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

AMBASSADOR PATRICIA GATES LYNCH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is February 26, 1992. This is an interview with Ambassador Patricia Gates Lynch which is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. The Ambassador will first speak about her assignment to Madagascar and then we will move back to other times in the armed forces network, Voice of America and all that. Madam Ambassador, I wonder if you can give me a little bit about your background--where did you grow up, where were you educated?

LYNCH: I grew up in New Canaan, Connecticut which is not too far from New York City. I had the great advantage of living in a very small, beautiful little colonial town and at the same time being close to New York where, of course, my mother took me to the Planetarium and all the museums, the theater, etc. I appreciate that because it was a wonderful place to grow up. I have a theory that perhaps New England, with its harsh winters, conditions one a little bit for the ups and downs of life as you go along. So I am very happy to be from New England.

Q: Where did you go to school?

LYNCH: I went to school at a place called the New Canaan Country School and I have often said that the man who was the head of that school probably influenced my interests in foreign affairs. His name was Henry Wells. He had spent most of his life in China where he was head of the American Missionary School there. Even though we were all very young going to that school, we would have frequent lectures by him about China and the difficulties between the Japanese and the Chinese. How they lived in that part of the world. It was an exposure that most youngsters don't have. I have been interested that people like Hedrick Smith, also went to that school.

Q: He is working for the New York Times now, isn't he?

LYNCH: Well he is free lance now, but he does a great deal of television. He wrote The New Russians and about power in Washington.

I think that was an important beginning. My family also was very much interested in what was going on in various parts of the world.

Then I went on to a school in Stamford, Connecticut called the Low-Heywood School. Those were the days when you had schools for girls not mixed the way things have become today. It was interesting there...it was an excellent school run by an English head mistress. Again it was a classical education. Four years of Latin and many years of French. I was fortunate enough to have the offer and everything forthcoming for a four-year scholarship to college, but these were the war years. I didn't take it because I had met a young man who was at the military academy at West Point and he was going off to war when he graduated and he wanted very much to get married before he went off. So I had this great choice of college or going to be with this young cadet who graduated. I decided

to get married which was quite different from everything I had ever planned for. Of course, going to college then wasn't as necessary as it is now.

Q: The pressures of the war years is often misunderstood.

LYNCH: Although I have done all my studying as I have gone along through life...oh, that reminds me what I said to the head mistress when I wanted to get married and it was just before graduation and she said, "Well they have done it at Vassar, and I see no reason why we can't make an exception for you. I like your young man and I know that you will go on learning all through life and that is what education is all about." And I have always appreciated her. She has been dead for a long time now. That and the other thing was that my mathematics teacher was very under-standing. That was my weakest subject. I was all right in everything else, but math was a little bit weak...which may have been psychological. You know they always told women that you aren't supposed to do math.

Q: I went to a male prep school in Kent, Connecticut and math was my worse subject too.

LYNCH: My math teacher, years later when I was working at the White House, was visited by the FBI and asked all about me. She wrote me a note and said, "Oh, I told them all about you, our relationship, what you did in school, and finally they said, 'Will you tell us something negative? Can't you remember anything negative?' I thought and thought and finally said you weren't very good at math." I love that story.

Q: Then you got married and looking sort of careerwise what happened next?

LYNCH: Well, of course, that is where again the foreign education stepped right in because I married a wonderful, bright, young lieutenant and he went off to war after we had been married for almost a year. We had traveled some in the United States...Wisconsin, Tennessee. Then he went off to Burma and I followed the news assiduously. I was doing things with theater because that had been something I was interested in. I worked with the American Theater Wing in New York, putting on shows. One of the people I remember doing a war bond show with was the man who played the Shadow. Now people today won't remember the Shadow, but I had always thought of him as being a great big rather forbidding man. Actually he was a short, bald, very pleasant older man. He played my father and I played the daughter in these skits that we did. Then I did a little professional work in summer theater.

I dropped it all when my husband came back. We traveled again all around the United States. An interesting life. I had two children. Then we went to Europe and lived in Munich and Paris. Again wonderful exposure. Of course I studied the languages when there and entered into the life of the country. Our children went to French school rather than the American School which was a great adventure for them and good for their language. Then my husband went off to a hardship tour to Iran and at that point...I am skipping over a great many years here because we were married for 30 years. At a point where we came back to Washington I started a radio program here.

Q: This was when?

LYNCH: This was about 1956. I decided that it was time for me to work. The children were in school. I wanted to be home when they came home, but I wanted to do part time work so we could do a little more opera, get ready for school and save for education for them. In those days you didn't make a great deal of money in the Army and it was important to augment the income. I was really a pioneer. I didn't realize at the time that I was going to be called, later, a pioneer. But Army wives did not work. Wives did not work. I would have women coming up to me saying, "Oh, we envy you. I wish our husbands would let us work."

So suddenly came new exposure to the professional world. I had really done it not for gratification but because I wanted an increase in the income. That was the original motivation. I was not frustrated with the life that I had had. It had been fascinating all the way along.

I did a program in Washington for about three years and then I did television...educational television programs. I was host of several shows. It was with WETA.

Then when my husband went on a hardship tour I went back to Munich where I had the offer of an apartment. I worked for NBC Monitor. They approached me saying they knew of my work and would I do some things for them in Europe. It turned out that I did not only Europe, but they sent me to the Soviet Union, which was an extremely interesting place to do interviews. At that time there was quite a barrier between the press and the officials in the Soviet Union. But they were able to get me in because in Moscow they wanted to start for the first time, this was 1960-61, to promote their tourism. For a short time they did and then they cut it off later. They thought if I could come, perhaps this would help tell about different places in the Soviet Union and places people could see. So I went to schools, hospitals, all kinds of places in Kiev, Moscow and Leningrad. I also went to Poland and Hungary on that trip. I told a little about the ballet, the Bolshoi, their schools, museums, etc. - a little bit about everything that they were doing in the Soviet Union.

One of the things that I did while I was in Munich, the children were going to German school, was go to Radio Free Europe and do stories about what they were doing. Radio Liberty was also in Munich but they were not open at all at that point.

Q: Explain a little for the historical record what Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were.

LYNCH: Radio Free Europe was broadcasting to what were then the Iron Curtain countries...Eastern Europe... Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. Radio Liberty, at the time, was broadcasting just to the Soviet Union. The other countries were the Baltic States, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. In later years Radio Free Europe

was joined with Radio Liberty. They broadcast no English, and that is still true today. Radio Liberty broadcasts in the 12 languages of the Soviet Union. The Radio Free Europe part was all in the languages of the countries to which they broadcast.

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty also were surrogate stations, which means that they were the stations of the countries to which they broadcast, unlike the Voice of America which tells more about the United States and something about world news and some regional broadcasting. But the mission of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty was really to be involved with the politics, the analysis, keeping the culture alive of the target country. That is true today even with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Radio Liberty is still, for the listener, a non-governmental home station. There isn't the money in these countries to keep the press as alive as they want it. The freedom is there to a certain extent...

Q: For the record you were working here for Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

LYNCH: Well, no, here...I am now, but I will tell you about Voice of America just briefly when I started with them, but I am now with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. This makes it so interesting that in those days in Munich I was telling about them on U.S. radio. Actually they briefed me in Radio Free Europe before I went into the Soviet Union and I came back and debriefed them of certain things I had observed and which they had hoped I would take a look at while I was there. Changes in the way people lived, etc. Nothing secret or clandestine. Just a good look at events going on as I saw them.

When I came back to the United States I had a call from Voice of America. I had been working, of course, for NBC abroad. My husband came home and we came back here. Voice of America asked if I would be interested in working for them here in Washington, which I started to do. I was with them under contract for several years before going on staff. I went on staff in 1968 and then in 1969 Mrs. Nixon asked me to come to the White House and work for her. Actually I was originally on her press staff but ended up doing work for her separately on several things.

I traveled with her around the world and with the President after the Moon Walk. It was a wonderful time to go because the world was very open...it was the "trip for peace" that President Nixon made. There, again, I was learning all the time. To me learning is probably the most exciting part of being alive.

Q: In the foreign affairs field, on these trips with Mrs. Nixon, how well was she briefed, interested and interacted with foreign leaders and people?

LYNCH: Let me tell you about her. By the time she went to Africa, I was no longer on her staff because I had been on loan to the White House and had gone back to VOA. But she asked me to come with her to Africa, knowing I had a little French and she wanted me to help out a little bit. I went on the African trip where President Nixon did not come, but she was there representing him. She was outstanding, even giving the toasts at dinners

we went to. We went to Liberia for the inauguration of the President. We went to Ghana, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. Many of the press people from Newsweek, Time, and U.S. News & World Report had come from London to cover this event. She gave a press conference. I remember, I think it was the Newsweek man who said to me, "Is she always like this? We didn't know she could handle press or knew about affairs of state at all." I said, "Oh, she knows but she believes in falling back when her husband is there and just being the housewife, first lady, and not interfering in anything. But she really has come into her own on this trip because people have seen what she can do." And she was outstanding. And of course when one goes on a trip with the President you have thorough briefing books of the political situation in each country...what you are going to do and what your routine is along with a thorough background of the country. So, there again, I had remarkable White House experience which gave me a good viewpoint.

Q: I can understand the friendliness in most countries, but how about Ghana? Was there a problem in Ghana? This was still the height of Nkrumah wasn't it?

LYNCH: I will tell you about Ghana. The beauty of Ghana was that they were so polite that they held off on the coup until the day after we left. The Ambassador from Ghana to the United States, of course, had accompanied Mrs. Nixon from Washington to Ghana. I had known him and had met with him and his wife before going over to Ghana to learn something about the country. He was kept there. He couldn't get out. I came back and talked to his wife about the fact that he was all right. I was the last person to have seen him. He did weather the coup and became a minister. No, we didn't have trouble in Ghana. It was a warm, wonderful welcome. In all of these countries there was a warm welcome.

Working at the White House was in itself a great exposure to understanding the American system and that helped me later on when I was lecturing in various parts of the world about the socio-economic conditions in this country and answering questions. Although I am by no means an expert, I was able to give information and do research before going. It was an AMPART grant that I had in later years, in the '80s.

Q: Did you have the feeling that when you were in the Nixon White House that here was an Administration that was operating with a real plan as far as how foreign affairs will be conducted?

LYNCH: Oh yes. I think it was well organized. I think President Nixon was certainly one of our most brilliant presidents. He was a student of history. He knew his history. He cared very much about the world. He also paid attention to domestic affairs and did things that only come out now gradually. He had good relations with Congress except for John Ehrlichman and Haldeman who ruffled feathers. He was not a pat-on-the-back popular President because he was an introvert, from my point of view. But so bright, so kind to the staff. He was a pleasure to work for, we all loved him. He knew everybody's name. There was a great warmth when he was on a one-on-one basis. The press was never with him. I don't think the press caused his troubles, but they weren't with him when he really

needed friends. I have been pleased to see him act the way he has in the ensuing years after Watergate and come back as a statesman. Of course Presidents do pay attention to him, they do consult him. I think that is very good for this country.

Q: Now leaving the White House, you were with the Voice of America about when?

LYNCH: About 1970 then until I left in 1986. I traveled all over the United States. I traveled in the '80s China. Radio Beijing, the government station asked me to come and visit them in China. Now this was a great honor because they had had some Chinese broadcasters go over from VOA, but they had never had an American broadcaster come over as the guest of the government. This was, of course, after the Cultural Revolution, but not so far afterwards. They were still sorting things out. They still kept things very close.

I remember going to the Chinese Embassy here and how amazing it was even to get into the Embassy. It was hard to get through the doors. I remember too that when I was telephoned about coming, it was by a Chinese professor who said, "We must know before we extend it whether you will accept it." Saving face was very important. They asked me what I would like to do and I wanted to interview people, of course, on all levels...in government, in banking, on farms, music.

I remember going to the music school where they had never had anyone come. Later the First Lady went and they had her visit. I went to Beijing, the university. I was also invited to lecture because the professor who had come here early on said they used our VOA program to teach English and learn about America. I was asked to lecture at the University of Nanjing, for example. It was a remarkable trip. A wonderful trip going off, at that point, into the great unknown.

I was assigned a political writer from Radio Beijing to go with me to Nanjing and Shanghai and Xian and Hangzhou, Shanghai. Of course, when I asked to do anything extra there was great consternation, many meetings. In each city my interpreter companion and I were met with a car and a driver and also a representative of that city who would be our man to answer questions. Actually my interpreter, the one who was a political analyst, had been in the Red Guard she told me after we had gotten to know each other a little bit better. She was also able to take me into her apartment to meet her husband and see her little boy who had to be in boarding school because she was assigned to Radio Beijing.

The people at the Embassy told me that I was very fortunate to go into not only her apartment, but one or two others that I was invited into. I was also invited into the one that was very much for the VIPs. The Ambassador, Art Hummel, told me that they rarely get into homes so I was fortunate to be doing it.

I did interviews. At one time the interpreter said, "Well you are not going to be able to use all these interviews. Where are you going to have them?" I said, "Oh, I will use

them." And I did. They were all on my program, over several weeks, sent around the world.

Q: What was your program once you got your place in VOA?

LYNCH: It was called the "Breakfast Show." Later it was called the "Morning Show" which it is today. The "Breakfast Show" went on for years and years. It was different. It was a microcosm of the VOA, because we had everything on there...mostly interviews, some music. It covered American industry, theater, cultural events, science matters. There were interviews - I did almost all of the ones on my program on education, on events like civil rights and the strike. I would talk about the march in Selma and what was going on here in Washington in ways of conferences and how people were trying to get to know each other and work things out. It was a history of this country.

I found it very helpful to know about other countries because then I knew my audience and their feelings, something about their sensitivities, I guess you would say. Because of that I think I was helped to make friends with the people who were listening. They were not fans as much as they were friends. For years and years I did this first with two men and then just two of us...a man and I did it on separate days. We had for many years the highest rating of any program on the VOA.

I remember that used to baffle some because of the personal aspects of it. They would say, "Why is this a higher rating than our Meet the Press type things?" Well, I think it was because we really contacted people. I told, for example, about my children as they were growing up. They grew up on the "Breakfast Show." I didn't tell about it as a bragging mother but for a reason and the listeners knew what the reason was. I would say that my son was getting ready to go to college and we were going around visiting all the different universities to see which one he wants and it is very difficult to get in but it is possible and this is what we are doing.

I remember when my daughter graduated and went to live in a little apartment I told how she paid rent, bought a car on installment. The important thing was that it was possible for a young person to have an apartment of her own and to be able to buy a car.

Then I talked about buying a house and how difficult it was. You didn't really own the house for a long while because of the mortgage. All of these personal things that were interspersed were for a reason. When the children were married I told about the customs of wedding ceremonies in this country.

Q: With a program like this did you feel any pressures ...there were various Administrations in and out? Could you talk a little about this? The VOA is an important element of our foreign affairs apparatus and how here on a program that would seem to be pushing no foreign affairs policy did you get pressures to lay off this or that?

LYNCH: No, the freedom was extraordinary. I always said that I had the best job of any woman (and at that point I qualified as "a woman") in the United States because I produced the program. Although I was on every other day, I had the long two-hour Sunday program. Our program was the only VOA program where the hosts were allowed to ad lib. Naturally if we said something that was really stupid we wouldn't have had this trust. But it was a wonderful feeling to be able to put in something that was a genuine feeling and people picked up on this. We had letters from some ministers in other countries that said they really believed what was said when Pat says it. I thought that was highly complimentary. It wasn't so good if they weren't believing everything because on the VOA we really build credibility. That is what is so important. I think perhaps that was my main thought always...I want people to know that I am telling the truth and I will poke a little fun at what isn't ideal, or what is frustrating like tax collection time rather than that everything is rosy and perfect. But all of VOA tries to do that. It is just that I had the chance to do it on a personal basis and evidently it worked.

Q: Were you able to get the feeling and get much response for...here you were at a time of tremendous revolution about the role of women in the American society. This was not the lot of many women who were continuing to fight their way up. Were you able through your interviews to bring out all this as well as the black and Hispanic experience?

LYNCH: Yes, without being a women's program I had a special and personal interest in telling what was happening to women in this country. Let me give you a little aside when you said that it was an interesting time. I remember the day, and government certainly was a leader in accepting women in the working place and making it fair for them, when I very politely said to my supervisor, "I really think that it is time for me to have a promotion because I am doing exactly the same thing that my male counterpart is doing, but I am making thousands of dollars less." He said, "Well, I agree but we have to go a little higher up." We went a little higher up and they said, "Well, we are sorry. Yes it is true you are doing the same thing and a fine job, but we can't give you any more money while we have men who have families to raise. They must have the promotions first." I thought that was extremely interesting and frustrating.

I was not the type of woman who would sue or march, but, I have discussed this with some rather high ranking women in government and we have all decided that, although we weren't the kind that were pushing, we certainly are the beneficiaries of the women who worked very hard out in the shouting arena, which we didn't believe in because we were making slow and steady progress. I admire those women because they opened the path for many.

Q: This is the usual course of revolutions. You have two groups, one of the steady workers and the other out in front.

LYNCH: That's right. I think you need both and I think you need women helping women. That is what I have always felt very strongly. If there is a chance to promote a woman, or bring her along, that is very important for women who have been able to forge ahead to

reach out and help other women. That is a must and you will see as we talk later on about my becoming an ambassador, I had a DCM who was a woman - an extremely capable Black woman, Marilyn Hulbert - and as far as we know we were the first embassy ever in the Foreign Service to be headed by women.

Q: This has also been one of the stumbling blocks about the ambassador and DCM relationships. You really shouldn't have two women there.

LYNCH: I think we blasted that theory a little bit.

Q: Before we move to the ambassadorship, what about your listener response? Were you finding particular responses from any particular part of the world? Were more women responding to you?

LYNCH: No, and I want to get back to one of your questions about what I did on the air about women. I think perhaps I had more male listeners than female. I will give you some examples of that. During International Women's Year, it was the early '70s...the United Nations International Women's Year...I decided that I would do something with my listeners about women, not just in this country but all over the world. I asked listeners to write in a nomination for an outstanding woman in their village, their city or their country or any other country. I had a committee...I remember Vanetta Washington, the wife of the mayor in Washington, and other people in this city outside of VOA were on the committee. I said that we would choose three letters a week that I would read on the air. The nominated woman would receive an International Women's Year pin as would the person who did the nominating.

Well the letters just poured in. More from men than from women, which I found very exciting. The woman nominated might be a teacher in the village; someone who had helped build a well; Mother Teresa, who received more nominations than anyone, and I sent her a pin and letter; several people nominated a Japanese mountain climber; people from all different parts of the world. It was exciting because the letters did come in and you started to have a sense of more appreciation for women because people stopped and thought about it.

I did another year on volunteers which is really more of an American concept than in other parts of the world. People wrote in about the volunteer they nominated. These were just experiments and things I enjoyed doing very much.

But, no, I had, for example...many scientists would write and say that they were always glad when I talked about scientific developments because they didn't get much of that. Someone I know well today, was a physicist from Leningrad who phoned me and said, "I have come to the United States and am working at Catholic University and I would like to meet you. I came out with two suitcases." He came out on what was then one of the rare Jewish visas. He came with his wife and two children and two suitcases through Vienna. I remember he had brought me a little bowl, an enamel cup. He came over to my office and

said, "Everything I have learned about America I have learned on your program." Just then the phone rang and it was Clement Conger, the curator at the White House and the Department of State. We talked for a minute and then the scientist said, "Oh, I know the name Clement Conger, in America you can give gifts to him for your White House or State Department that will come off your income tax." I said, "You really did listen carefully." I had interviewed Clement Conger several times.

I am telling you these things not to say how well I did in interviews, but about the responses. This scientist was a member of the Academy of Sciences in the Soviet Union. He said, "What I like the best about your interviews with scientists was that I would be sitting there saying to myself, 'Oh, if only I were there I would ask him about such and such,' and just then you would ask him." That made me feel very good because I hope that was true of all people listening...that they would be getting their questions answered.

I really felt strongly about my interviews being about the interviewee, not about how much I knew. Naturally I had to do a great deal of homework ahead of time, but I didn't want it to show, except from my questions. The interview was not to be filled up with me, as it is today, but the person I wanted to bring out.

My Soviet friend, for example...he is working today with General Electric...loves this country. But as he said at the time it is a big adjustment. He said that he was not starving in the Soviet Union because he had a good position, but there was no future for his children. He wanted his son to go to MIT, which he did, and my physicist is doing research at General Electric.

I met some remarkable people through the years because of the Voice of America program. I feel that it really was a tremendous privilege to have that microphone and to be able to talk to people everywhere and have their letters come in telling about what was happening in their country.

Q: You did not have pressures from above to push this or that a little harder?

LYNCH: No. I did not have censorship. As a matter of fact they always seemed rather pleased with what I was doing. I would interview Congressmen, Senators, Vice Presidents, Presidents, farmers in South Dakota...never just the hierarchy but every walk of life. No, I was never censored or pushed.

There was a short time in the '80s when things were being revised. Every time we had a change of administration I saw new people coming in. It is the same in every profession I think...it is a bit harrowing when you have a whole new group come in and they decide to take over. I remember the only people we really objected to, we being broadcasters and personnel of VOA, would be a new man who would stand up and say, "Now I am going to get some really professional people in here to run the Voice of America."

Q: Obviously a man of great sensitivity.

LYNCH: I remember we had one...these were not always the head they would maybe be the deputy...new program director who said, "Now we don't think the people in the rest of the world really care about the space program anymore." Well, I knew from my program...I had several features that were weekly, steady things and one was the space program. A man from NASA came and people wrote in questions. It was our most popular feature, no question about it. I always considered the reason I had so much mail was because the space things came in, not just because they seemed to like the program, which they did. We did a labor program with a labor expert. We talked about GATT for ever and ever with the business broadcaster. I would read a letter a listener sent in and then we would discuss it in detail. We had agriculture because there were people wondering about our advances in agriculture. That wouldn't always be as exciting to American listeners. Why are you talking about fertilizer? Well we weren't broadcasting for American listeners, although we were delighted when they tuned in.

This was some of my grounding, the whole VOA experience, in foreign affairs. I remember Nancy Kassebaum coming up to me just before the confirmation process on the Hill.

Q: She is Senator from Kansas.

LYNCH: From Kansas and very much interested in Africa where I was going. She was on the committee for the confirmation hearings. She came up to me and said, "I am so glad to have someone who has the experience that you have as a non-career foreign service person." I heaved a great sigh of relief because appearing before Congress is always enough to make you a little apprehensive ahead of time. I felt that was very nice of her to put me at ease before she went up and took her seat. It was a help.

Q: Okay, let's turn to the main focus now. How was your appointment to Madagascar and the Comoro Islands? You served there from 1986 to 1989.

LYNCH: That is right, just a little over three years. Well, people had often said at VOA...especially after my trip to China and when I went out on a speaking grant. (One country I went to was the Philippines and it was having a very difficult time, I might say, when they were having riots before the fall of Marcos. I had been in the Philippines before with the Nixons.) Well, I was often referred to as an ambassador for the United States because of the programs and travels. The term had come into being, but not in my wildest dreams did I ever have it as a goal because it was not my career path.

However, thinking back to the International Women's Year, I remember that the woman who was the head of that, Ruth Bacon, was a retired Foreign Service officer. After we had worked together in that year she said to me, "You know you should be an ambassador. You know that don't you?" I said, "No, I never thought of it." She said, "Well, you should be but you will never be because you are a woman. I reached the deputy level." I tried very hard to call her at the time I knew that I could tell people about it and she had just

died. I remember being so sad. I hadn't seen her for several years and I had wanted to tell her that women had really progressed to the point where amazing things could happen.

So I think it all happened because a number of people came together at the same time with the idea. And, you don't, as we all know, have special things happen in this world unless others help you. In this case there were two things. One, I had worked for the government. I certainly couldn't help on any campaign and I never had given any money so to be a political ambassador those are usually things that make the path rather quick. I had served many Presidents of all parties very gladly without any feeling of whether I was a Democrat or a Republican. It didn't make any difference what our VOA people were either, or USIA heads, whether they were Democrats or Republicans. When you work for the government you don't ordinarily have political allegiances, at least I didn't, because I felt the important thing I was selling was the United States.

So people wrote letters, not at my instigation, I might add. A wonderful man I did know well, by the name of Arthur Burns, I would say probably started it. He was, of course, head of the Federal Reserve, became Ambassador to Germany, and was one of our most highly thought of ambassadors. He thought I should become an ambassador and he wrote a letter to the head of USIA and it went to the White House. I had some interviews...all of this took quite a while, it doesn't happen overnight. But over the course of a year or more different things happened. I also had something rather nice happen in that the man who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs had said to me that they would certainly be glad to have me if my name did come in from the White House because of my background. But, I still knew it was a very difficult process and I didn't count on it.

So it actually came to pass. The White House proposed me for two countries, Ghana and Madagascar. Then I had the call from the White House saying that the President was sending my name to be Ambassador to Madagascar and the Comoros, which was a smaller country near by. Madagascar, itself, has 12 million people and is one of the larger spots. But the Comoros were also important to us because of its location. Now it is a separate embassy. At that time it was part of the Madagascar Ambassador's responsibilities.

I remember that from the time the White House proposed me...it was not public, this had to be kept very quiet...but I went over to the Department of State and thought I could continue my program and also be learning about Madagascar. But I found in the matter of just a couple of weeks that I really couldn't do a good job of preparation unless I gave it my fullest attention. So I told one or two people it was necessary to tell at VOA that I was going to be on temporary duty and that is the way we said it on the air. I was just off on a temporary assignment and I would be back. And I was back for my final program just a week or so before I left.

Q: Did you announce what you were going to do and how one prepares to become an ambassador?

LYNCH: I did a whole program about my becoming an Ambassador but not on how one prepares to be one. I did tell them a little bit about Madagascar and where it was, what its exports were, a little bit about it. I received right at the Embassy about a hundred letters a year coming in from people all over the world who had heard the last program and just wanted to touch base.

Q: How did you prepare to be an Ambassador?

LYNCH: I spent time at the Department of State in the African Bureau, in particular the East African Branch. I studied. I read cables. The big part was interviews. Probably as many as sixty. Constantly having consultation with people in the Department of State on numerous subjects. Then consultations with the various agencies I would be working with...AID, the intelligence people, the Pentagon, etc.

The aim was to get to know the people you would be working with from afar and also so that you would learn yourself the mission of AID, for example. That was always an interesting one for me, the Agency for International Development. I had heard that in many Embassies it was a great bone of contention between the Ambassador and the AID director. There was bad feeling. I said to myself that it was not going to be that way if I could help it where I am going. I learned on the scene that the AID people help an Ambassador with the mission. The AID people have the money you want to have to help an emerging country with difficulties. You want to be able to help them build a hydroelectric plant or help with their banking system, as part of your mission.

I had extremely good fortune because perhaps with all my good intentions if I hadn't had the two directors I had from AID it wouldn't have worked as well as it did. In the first instance I had a wonderful man who had a very small staff. His wife also worked. We worked together just perfectly and accomplished, I think, a great deal. Well, testimony to what happened later, we did accomplish a great deal. He had been there three or four years and was reassigned. Someone new came out. I thought, oh, I have lost this wonderful man and it will never be quite the same. And along came an equally wonderful man. So I was very lucky on that. We worked just as well together as the first one and I had worked.

AID was so pleased in Washington that they decided to make Madagascar a real showcase. The consequence of that was that just before I was leaving AID started to build it up to enormous (relatively speaking) proportions. I disagreed with that because I think it works better in a smaller country on a smaller scale. The first thing you know you have logistical problems, two administrative officers competing for housing space in the same city. I understand that problems have arisen because of the large staff.

Q: Small countries can't take it. We tend to come in and take over.

LYNCH: I am giving you my frank opinion. On a platform I would support AID to the hilt because I believe very strongly in what they are doing and I think they have very good

people. But as in all instances, the bureaucracy is apt to...the tail wags the dog. I think that can happen when things build up too much.

Now in my Embassy, when I arrived we had too small a staff and we doubled it while I was there, but only because that was the way State wanted it, and they understood our needs. We needed a political officer very badly and didn't have one. A good one came in. We needed a good economic officer. The staff was built up to be a very fine one. It isn't the most important place in the world, but for its size of 12 million people, and its strategic spot off the east coast of Africa and with the straits running by and with possible troubles in South Africa and perhaps tankers having to come up our way, it is important to have it do well.

Also there was a very strong Soviet influence there and I think that is one of the main reasons we wanted it to be a good working embassy.

It is a wonderful job.

Q: When you went out what were your implicit or explicit instructions? What were American interests in Madagascar?

LYNCH: Economic interests were almost at a standstill because it was a Marxist oriented government. Everything had been nationalized. American firms had had to pull out. AMOCO, the oil company, was there, but that was the only big enterprise at that point. One of the things that I interpreted I was to do was to lay the groundwork for future investment. We did a great deal of that. We tried to interest people in this country, I talked endlessly to the President of Madagascar about a new investment code. He said that he had one and why did he need another one. I said, "You need a new one because the one you have isn't good enough. You are not going to attract people until you give them some profit. You can't keep the 51%." He would say that I sounded like the French. The French and the Americans and the Soviet were the big influences there.

So I did a great deal with the President trying to improve the investment code and improve his attitude towards the United States which was not very good when I went out. I had very good relations with the President. I admired him for his intelligence..."admire," he is still alive. The other President, the one in the Comoros, was assassinated right after I left. President Ratsiraka, in Madagascar, was attracted, in his youth, to the communist system, having gone to university in Paris. He went into the French navy and became a captain. He promoted himself to admiral after he became President. This is a man of great intelligence. I was always sorry that he wasn't more oriented towards us. I think one of my chief jobs was to orient him more in our direction. During my tour, conditions were good with him and the ministers, I think they were improved. So I felt good about that. You can't make massive changes but I had helped a little bit for the future.

Q: What was the political situation when you arrived? Was it a one party situation?

LYNCH: Pretty much a one party system. The President starting loosening up to where he said he wanted it to be a democracy. You see, our strength started to become obvious in those years...I must say that President Reagan could never have enough credit for building up the defense because I think, taking just Madagascar, the President of Madagascar after Vietnam had written us off as weak. The Soviets were the people he should hitch his wagon to because he felt the Soviets were stronger. He had his limited military equipment from them. As we became stronger he had more respect for us. So I went in at a good time to help further relations because I had the backing of this superpower that he was beginning to have more respect for than he had had in the past, even though he still ranted and raved about what the United States had done to him.

The day I presented my credentials he went on and on, not on the television part, about all these awful things that America had done to him.

Q: What had we done?

LYNCH: We had corrupted his students, we had done things with our ships that we shouldn't have done, just all kinds of things. I knew what some of the basis of his charges were, they were not good charges at all. This was in front of his staff and a couple of my staff. After that, I always met with him face to face with no interpreter, no staff, because that was the way the relationship could build the best. I liked him. I didn't agree with him and I told him and this was really the foundation of our relationship.

Early on I said that I would start with a new beginning and I knew all these things he was feeling strongly about. I said that I would start with a clean slate and we would start from here. I said that I wouldn't always agree with him, but I would respect his view. He liked that attitude. He was a very strong man with a big ego. He liked that I would speak up.

I remember that someone told me in the Department before I left that this man was probably going to be very condescending to me because I was a woman. That wasn't the case at all. I always felt he treated me exactly the same as he would have treated a male ambassador.

A little anecdote, what I did for my country. He smoked long Cuban cigars and I am allergic to cigarette smoke much less the cigar smoke. The purer our air becomes the more allergic I am. I sat on one side of his desk and the cigar smoke would come pouring out. My anecdote is that one day he stopped to answer the phone. He put his cigar in the ashtray and it all came right at me and I started to sneeze. I sneezed all the way through his phone call. I managed to pull out of the sneezing session when he returned and picked up his cigar. The next time I went to his office he said, "How are you? When you were here last time you had a terrible cold."

A couple of years later a government official came for the inauguration. A man this time from the Department, a deputy assistant secretary, and he said to me, "Oh, I was so worried because I didn't think I could get through my speech because I am so allergic to

tobacco and he pulled out a cigar and I thought I was going to sneeze." So it wasn't just a female thing!

We had a program called Food for Progress and it was wonderful. The Ambassador just before me had laid the groundwork.

Q: Who was the Ambassador just before you?

LYNCH: Robert Keating. Life is such that one Ambassador sets up something and the next one takes the credit for it. I like to say I really received credit for our big import of rice coming in. It all went well and it really started the economy on a new turn. But it is because the Ambassador just before me had really organized the program, had set it up and had it all ready to roll, and I came in and made it roll. I hope the efforts I made helped the next Ambassador who came in. That is the way it goes in the Foreign Service, as you know. One sets it up and the next one gets the credit. But that is all right because it passes on and all turns out even in the end.

The economy was in terrible shape in Madagascar. The farmer wouldn't grow rice because he wouldn't make any money. People couldn't buy because the price of rice was too high. We brought in rice to go into government silos. The black market was buying up all the rice and would release it around Christmas time. We brought in tons of rice and the government had to keep it until Christmas time and then release it and sell it at a price that we set with the World Bank. Then the black market was left holding its silos with their rice. This worked because suddenly the people had enough rice when what we had brought in was being released. The farmer by the time I left was starting to grow more rice because he was getting a better price for it in the marketplace. It was the old wheel starting to turn, but ever so gently. It never really took off. But there were many more goods in the stores than when I had arrived. It was starting.

And now the tragedy of Africa and of small countries is that there have been riots, not a coup, because the President still is in partial power...he is in his Palace with 2,000 guards and the rest of the government has been taken over by opposing sides. There is a new Prime Minister and all Cabinet members are new. The President is ruling with the new people but everything is at a standstill. All the investment that the Ambassador who had followed me had very carefully set up...he was going to have people come over from the Overseas Investment Corporation...all had to be canceled because of a strike. The strike has been going on from this point for more than six months. But things are starting to roll again. The mails are starting to work better. The planes are starting to fly better internally.

I am always hopeful that there will be a great turn around because you have very intelligent people, the Malagasy are extremely intelligent. They are industrious. They have vanilla and coffee and minerals. The markets are low now, but they have the wherewithal and they have skills. This country can be very successful.

Q: They are basically of Malaysian stock aren't they?

LYNCH: Yes they are. They are more Asian than African.

Q: What is their orientation? Do they look towards Africa?

LYNCH: Not really. It is amazing. I didn't know until I arrived there how little they looked toward Africa. They don't consider themselves African. Now they do send people to conferences there. The President had hopes of being very important in the Organization of African States, but he didn't make president of it. There were no ambassadors there from African countries when I first arrived, although there were 20 or so embassies from Eastern Europe, Iran, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, etc. It was rather a large diplomatic community because they all figured it was a rather important place to send someone. But Africa, no.

The people are very Asian in their thinking and looks. Their rice paddies reminded me of Nepal when I first arrived, with all the terraces. The look of the country is very much like Nepal. These are wonderful people. Really lovely. Very passive people, but they can be aroused and then can be angry, in fights between themselves, cut off heads if necessary.

Q: The old Malaya business.

LYNCH: That's right. But basically they will absorb a great deal of hardship without complaining. The FSNs were fine people to work with and outstanding. We had a great many of them and without them an embassy couldn't run.

Q: We were competing with the Soviets there. This was sort of at the end of Soviet influence overseas, things starting collapsing around 1989.

LYNCH: Yes, that is right. Let's even take it to late 1988. When was the first summit here in Washington? I believe that was December 7, 1988, if I remember properly. Among the many things that an ambassador does, one reason it makes it such an interesting job is that you are operating on so many different levels all the time. You have the political level which is all important. You have running the Embassy. You have your relationships with the different agencies. And then you have the entertaining. I did a great deal of that also. I had a beautiful residence and an outstanding household staff. I did a great deal of entertaining, always with the Malagasy. And also I liked to have the Embassy people there. Then I would integrate the Embassy people with the Malagasy.

Then I was interested in the wildlife there...the preservation there...because the burning of the forests and the danger of the lemur, a unique animal, becoming extinct. I always had World Wildlife people come to dinner when they were visiting from the United States, or from anywhere. I would have people from the Ministry of Scientific Affairs come...not just ministries, but many people from the university.

I worked very closely with the university. My next door neighbor was the President...not in the beginning, he was the head of the law school. He became one of my closest friends in Madagascar. The university, of course, politically, was very important, because that is where your riots start. The marching students brought down the government in 1975 and when I was there we had a couple of very bad times when it looked as if the government might be overthrown. My concern was for the Embassy personnel. The students were not against the United States. As a matter of fact, the Malagasy are very much oriented towards the U.S. They love us. They are French, culturally.

In my entertaining, I would sometimes include the Soviet Ambassador, and he would come if it were a special dinner, for example. He would bring his interpreter. He had a great many KGB in his embassy as Madagascar was a very important place for the Soviets because of its location...in the Indian Ocean, etc. He would come with his interpreter and I would talk with him, wherever we were. I would talk to his interpreter in French and he would interpret to the ambassador in Russian. We became rather adept at it. I always asked him if he would bring one particular interpreter who spoke beautiful French rather than with a heavy Russian accent, because I could then understand better. Never was I invited back. This is an important point to show you the changing times. But always he was very friendly and we would talk and I would go to the Soviet Embassy to sign the book if there was an earthquake, any kind of national day, etc.

But at the time of the first summit between the President and Gorbachev I invited the Soviet Ambassador ...this was not something Washington said to do, but I thought this was a good time to have the ambassador, with his wife, come to the Embassy the morning of December 7. I had a bottle of champagne and some cakes and I had my DCM sit in...she was also a very good political officer (as was the designated political officer). He brought his political officer. I also had my husband there because I thought it would be good to have the two spouses there.(As it turned out, his wife did not come.) We had a nice talk. It wasn't anything revolutionary but it was just a gesture I wanted to make because I could see the rapport in Washington coming. It went very well. We toasted the two Presidents.

That same week, the day the summit was to be over here, he invited me to come to his residence in the compound. Of course they were all living in a compound. It was the first time, according to the other ambassadors, that a Western ambassador had even gone into the compound. So that was a step.

Then we had a pianist...in the Arts in the Embassy program of sending over an artistic ambassador type...coming and there was only one good piano and that was in our residence. I was going to have the political people come to the house for a special recital but also we wanted to give one for the overall international and government structure. It was a revolutionary idea, but my USIA man, the PAO, suggested to me..."Do you think it would be possible for us to ask the Soviets and possibly use their piano and cultural center?" I thought this was a wonderful idea. Their cultural center had an interesting

location, it looked out right on top of our Embassy and we know there were many unusual things going on there besides cultural events. But I did ask and they said, "Yes."

We gave a joint affair with our pianist and their piano and cultural center. I had the invitations made up with the crest of the US Embassy and the crest of the Soviet Embassy on it. They went out and people said they thought they would never live to see the day. The Minister of Cultural Affairs, who was a very pronounced communist, a woman...I always got on well with her but I told her I didn't agree with her at all in her ideology, but I was glad to see a woman in high places. She said no American Ambassador had ever called on her before. She came to this event. From then on everything changed. She allowed us to use her library for exhibits, which she never had before. It changed the whole situation.

Q: Did you find a weakening in the zeal of the French-inspired far left socialism as they started looking at the Soviet Union?

LYNCH: Well, it was, but it was slow and subtle. The Soviet Ambassador after our cultural affairs and our visits back and forth between residences...the next thing was that he invited everyone for a sports day within the compound. This was truly revolutionary. Then I had everybody for an American, western picnic at the residence. It started to rain during the picnic and I remember inviting everyone inside. The men, many of whom were obviously KGB, were astonished that we would let them in our house. They just couldn't get over it. The Soviets were much friendlier towards us but they did not lessen their subversive activity. I don't want it to seem as if it did, and I am afraid sometimes people think all the danger disappeared, because it didn't. It was good for us, though, to get to know them better.

But I must say that they used some of the contacts that we made in a way that we had to be very wary of...because we were visiting back and forth and because relations were better they were able to meet some of our FSNs more easily and that is always dangerous ground. We were very much aware and alert to that fact. And it was fascinating. The friendship forming on the top, but the old ways continuing on the bottom.

Q: Still playing some of the games.

LYNCH: Even now.

Q: Did you see the weakening in the ideology of the Malagasy?

LYNCH: Yes, I think disillusionment would be the word. The spare parts not working. I left in September 1989 and the big fall didn't come until November/December 1989. When the Wall came down and the Romanian revolution in December 1989. This is when President Ratsiraka, again being an extremely intelligent man, had to reassess things a little bit. He must have taken a good look. I think he knows that things have changed. I think the people in the country do and they want very much to have a free enterprise.

They were pushing hard for it when I was there. The President was going along with it. I must say that President Ratsiraka was good about going along with the World Bank, the IMF, and with our plans. That was important and why we supported him in election time of the spring of 1989. He was making the effort. The problem was that he was not making it fast enough for the people in his country who wanted private enterprise, wanted to get the wheel turning, wanted to get food on the streets for the poor, faster. I think for him it was difficult and he was dragging his feet, but he was doing it, but not fast enough for his own country's satisfaction.

Q: What about your USIA operations? Were these going along fairly well?

LYNCH: Very well. I had good people from USIA, two people. A junior officer. We had an acting PAO because I had taken away the chief one, Marilyn Hulbert, and made her my DCM, and we could never get another one out there. They were always due to come and something would happen. We did have two splendid acting ones. One had to move on to Morocco and the new one who came was young, but outstanding. So I was very fortunate on that. They had good press relations. The press by the time I had arrived had opened up. Not that they didn't have misinformation columns. The most difficult part, and I think this is true in other countries that had their Marxist orientation...the radio was where you would get your anti-West propaganda. Television was not so bad, but radio which was always in Malagasy rather than French was where you would get your vitriolic talk about Libya, Iran and things that were anti-West. We would try whatever we could to set the misinformation straight. Things were going pretty well. We had to go pick up the press for things we wanted them to cover because their transportation just wasn't there. They would say, "Yes, we want to come," and we would go pick them up.

Q: But it wasn't the situation you find in some countries where you almost have to pay to get your stories into the press?

LYNCH: No. I think through the years we had been building and when the President started to ease up on us the press did too. They liked the people we brought in from USIA, visiting scholars, arts, etc. We would get excellent press, wonderful reviews when we would have speakers come.

Q: What was your impression of the African Bureau in Washington, the Department of State, as far as support, etc.?

LYNCH: Well, they were the best. That was my impression and I heard this from everybody in Africa. I have heard that it is better than any other Bureau for support. We are so far out there, so removed. Even when budget problems were pressing, if we presented our case properly, we would get help. If we really needed something we would get it from the African Bureau. I felt in close contact. Good desk officers. Just outstanding support. When I would come back for briefings and debriefings, the African Bureau was right there solidly behind me. There was never any feeling that I was political and they were regular. There was just tremendous rapport. I was always relieved that they

would say that they heard I was doing very well...they would hear that from the Madagascar Ambassador here and others. That was encouraging to me because I would come home and they would tell me I was making relations better out there, etc. I tell you that because I am so pleased that a political ambassador can be treated and regarded as well as a Foreign Service officer. There is something to be said for the infusion.

Q: I think any thinking Foreign Service officer feels that way. It does bring in good solid new blood. When somebody comes in with no qualifications and no interests, these are the horror stories.

LYNCH: For the most part that is not the case. Certainly a non-political officer can stick his or her neck out a little more because you are not quite as confined to the bureaucratic channel, if you are not unreasonable about it. I think that is important too, that you can make changes that need doing and then you can sell them to the Department and tell them why...back it up with facts. Maybe you can do some things that you might not be able to do as a Foreign Service officer.

Q: The Foreign Service is basically a practical bunch and if your ambassador arrives and has clout, it really doesn't matter where they come from. The clout is the important element.

Summing up this period as Ambassador, I wonder if you could tell us what gave you the greatest satisfaction and what were some of the greatest disappointments?

LYNCH: You remind me of a question that I was asked by Mike Armacost, somebody I knew and admired so much. He was Under Secretary for Political Affairs when I first went out. I saw him on my first trip back and we were talking in his office. He said, "Pat, how do you like it?" I said, "Oh, I love it. It just couldn't be a better job, more interesting place. I am so glad I am there." He said, "I knew you would. What is the most interesting part of it?" I said, "I think it is the diversity. There is so much on so many different levels. You are working with the people in the Embassy; you are working with people back in Washington; you are working with the Malagasy; you are working with the government, which is such a high priority. Everyday is different and a challenge."

There were, of course, crises, but I don't mind them, I get very calm in a crisis. I seem to do things almost on automatic pilot during such periods. So it was the diversity. I like the challenge. To be truly happy you need to be challenged to live up to your greatest potential. That is really happiness in a job or in life when you can be taxed at every level of your potential and that certainly is what comes with the job in an interesting country.

Q: Was there anything that you wished you could have done but just couldn't get done there?

LYNCH: Oh, yes. I wish I could have done it before so that the second time I would know everything to start with. But you don't, you certainly have to learn, at least the first

year, on the job no matter how much you have studied. I did a lot of studying. The second year you know what you are doing and you can be effective. The third year you are really geared up for it. I think three years is probably right because you are working at top speed at high tension whether one is conscious of it or not. If I had it to do again I would know so many things. It would have been easier. I don't think I would have done it differently, it just would have been easier.

Q: Could you tell me just a bit about what you are up to now?

LYNCH: I came back...I was fortunate because I was home five days when the President of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty called me and said he would like to talk to me. We met and he offered me the job of Director of Corporate Affairs here in Washington. That was very good because I like Washington, know people and have worked here for years and years. So I said yes, because I believed in the mission of RFE/RL, which is a private corporation but it has a great deal of independence as it is sponsored by a Board for International Broadcasting which receives its funding from Congress. This gives us more independence then VOA has. I believe in the mission which is to keep the free flow of information going into the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries. Today the mission is, we feel, just as important; those countries feel it is just as important because now they are struggling to solidify a very fragile democracy. And of course there are 15 new countries in the former Soviet Union to which we broadcast (not in English at all) but already we broadcast in 12 of those languages, Russian sufficing for the others. We are the only people in place with all of those languages.

So I went out of Africa into Eastern Europe at a time, late 1989, when everything started to happen. Of course, I love to learn about new things and this has exposed me to a great deal of information about what has been going on on the former Soviet Union scene and these newly developing countries of Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and the three Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

I love it because it is never dull. There is always something happening. It is a learning experience. I go to Munich about twice a year because Munich is our head-quarters. Washington has a news bureau plus some language service desks. I work very closely with the news bureau. The language service people I work with a little more closely. We now have a new branch of the Research Institute here. The Institute is something that we set up in Munich. So it is again a multifaceted, not always tangible sort of assignment, but very, very interesting.

I retired from the Foreign Service after I came back when I had the offer to come here, because RFE/RL is a private corporation. I had had 21 years in government. I retired with a small ceremony in the Director General's Office. Ed Perkins was the Director General. He had been our Ambassador to South Africa and I had visited him there. He presented me with the United States flag and the Ambassador's flag as they do for out going ambassadors who are retiring. And some kind words. I felt good about that because I

think it is very important to serve your country and I had a good 21 years, 26, 27 actually, and I wouldn't trade it for all the money in the world.

Q: Well, I think you very much. I really appreciate this.

LYNCH: I have enjoyed it. It is always good to talk about my career. Thank you very much.

[For additional reading: Thanks for Listening: High Adventures in Journalism and Diplomacy , Patricia Gates Lynch, March 2008, Countinghouse Press Inc., ISBN-10 09878619137]

End of interview