts. As a department, we had to struggle with how much privacy a department employee had. If you're assigned overseas as a diplomat, you're on duty 24-7. There is never an hour when you're not on duty. How does that affect your ability to work in the embassy and support foreign policy and the objectives of the administration, and then go home and post on your

Facebook account that you think the policy and the ambassador are crazy? (Laughter) What you're doing – if you're here in the United States, I guess you can do that. You can say, "I'm off duty and my opinion is my own." But when you're in London and you're never off-duty, do you have the right to say, "I spent eight hours today promoting this policy, but tonight in the privacy of my own home with a glass of wine, I'm saying the policy is crazy and here's why." And then broadcasting that into the Ethernet where it lives forever and you've lost total control of it.

We struggled with new recruits who would pass the Foreign Service exam, pass the orals, pass the security, pass the medical exam. Perfect, everything we wanted, really strong candidates. Then they get to the final review process, the very last look at the potential new recruits, and we'd see pictures on their Facebook page showing them passed-out drunk three years earlier at a fraternity party. That's eternal, that's permanent; that never goes away. And we have to ask ourselves, "What would the Russians do if they found this Facebook posting? What would the Chinese do? How could they exploit that? Is this the kind of person we want in the Foreign Service?" Back in your day and my day, we might have been passed out drunk but no-one knew. Only we and our fraternity brothers knew, and it was old history, and you'd never bring it up and the Foreign Service (and Chinese and Russians) would never know about it. End of story. Well, that's not true anymore. People are posting all kinds of stuff, and it never goes away. It can haunt them for the rest of their lives.

Another impact is the ability of Washington decision-makers to get independent information, independent from the embassy. When you and I started, if the president wanted to know what was going on in Sri Lanka or Uganda, he'd turn to State Department reporting. Embassies would be reporting on economic, political, social developments that go back to the department and analysts take that information and show what's going on in that country. Today, the White House and decision-makers throughout the government – Treasury, Justice, Agriculture, Energy – have their own electronic connections to their counterparts throughout the world. So the Secretary of Energy really doesn't need the American embassy in Uganda, for example, to tell him what's going on in Uganda if he's got a direct email relationship with the Minister of Natural Resources in Uganda. We may never know – the American ambassador in Uganda may never know if the Secretary of Energy is discussing developments about a new oil or gas discovery in Uganda because it didn't have to go through the embassy. And it's an internal problem, as well. I can't tell you how many times I'd meet with Ugandan officials, including the president, and learn that someone in the department or White House had contacted them. We've got this multi-connected universe where our ability as the senior diplomats or as ambassadors to control communication and information is gone. That's long gone. The best we can do now is try to manage, synthesize, and present ourselves as analysts of all this information. But the danger is one bureaucrat at the Department of Energy or Treasury gets an established source of information through one channel in a country overseas, not to mention blogs and all kinds of electronic formats, and that shapes her thinking and analysis. How do we get our own analysis into that process?

Another impact of electronic access is the role of state overseas. Do we really need econ officers, for example, in our embassies overseas? In Europe, for example, practically all the data we need to figure out what's going on in the economy in Estonia or Luxembourg is available online. Why do we need to spend $250,000 putting an econ officer in Lithuania if the Lithuanian government's data is all on-line? We can do that analysis in Washington, DC. Companies can connect directly with each other and with governments, so how does that affect commercial advocacy? I'm not proposing this – I'm saying these are issues that we as a department have to address. Same goes for political developments. Were our political officers in the United Kingdom able to provide any information or insight into Brexit (British exit from the EU) that decision-makers in the U.S. weren't able to get on-line from other resources? I don't know the answer to that. We may have provided superb analysis into the Brexit vote and why it went that way and what to expect in the future; I don't know. But I do know that if we can get the information we need online and analyze it in Washington, we may have to re-look at the way we do business. It takes thousands and thousands of dollars just to relocate an employee and her family from one post to another – then add in housing costs, education for the family, medical care, security, office space in the embassy. You add up all those expenses – I think it's on average $250,000 a year to have an employee based overseas, including salary, benefits and auxiliary expenses. During a three year assignment, that's three quarters of million dollars plus we're paying to have an FS-3 econ officer in Luxembourg. Are we really getting that much added value having a person stationed there as opposed to doing the same analysis online while based in Washington?

But, by far, to my mind the biggest impact of electronic communications on our business is the ability for us to engage directly with citizens throughout a country. No longer are we restricted to getting our message out by working the local media and civic groups. We can also bypass the local government if we want. Kristie Kenny is one of the department's most senior leaders. When she was ambassador to Thailand she had a Facebook account and Twitter and who knows what else; she was an absolute virtuoso with social media. She had thousands of followers in Thailand. Well, I went to lunch with her one day at a Thai restaurant in Arlington. Within seconds, the entire restaurant staff, hostess to busboys and cooks, was all atwitter (so to speak). "Look! It's Kristie. Kristie's here!" That's impact. That's outreach. But it's not just about the number of followers or likes and stuff. It's about what do we do with this access? How do we best exploit it to our advantage? What's the best way to do diplomacy in the electronic era?

I think you asked the right question. Electronic media affects us in multiple ways, on multiple levels. Not only the nature of our business practices, but also the electronic history that never goes away that our employees have to struggle with, to the role of the embassy and the ambassador. What is the new role of a diplomat? What value do we add by being physically present overseas in a wired, electronically interconnected world?

Q: Oh boy. One other thing I was wondering. Somebody I've already met briefly with whose name keeps coming up every time there's a problem at the State Department, Pat Kennedy, you must have crossed paths with him?

BROWNING: Did you say the recorder is off? (Laughs)

Q: No, it's on!

BROWNING: Just checking. (Laughs) Asking a Foreign Service management officer if he's ever crossed paths with Pat Kennedy is like asking a Catholic if he's ever heard of the pope! Pat Kennedy is the senior-most management officer in the Foreign Service. He's been in the Foreign Service for over 40 years, I believe, and has had several key positions. Assistant secretary for administration; management counselor in Cairo; under secretary for management; executive secretary of the department. He's very much a seventh-floor kind of guy and knows the institution better than anybody. I would wager current and past, there's nobody who has ever acquired the knowledge and understanding of how our institution operates that Pat has accumulated. He loves the department and the Foreign Service. He probably works 50-60 hour weeks in the office and who knows how many hours at home, strengthening and protecting and facilitating the work of the department.

Q: Has he been effective? Did you get crossways with him?

BROWNING: (Laughter) It's easy to get crossways with him because he's everywhere all the time! Omniscient and omnipresent. No, Pat and I have worked together for many years. I think he cares so deeply about the institution and he knows so much and he's so good at what he does, that sometimes it seems like there's little room for others. So I think sometimes it's hard – I can remember sitting in meetings with him and the director-general, and I'm the PDAS. The director-general would raise a certain issue or a problem, and say, "We're looking to address it this way." Pat would say, "Read 6 FAM, X, Y Z.3 and you'll see …" and he would quote from memory the law and regulations and procedures that are needed to manage certain issues. His knowledge is encyclopedic and his energy level is constantly high. So sometimes it might be hard for some folks who feel they also have things to contribute, that there might not be much space for them while working with somebody with that much experience and knowledge. His staff is loyal to him, rightfully so. He's protective of his folks and certainly the bureaus in the M family. I think he has done a good service for the department and the country.

He helped set up the office of the Director of National Intelligence; John Negroponte was the first incumbent and Pat left State for a while and helped create this office out of bits and pieces of all of the intelligence agencies, and they were, as you can imagine, kicking and screaming, but he is a very effective bureaucrat and was able to cobble together resources the Director of National Intelligence needed to do his job. He worked with the CPA in Iraq and has since then focused tremendous effort on our work in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. He's just a force of nature. He's really contributed a lot to our nation's diplomatic and security efforts.

I realize he's got some issues with Congress and they with him and there are folks who have a different opinion of him than I do. Who can predict what things will be like with the new president, whether Clinton or Trump?

Q: What are you up to now?

BROWNING: In July 2016, FSI asked me to come back to Washington and work with Nancy Powell to mentor a new crop of chiefs of mission. The Senate finally, after many months, confirmed a whole group of career ambassadors, and the department wanted to get them confirmed and out to the field before the congressional recess in the fall and the election. I went back for a month with Nancy and we shared our experiences and gave advice to these new ambassadors. FSI and HR are anticipating 70 new ambassadorial assignments with the change in administration, the regular crop of career rotations and then the new political appointees that will come with the new administration. All of those will need training and mentoring in the spring and fall of '17, so I may be going back for several months to work on that.

And I'm getting settled into my community here. I've got 15 acres to maintain, clearing brush and that sort of thing. I live in the foothills of the beautiful Sierra Nevada mountains, so I've done a lot of hiking, snowshoeing and outdoor activities, joined some conservation and land trust groups. I get to spend time with grandkids and I'm doing a ton of reading. It's been a good retirement; I've enjoyed it. I've appreciated the ability to stay involved to some extent in foreign affairs, but have also very much enjoyed not being in the center of the universe, Washington DC.

Q: Thank you very much.

BROWNING: Thank you – this has been a good opportunity to review my career! I never kept a journal or diary so this was a good exercise to resurrect memories from the dark recesses. Hopefully, most of them are accurate.

End of interview