

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

WALTER COLESHILL

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 10th of April 2012. This is an interview with Walter Coleshill and it's being done on behalf of the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. And we'll have at it.

COLESHILL: Well, that's -- got that out of the way. So let's at it, as they say.

Q: OK. I might want to explain for the reader that this is somewhat unusual for our oral history program, but I can't let the opportunity pass. Walter is a retired British Foreign Service Officer and was involved with various things, including ones we've dealt with on the American side. So I'd like to pick up that. But what I thought I would do is since you're a spouse now, and we do have a spouse program, I'll just use that as a convenient cover. But let me start. First of all, I'd like to get some questions as I usually do on these things for people to understand who you are and where you're coming from, if that's all right with you.

COLESHILL: Yes, that's fine.

Q: First place, where and when were you born?

COLESHILL: I was born in Paddington, London on the 17 January 1928.

Q: Well, then you were just about thirty days older than I. I was 14th of February 1928.

COLESHILL: Well, there you are. Obviously a good year.

Q: Well, it was a year of the dragon, you know?

COLESHILL: *(laughs)* Is that right?

Q: Yes! We are -- by the way, we have two contemporaries that will probably ring down the corridors of time in that same thing. Shirley Temple and Mickey Mouse.

COLESHILL: *(laughs)* Well, Shirley Temple I met subsequently in Accra, Ghana --

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: -- when she came to be the U.S. Ambassador.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: And I must say she was one of the toughest legislators I ever met. She argued her corner wonderfully well.

Q: Well, all you have to do is look at the old movies to realize it. I mean this is -- a kid that age to be able to do what she was doing, you're talking about a real intelligence, real intelligence there.

COLESHILL: Yes, indeed. When we, at the British High Commission heard that Shirley Temple Black was coming to be the American Ambassador in Accra, many thought, "Oh, this will be a pushover." She wasn't. She was one of the most able negotiators I ever met.

Q: OK. Well, let's go back. Now, let's take on your father's side. What do you know about your family on your father's side?

COLESHILL: I know quite a bit about it as I have researched the family genealogy. Unfortunately the research has taken place since his death in May 1972. My father was born in London, England, in 1902. His father died when he was four, his mother when he was ten in 1912. In the following year, 1913, I understand, he was entered into the British Merchant Navy Training Service. That meant he was put aboard a former prison hulk moored in the River Thames at Woolwich where he began his training for the British Merchant Service. The following year, World War I began on 4 August 1914. In 1915 the British government was looking for cannon fodder. Here was this young man, thirteen years of age, and an orphan. He is fit, around six-feet tall and enrolled into a Government-backed scheme of employment. So what do the authorities do? They falsify his age and enter him into Man's Service in the Royal Marines.

Q: Good God.

COLESHILL: After a short period of basic training at the Royal Marine Depot at Deal, Kent, he was drafted and saw service aboard the battleship H.M.S (His Majesty's Ship) Malaya. In May 1916, he saw service at the Battle of the Dogger Bank against the German High Seas Fleet. In the action H.M.S. Malaya was severely damaged and my father partially lost his hearing. Malaya was then sent, would you believe when the US was still a neutral power, to Brooklyn Naval Yard for major repairs. My father claimed that the short period he spent in New York was the happiest time of his life. He survived World War I and, subsequently, took part in the British contingent to the French Victory Parade in Paris. In 1919, he claimed he was the youngest member of the British contingent. He was at that time 17-years of age. At six-foot-two inches in height and in his Royal Marine dress uniform, he must have looked absolutely immaculate.

Q: My God, that's quite something.

COLESHILL: Yes, it was a good start.

Q: Well, what did he do after the war?

COLESHILL: Like so many combatants, he fell upon hard times. He had no marketable skills. However, being tall, good looking and with war medal ribbons on his uniformed chest he was an asset. He found employment as a hotel porter in West London. In 1920, he joined the British Army and was sent, would you believe, to Iraq --

Q: Oh my God.

COLESHILL: ... to assist in crushing the so-called Iraq Rebellion of 1920 – 1922.

Q: Ah yes, that's when the --

COLESHILL: He stayed there for, I would think, about three years. Then he came back to England where he met, and subsequently married my mother in 1927. I was born in 1928.

Q: OK. How about on your mother's side?

COLESHILL: She was the daughter of Walter Green, an ostler [a person who works with horses.] Walter Green and his wife had a family of eleven children. My mother was named Lily. She was the eighth child and her parent's first daughter.

Q: My God.

COLESHILL: My mother was born in 1895 in -- in Kensington, London.

Q: Mm-hmm. Well then, where did she go to school?

COLESHILL: She went to school at a London Board School in Notting Hill -- a part of London, which is now fashionable. In those days however, it was just another smoke-filled, grimy inner-London suburb. Britons were still burning coal in their domestic grates and, at any time from September to May. You were lucky if you could see across the street.

Q: Yes, the so-called "London fog" was really coal smoke.

COLESHILL: In England it was called the "London peculiar." It was yellow-gray in color and had a sulphuric taste. All else apart, the fog had an awful effect upon the bronchial problems of the citizens. In fact, when I was born in January 1928 it was one of those bitterly cold periods when The Round Pond in London's Kensington Gardens froze. I was pushed in my pram onto the ice. (I still shudder at the thought.) Even parts of the tidal River Thames froze. And so my mother went to school in Notting Hill from 1900. Five years after I was born -- 1933 -- I went to the same school and had my mother's form teacher as my school principle.

Q: All right, well as a kid -- a couple of things. Were you a reader? Some are, some aren't?

COLESHILL: Lord alive. Yes! My mother's perpetual complaint was trying to get my attention. She claimed she looked for the nearest newspaper or book and would find I had "my nose in it." Yes, I loved reading, learning, and school from the very beginning.

Q: Do you remember some of the books you read as a small kid?

COLESHILL: No. -- I suspect I read all the usual books that children read, especially those interested in reading adventure stories set in overseas locations. The first book I remember reading, at age eleven, was Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," which was about life in the Chicago meatpacking trade.

Q: I've never quite felt the same about meat after reading it.

COLESHILL: Well, yes (*laughs*), I suppose you're right. But this, this led me down the path to being a life long socialist. Even today, when I regard myself as a Social Democrat, I know which party I shall be voting for come November 2012.

Q: Well, where did your family fit politically?

COLESHILL: That is an interesting question, because it was never discussed. I was never certain about my father's political affinities. I suspect he supported the British Labour party. Around 1935 my father was a foreman decorator. At one time he had his own business, but most of the time he was a freelance. He would take contracts on old Victorian-era residential buildings that were being refurbished and dragged into the 20th century. With the increasing demand for office space in central London, families could no longer afford to rent them - so developers had them converted into offices and

showrooms. My father would take a contract to convert the building to current standards. I never discussed with him his politics, but I know my mother's politics were entirely Conservative with a big 'C'.

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: ... this was because her Father, my maternal grandfather, was a staunch Conservative. He had been -- an ostler, O-S-T-L-E-R, in other words --

Q: Deals with horses and --

COLESHILL: -- someone who deals with horses.

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: Rumor, within the family, had it at sometime in his life Grandfather Green had been the head coachman to Gordon Selfridge, the American who gave his name to Selfridges Department Store on Oxford Street in London's West End. How accurate the rumor was I have no idea. But it is an interesting tale!

Q: Oh yes.

COLESHILL: When Gordon Selfridge decided coaches and horses had had their day and he wanted a motorcar, he offered the job as a chauffeur to my grandfather. He refused it on the grounds that he had lived all his life with horses and he was going to "die looking after horses."

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: And he did just that.

Q: Well, one other question. In the American context, it can mean something, but in the British context I'm not too sure. What about religion? Were you Church of England or one of the other denominations?

COLESHILL: In the religious spectrum --

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: -- together with my brother and sister, we attended Sunday school every week. Neither my mother nor my father, were in any way religious. My father was -- if anything -- an atheist. My mother believed she was an Anglican, but never attended church. As far as I am concerned, and we'll come to that later on, there was a period when I grew fond of the Anglican Church. With thousands of other children I was evacuated from London to the provinces on 1 September 1939, that is to say three days before the beginning of World War II, to a delightful village in Wiltshire, where I joined

the village church choir. There were six of us, and for two and a half years, I attended St. Andrew's Church at Castle Combe twice every Sunday and Holy Days. As good luck would have it, I was trained as a chorister by a New Zealand Army staff sergeant who was the volunteer village choirmaster from 1940 to 1942. As a result, I embraced Anglican Faith. To this day, whenever I am in England, I enjoy exploring the many superb Cathedrals and churches with which we are blessed. I still recall the liturgy by which Our Lord is worshipped in the UK.

Q: Yeah, I spent four years on my knees at a prep school run by Episcopalian monks in Connecticut.

COLESHILL: Yes?

Q: What about in education? Were there any subjects of particular appeal to you and subjects that didn't appeal to you?

COLESHILL: My education was doing fine up to the age of 11 when I had achieved some success in the examinations set by the London County Council for students. Unfortunately, come September 1939, thousands of young people were sent off into the provinces because the British government wished to avoid refugees and casualties from bombing. It was thought the German Air Force -- if we ever went to war -- would immediately rain bombs on London and other urban locations causing massive civilian casualties and unrest. And so, women and children were voluntarily evacuated. I was evacuated on 1 September 1939. In my home, here in North Carolina, I have a watercolor of Castle Combe, a village that has won the title of Britain's prettiest village contest. Unfortunately I was one of one hundred London evacuee children who descended on this small village --

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: -- on the 1st of September 1939, when the Billeting Officers were expecting twenty!

Q: Oh boy.

COLESHILL: ... that meant there were thirty village children and one hundred Londoners. We had to be distributed around the small school. Initially, we divided into two groups: morning children and afternoon children. In good weather it was fine: Classes assembled beneath the nearest horse-chestnut tree and we took our lessons in the open air. In the winter it was an entirely different matter. With ages ranging from eight to fourteen years, one group would be doing arithmetic whilst another age group did English language exercises, or reading. It was a problem for students and teachers but, if a student was determined to learn, as I was, it worked. But my education suffered and I never really got back in to the swing of fulltime education. In 1942, when I returned to London, German bombers would make occasional air raids into the London area; education would

cease as we trooped into the cellars wondering if we were going to be alive in the next five minutes.

Q: Well, of course in a way your experience to a certain extent replicates that of, particularly, children who lived in farming communities in the States of the one-room schoolhouse.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: You know, where a teacher -- one aisle would be the first grade, the other aisle would be the second, and so forth.

COLESHILL: That's right.

Q: But you did pick up, particularly at the earlier age, an awful lot of education.

COLESHILL: I was an avid reader. And being a self-starter, I could, always find matters of interest for my inquiring mind.

Q: We're almost exactly the same age. And one of the things, although I lived in the States, I lived in a military town, Annapolis in Maryland where the naval academy is located. And my brother was a naval officer during the war. And of course, everyone there all followed the war diligently, particularly the young boys.

COLESHILL: Mm-hmm.

Q: And it was probably one of the greatest geographic lessons you could have. I mean we knew where every little island and where every Russian village was practically. I assume that you had very much the same experience.

COLESHILL: Oh Lord alive, yes. Miss Brockway, the Principal of the village school, was an absolute tartar. She had gone to Cambridge at a time when it was not normal for young ladies to attend university. She was a lifelong spinster who believed in corporal punishment. She also believed in broadening the minds of the children in her charge. For example: there was the "map room" where maps of the various sites of the conflicts around the world were on permanent exhibit: Norway; the Low Countries; the loss of Dunkirk, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Malay Peninsular; General McArthur's exit from the Philippines to Australia. Yes, we had all those. So we had -- we didn't know it at the time -- a superb geography lesson.

Q: Did you have any inkling that sort of the diplomatic service or was it military service that -- I assume that you assumed you were going to end up with the military too, didn't you?

COLESHILL: In wartime Britain, everyone, male or female alike, knew that, medical exemption apart, at age eighteen they would be directed into some form of compulsory

National Service. Usually it was into military service but in mining districts, males could be directed into the coal pits. I was conscripted into the British Army a few days after my eighteenth birthday in 1946. After six weeks of initial basic infantry training, which every recruit into the British Army endured, I was transferred to the Royal Signals. This made eminent sense as I had experience with the British Post Office, as a Telegraphist. Unfortunately, having done six-month training at the School of Signals, much to my disgust as I wanted to go to the Far East, I was sent to the War Office in London. When I spoke to my Adjutant I was told to return to my desk and wait to be told where I would serve my time in the British Army. Nearly three years later I left my London-based unit and, very frustrated, re-entered civilian life. The frustration was heightened when I did not obtain a post in the Commonwealth Office as I was posted to a humdrum Civil Service Department in London. It took me thirteen years before I left that Department and entered the Commonwealth Office.

Q: Well, how did you find the British Civil Service where you were, from your viewpoint, this particular time before you got to the Commonwealth Office?

COLESHILL: I was employed by the Savings Department, which was an enormous manpower-user with little promotion prospects. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it because I found I had the ability to train people in the work that we were doing. This was recognized and I was asked to do training jobs for the Department. I also enjoyed representing my Department at swimming events against other government Departments.

Q: Well, did your experience in that element of government make you suspicious of government service in other -- anywhere else too, or not?

COLESHILL: No, the only thing I found difficult to understand was why there wasn't an equality of promotion opportunities. In my former department the average age for promotion from a basic grade to the first line supervisor was 22 years.

Q: Whew.

COLESHILL: Whereas in other departments, one served for as little as three years before being promoted. I found that iniquitous and said so! Saying it did not endear me to my first and second line supervisors. However, all the time, if there was ever a job opportunity overseas, I applied for it.

In 1960, with the beginning of the disintegration of the British Colonial Empire, The Commonwealth Office needed staff to fill high commissions around the world. I applied to transfer to that office and was successful. Unfortunately, my home department did not want to release me and it was three long, weary years before I achieved my goal and entered the ranks of the Commonwealth Relations Department.

Q: Well now, these things can be somewhat misleading. Was the Commonwealth Department the equivalent of the Foreign Affairs Department to or --

COLESHILL: The British Government had three Departments of State that regulated Britain's relations with overseas territories. In 1963, by far the largest was The Foreign Office that dealt with foreign countries: Germany, France, the U.S., etc. Then came The Commonwealth Relations Office, which dealt with the self-governing dominions: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, the newly independent countries such as Ghana, plus The Irish Republic. The third department was the Colonial Office. They dealt with British colonies, protectorates and protected states. The Gold Coast, for example, was a colony until 6 March 1957 when, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, it ceased to be a colony and became the independent Commonwealth country called Ghana. . At that time the responsibility was transferred from the Colonial Office to the Commonwealth Office.

Q: Well now, this was when?

COLESHILL: In 1966 the Colonial Office and The Commonwealth Office merged to become The Commonwealth Relations Office. That Office merged with the Foreign Office in 1968 to become The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)

Q: But where were you? You arrived at the Commonwealth Office when?

COLESHILL: I arrived in the Commonwealth Office in June of 1963 The Commonwealth Office's need for additional staff was fed by the constant demand by their overseas offices, or High Commissions, to fill the gaps in their personnel requirements. The transfer of staff to offices overseas resulted in a lack of continuity within the Commonwealth Office itself. In early 1963 the Head of Personnel Department called me and said, "Look here Walter. We will transfer you in, but only on the understanding that you don't apply for an overseas job within the next four years." Having always believed that half a loaf is better than no bread, I agreed.

I arrived in the Commonwealth Office in June 1963. Two months later I was asked to choose between being posted to High Commissions in Accra or Bombay. As I had friends in Ghana, it was to West Africa I went. In January 1964 I flew to Accra and joined the British High Commission.

Q: Now, when you arrived in Accra, Ghana was an independent nation at this point.

COLESHILL: Ghana had been independent since 1957. It was a particularly interesting place to be as, even with Kwame Nkrumah as President, at that particular point there was a parliamentary party to oppose Nkrumah's government. For me, life in Accra was hot and humid, but very pleasant. The department stores and shops were filled with the very finest products from the United States, UK, France, Germany, even from South Africa. Almost everything anyone wanted could be found in stores in Accra. Unfortunately, that joyful situation lasted only for a further three months.

In March 1964, Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (C.P.P) orchestrated a referendum that decreed Ghana should be a One-Party State. Having packed the

referendum with well-organized supporters: the market “mammies,” who ran Ghana’s retail markets and taxi drivers in the major cities. The declared result was an overwhelming victory for Kwame Nkrumah and his C.P.P. Almost immediately Nkrumah and his Party’s cohorts began searching out any form of overt or covert opposition to his rule. If they were lucky, his opponents were jailed. There were also one or two deaths. For everyone but the ruling C.P.P. junta, life descended into a very unpleasant situation in rapid time. The Ghana pound, that before the election had been stronger than the British pound, rapidly plummeted into an almost worthless currency. Imported goods rapidly disappeared from the store shelves. Corruption became rampant and the black market flourished.

Q: Well, when you arrived there, what was your both title and what was your responsibility?

COLESHILL: Another interesting question because I had received training in London to be the High Commission’s Accountant. [State Department’s equivalent would be a financial management officer.] On arrival, I was told the High Commission had an experienced Accountant. Another was not needed; accordingly, I should, pro-tem, find a desk and chair and help out somewhere.

Q: I take it that Nkrumah’s actions were pretty well -- at one point I remember he was a darling boy of all of us in the west. But this is gone by this time.

COLESHILL: Yes. He’d been identified in the 1950s by the American government that Nkrumah was likely to be one of West Africa’s movers and shakers. He came to an East Coast university. I cannot tell you which one, because I’ve forgotten,

Q: It was Lincoln College or Lincoln University --

COLESHILL: Well done.

Q: -- I believe in Nebraska.

COLESHILL: When Nkrumah returned to colonial Gold Coast he founded the C.P.P that organized the citizens of Gold Coast to oppose British colonial rule. In 1957 this was achieved. Unfortunately, Nkrumah is the classic example of absolute power, corrupting absolutely. To give you an example: When the British left the Gold Coast in 1957, the amount of government funds exceeded the equivalent of 400 million British pounds.

Q: Ooh.

COLESHILL: In 1957, that was an awful lot of money. Within, seven years, in 1964, President Nkrumah’s administration had spent much of this on wasteful projects. To give you examples: Ghana bought a time-expired warship from Britain. Nkrumah had it converted to a floating gin palace. The warship could still fire its guns but, on board, were all manner of entertainment rooms where Nkrumah entertained visiting foreign

dignitaries. Ghana also brought three VC10 airliners, ostensibly for commercial use by Ghana Airways. However, one aircraft was always on standby for Nkrumah's personal use. As a result, if a passenger wanted to fly overseas on Ghana Airways routes between Accra and U.K., Germany, Italy, Egypt, or Greece the passenger risked the flight being canceled because Nkrumah wanted, often at short notice, to fly to Hanoi or elsewhere. A road of motorway specifications was built around Accra. Within a week of the road being opened it was declared to be dangerous and was closed because the roadside dwellers had stolen copper cables and light fittings and used them for their domestic purposes. The country was descending, headlong, into financial chaos.

Q: Yeah. Well

COLESHILL: You asked me about my rank. At the time, of my arrival I had not reached diplomatic status. The British Diplomatic Service had a sliding scale from grade ten to grade one. Ten was the entrance level. I was at grade nine. However, within nine months of my arrival I was promoted to acting diplomatic rank. I was then a grade seven, and therefore, a Second Secretary.

Q: Did you find when you came there -- I mean Britain had years of experience in Africa. Was there a solid African core? I don't want to use -- you know what I mean. Of specialists who were going to stay and wanted to stay in Africa and work in the British system?

COLESHILL: I can only speak with authority on the Gold Coast/ Ghana situation. In 1957 numerous Britons stayed on to work in the era of post-Independence. Many stayed at least until economic conditions worsened post-1964. This compared favorably with what happened in the Belgian Congo and Algeria. In post-Independence Congo and Algeria the former Belgian and French colonists cleared out lock, stock and barrel.

At this point I should mention an agreement between U.K. and Ghana entitled "The UK/Ghana Mutual Technical Co-operation Agreement. This came into force in 1957. The agreement provided British government funds to pay the salaries, external travel, etc, for a cadre of personnel to fill essential posts within the structure of the Ghana government. When asked by the Ghana government, the British government identified a candidate and submitted his name and curricula vitae to the Ghana government. Many candidates had been previously been employed elsewhere within The Overseas Service of the British Commonwealth. The successful candidates were usually employed at Head of Department level in such essential tasks as Economic Policy, Telecommunications, Fire Department, Customs, Water Supplies, Railways, Hospitals, Aviation and Air Traffic Control. During the years 1964/67 there was usually forty of these British government employees working for the Ghana government and living in Ghana. In passing, I should recall I never saw any evidence of the "Mutual" as is set out in the title to the agreement which set up this arrangement. It was strictly uni-directional: From UK to Ghana.

Q: How did you -- when you got to Africa, I mean you were in a difficult post. How did you sort of react to this? Were you thinking yeah, this is nice, but I want to get to Europe or something like that? Or did you think it was a real opportunity?

COLESHILL: No. Exactly the opposite! In one of my first Departmental interviews I was asked where would I like to go? I said I would be happy if you post me 8,000 miles from London. Later in life, I could always travel to Europe on my own resources. At that moment I thought I saw a flicker in the interviewer's eyes that indicated they had a "sucker" on board.

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: In the corridors of power, when they wanted someone to go off into the wide blue yonder, it was known they had a ready candidate for the job. With the exception of three months training in Belgium, all of my postings were over the hills and far away. Even with the anti-British feeling being engendered in 1964/7 by Nkrumah's Ghana government, I enjoyed being in Ghana. This was an entirely different life. For the first time in my life I had a well-paid job I wanted to be identified with. My wife and I had new cars. At British government expense, my daughters were being educated in good boarding schools in England. They flew out on holiday visits twice, or three times a year. When we came home on leave we would always go off to somewhere pleasant.

The down side was my wife found she could not stand tropical heat and/or humidity. My wife very rarely accompanied me to a new post. I would go off and arrange the accommodation, sort out the heavy baggage, make our new house spic and span and settle into our new environment. For my first posting to Ghana, I flew from UK on 17 January. My wife had Easter at home in England and then came out by sea. In mid-April I greeted her on the liner the m.v. Accra at the port of Tema. Outside the dockyard gate the first thing we saw was a group of Ghanaians shuffling along the road towards us with placards reading, "Filthy British, Go Home."

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: I did what I had been told and pulled off to the side of the road, wound up my windows, and kept my, my motor running. Eventually the procession, with their "Filthy British" placards, some held up the wrong way, moved past. At the end of the line was a machete-wielding, semi-drunken character that lurched towards me and enquired which country are you from? I replied I was Canadian. Welcome to Ghana, he said.

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: At that point he disappeared headlong into a nearby ditch. I drove to our apartment. After a hasty visit to the bathroom and, with the expletives deleted, my wife enquired what have you brought me *to*? What sort of country is this?" Later at dinner of turbot, duckling and champagne on the terrace of Accra's best hotel she admitted Ghana might yet have good prospects.

Q: Did you have much social life with Ghanaians?

COLESHILL: Yes. Once you got beyond the political stance of Ghana Ministers and senior government employees, who were compelled by their C.P.P. affiliations and by their employment to maintain the C.P.P. party line, there was considerable socializing with the Ghanaian professional classes. They were delightful, sociable and sophisticated companions. Many had been educated in Britain, Europe and the U.S. Dining, dancing, playing bridge and golf were all areas where we socialized.

Q: I'm told that people who served in Ghana found it, you know, once you got to know some of the people there, that there's a lot of dancing and it's really a lot of -- they're a nice people.

COLESHILL: Ghanaians are intelligent people. They laugh easily, they love to party, they love to dance and, provided you expressed no racial intolerances, you would always be acceptable. I enjoyed being with Ghanaians. Fortunately, I never had social contacts with Kwame Nkrumah's Ministers.

Q: Since you were involved on sort of the financial side of things, I would think that this would be -- you would have to watch for illegal use of money and all that.

COLESHILL: We're talking about corruption?

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: You have to understand the West African mentality. What westerners – Britons and U.S. nationals alike - may call corruption, Ghanaians, would call the process "Tribute."

Q: Ah.

COLESHILL: As an example: If you are sick and enter hospital in the U.S. or U.K., and want a glass of water, you ring the bell and ask for a glass of water. Without payment the water appears. In Ghana, there is a different procedure. You reach under the pillow and take out a penny, the lowest coin, and ask for water. The nurse accepts the penny and brings you a glass of water. That is an acceptable contract in the Ghana I knew. Now, is that corruption? Is that tribute? I don't know. It is simply the way things were done in Ghana.

Q: Yes, I ran across something of the same measure when I was in Vietnam. I mean you paid for forms.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: Well, in the States, you know, we sort of hand out forms. But why not pay for the form? You know, you're paying for service.

COLESHILL: That's right. At another level, there is a tribe in West Africa, and I suspect they're still there today. I haven't been back to Ghana since 1968. Then they were known as the Wa Benzi, W-A-B-E-N-Z-I. In the Ga language: "Wa" is tribe, and Benzi is a diminution of Mercedes Benz.

Q: Ah.

COLESHILL: During the Nkrumah era, if an expatriate contractor signed a substantial contract with a Ghanaian Ministry for the provision of goods or services, the Minister expected what was colloquially known as a "dash," i.e. a tip, or a pourboire. Call it what you like. The day after the contract was signed, what the Minister wanted was a Mercedes Benz Saloon.

Q: Oh-ho-ho.

COLESHILL: So you had to be very, you had to be very, very careful.

Q: Well, did you have much contact with the Americans at that point, because we had a great deal of interest in Ghana early on?

COLESHILL: Yes, I did. We were not as close as we were to the Canadians, Australians and other African Commonwealth nations. Almost every developed nation in the world was pouring aid, in one form or another, into Ghana. Ghana was the poster child of what former colonies were going to be. Even after the arrival of the One Party State and the rise of Kwame Nkrumah, many countries continued to aid Ghana because they wanted Ghana to vote their way at the United Nations.

Q: Well, how about the Soviets? Was there -- I mean were they a player and was there --

COLESHILL: Oh yes, indeed. They were an enormous factor during the Nkrumah era, especially in the north of the country. I think it was at one of the airports in northern Ghana: Wa or Bolgatanga, there were hundreds of Russians and the Chinese workers constructing a 5,000-yard runway capable of accepting Russian and Chinese aircraft on their way to and from Cuba. One of the features of the 1966 coup was the ordered repatriation of hundreds of Russian and Chinese technicians from northern Ghana. I remember being sent to what became Kotoka Airport, Accra, to assess the number of Russian and Chinese contractors being flown to Accra from northern Ghana and, without refreshment, being embarked immediately onto Russian and Chinese aircraft bound for Russia and China.

Q: Well, was the coup sponsored by or cheered by sort of the west, or not, at the time?

COLESHILL: I have to answer no to the first part of that question because of the

sequence of events of that day. I lived within 400 yards of Flagstaff House, the seat of power of the Ghana government. The House had been taken over by the Ghanaians in 1957. Within the grounds of the House, the Russians built an enormous concrete bunker. Late one February Sunday afternoon my then wife and I, being keen bridge players, were playing bridge with two friends who occupied a bungalow in the grounds of Flagstaff House. We finished the final rubber at around 11:30pm and drove home.

At 4:00 on Monday morning we were woken by the sound of automatic weapons. The firing came from The Ghana Reconnaissance Regiment who, commanded by Major Afrifa, had motored for three days from northeast Ghana to Accra where they had surrounded Flagstaff House late on Sunday evening. My wife and I had driven through the Regiment's start lines without noticing anything amiss. It was only when the automatic fire was heard at 4:00am on Monday we knew a coup was beginning. Automatic arms fire continued during the day until 4:00pm when an explosion destroyed the Russian held bunker. We were told the Russians had refused to accept an invitation from Major Afrifa to leave the bunker. They died when the bunker was destroyed.

To answer your second question: From a lengthy conversation I had with Mr. Harley, the Inspector General of Police at Police Headquarters at 11am on that Monday morning, I am confident the British Government were unaware of a coup being planned by senior officers of the Ghana Army and the Ghana Police Service.

Q: How long did it take things to settle down, at least initially? Did they --

COLESHILL: It was only when the National Liberation Council declared that Nkrumah would be arrested and brought to justice before the Ghanaian Courts that most Ghanaians began to recover from the Messianic hold that Kwame Nkrumah had on the nation. Initially it took some time because of the revelations about the egregious behavior of Ghanaians during the Nkrumah era. There was a trial of senior members of Nkrumah's Administration. Three men were found guilty of the charges leveled against them and sentenced to death. They were tied to stakes set on the beach and, before large crowds of jubilant Ghanaians, they were machine-gunned to death. When a number of diplomats protested to the Ghana Government at the manner of their killing, they were told to be silent.

Q: Nkrumah I believe was out of the country, wasn't he?

COLESHILL: Yes, he was in Hanoi. He used one of the three Ghana-owned VC10s I mentioned earlier to fly to Hanoi. He took with him the last forty thousand Ghana pounds from the Ghana Treasury. Because of the Messianic aura the sycophantic Ghana press had engendered throughout Ghana, the coup plotters took advantage of the absence of Nkrumah from Ghana to mount the coup. .

Q: Did your work change?

COLESHILL: It doubled my work at due to my involvement, within the High

Commission, with the UK/Ghana Mutual Technical Agreement mentioned above. Following the overthrow of Nkrumah's Administration, the British government was prepared to accept many more Ghanaian students for University and Vocational training in the United Kingdom. The British government also began topping-up the salaries paid to some two hundred British teachers recruited by the Ghana government and who were teaching in the Ghana Education Service.

Q: When I think of Ghana I think of groundnuts.

COLESHILL: *(laughs)*.

Q: But what was Ghana producing to make it a viable country?

COLESHILL: I believe you are thinking of the Tanganyika Groundnut Scandal of 1951. That scheme, which was organized by the British Government to assist the East African Colonial Governments, was abandoned after failure of the crops and the loss of some twenty-five million pounds to the British Treasury.

Q: Ah yes.

COLESHILL: The basic source of wealth was the production of cocoa. At one time Ghana had been pre-eminent in the world's supply of cocoa. Gold was still being produced. There was also the supply of bauxite and its conversion to aluminum. This process required a massive generation of electricity. Hence the British funded construction of the Volta River's Akosombo Dam and the associated turbines.

Q: Well, how long were you in Ghana?

COLESHILL: If memory serves me correctly, I arrived in Accra on 17 January 1964 and left at the end of November 1967. It was a month short of four years.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop and we'll pick this up the next time. Where did you go?

COLESHILL: I arrived in Liverpool in northern England on 15 December 1967 with the expectation of working at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London at sometime in February 1968. However, on Boxing Day, 26 December 1967, (a public holiday) I was told to cancel my plans for leave etc, as I was to start immediate training in consular work beginning on 1 January 1968.

Q: Sounds like the same people who run the State Department (laughs).

COLESHILL: Oh, by golly, the similarity is there!

Q: (laughs) Yeah.

COLESHILL: So, early in the morning of New Years Eve I left my wife and two children at our home in Devon and journeyed to London to join a consular course that started on New Year's Day. I never forgave the Foreign Office for denying me the pleasure of enjoying the planned end of year celebration with my family.

Q: OK, well why don't we pick it up the next time. We'll talk about your consular training. And I'll be interested because I spent 30 years as a Consular Office. And we'll talk consular-wise and then move on to what you were doing after that.

COLESHILL: Just to give you a hint of where we are going, I will say I believe consular work to be one of the most rewarding aspects of diplomatic life.

Q: You're speaking to the choir.

Q: Today is the 11th of April 2012 with Walter Coleshill. And Walter, where did we leave you? You had just -- actually, I remember -- you were going to take Consular Training.

COLESHILL: That's right. On the 26 December 1968, Boxing Day and a public holiday, I was called from the Foreign Office to say basically, "Your leave has been canceled. We want you in here in London on New Years Day to start Consular Training." That followed with six weeks of intense study of what Americans would call "the FAM."

Q: Yeah, Foreign Affairs Manual, yeah.

COLESHILL: We had an enormous book, which all course members had to read study and comprehend. In those days, the work of a British Consul was a mixture of protection of British subjects and dealings with the British Merchant Navy. British consuls were assigned to major seaports around the world, Cape Town, Bergen, Baltimore, New York, places like that. To a certain extent, the power of the British Consul in regard to the British Merchant Service was awesome. It seemed we had the authority to do everything short of imprisonment and death! We could certainly discharge a troublesome seaman, or not discharge him or tell the captain what he had to do with regard to his crew. In consequence some of my time was spent in Birkenhead, a port on the Mersey River opposite Liverpool in northwest England.

Q: Yeah, I would like to get a feel for the consular service. At this time was this a service apart in the Foreign Service?

COLESHILL: No. It had originally had started that way. There were a number of Consular Services which specialized in various parts of the world: e.g. The Levant Service and the China Service and then there was Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service. These two Services had been amalgamated at various times before the Second World War. In 1943 another look was taken at the combined Service when Ministers increased the numbers of former grammar school pupils who were allowed to join the Service.

Q: Yeah, we've gone through some of these things. The American, you had the Diplomatic Service, the Consular Service, and they were combined into the Foreign Service in 1924. And you know, even into the '50s there's tremendous push to bring more people from outside the, you might say the elite universities and get more women and get more minorities into the service.

COLESHILL: As you well know there has always been a meaningful liaison between the British and the American Foreign Services. Prime Minister Thatcher, for example, came to the U.S. to discuss matters of mutual interest. On her return she instructed FCO to introduce performance pay for senior elements of the British Diplomatic Service. This was violently opposed from within the British Diplomatic Service. Many believed that giving rewards to the policymakers, and only the policymakers, was divisive. Those of us who had not reached that level of the Service opposed it vehemently. It made no difference. Leaving aside the fact that the lady loathed the British Foreign Service, when Prime Minister Thatcher made up her mind, with the snap of her handbag, the deed was done.

Q: Well now, how did the Consular Training work?

COLESHILL: Basically, I did six weeks training in London under a retired senior Consular Office official. Then you were sent off to one of the European posts for on-the-job- training. I was sent to Antwerp, Dieppe and Brussels, where I worked under the supervision of the Consul General. He gave me various jobs to do. These included administration and accounting as practiced in the Service. The first disagreeable task was prison visiting.

Q: Oh yes.

COLESHILL: My first prison visit horrified me because when the prisoner appeared in the interview room he was covered in abrasions, bruises and sores. When I enquired what had happened he replied it was none of my business as he had "fallen down the stairs."

Q: Oh God.

COLESHILL: When I examined the Consular file on the man I found he had been convicted of sexual acts with minors. My supervisor stated that no reference was to be made in my visit report of any injuries. If the prisoner had confirmed he had fallen – that was the end of the matter.

The one thing that did surprise me was that when posted overseas, British Diplomatic Officials could vote in United Kingdom elections, but Britons living abroad at that time could not. Laws passed by Parliament in Westminster brought about this situation. It was different from the American arrangements for the representation of the American public. I believe that Americans living abroad have been able to vote in U.S. elections for many years.

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: The change came about in the 1980s when British citizens living overseas were allowed to vote in General Elections in the UK same.”

Q: Well, did you get any feel -- because I'm trying to see if there was a difference. When I came into the Foreign Service, although everybody could have a counselor job, and most of us did on our first tour. So my first was in Frankfurt, but we could be a Political Officer the next time or an Economic Officer depending on what our interests and our abilities. But did you sense sort of a gulf, say, between the Consular Officers and the Political Officers?

COLESHILL: No. I recognize American first tour officers, “stand the visa line” as one of the ways to testing their abilities and as an additional opportunity to learn the local language. With the British Service there was not what Americans call “coning.”

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: In the 1960s, in the Commonwealth Office, you went everywhere and did everything. You could be a Controller one tour and something quite different the second tour. In my 25 years of service, I have done administration, consular, financial, political, passport work and, as we'll come to it, some rather strange jobs later down the line. The British did not have the rigidity. We laughingly told ourselves we were gifted amateurs. We were certainly amateurs. However, many brought unusual skills to the Service. In Ghana, my Head of Department had spent 30 years in the British Colonial Service in West Africa. What he had to learn about West Africa was virtually nothing. He knew everybody and every nuance that life in West Africa could throw at you.

Q: Well, how long were you in Antwerp then?

COLESHILL: I was in Belgium for only three months. And then I was brought home, still not knowing where I was going. Why the secrecy, God only knows. I was brought home, given a week's leave. Halfway through the week I was told my next post would be at the British Consulate General at Alexandria in Egypt.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: Having purchased a Ford vehicle to drive in the UK, the change of plan caused consternation. Ford vehicles were banned in Egypt as the company was selling vehicles in Israel. After selling my new vehicle and taking a massive loss, I purchased a new Hillman vehicle with the steering wheel on the correct side. The FCO refused to accept any responsibility for my financial loss on the grounds they had not instructed me to purchase the Ford vehicle.

Q: Oh yes.

COLESHILL: The Consulate General in Alexandria was a two-man post. At one time, pre-1952, there were probably as many as 15 diplomats on the staff. In March 1969 there was an acting Consul General and me. We had evacuated our downtown Consulate General in 1967 when Egyptian medical students invaded the building and trashed it. Our new Consulate General building was the former summer residence of the British High Commissioner to Egypt. The building had not been used since 1952. The new Consulate General building was a vast and grossly under-used structure with a mature garden that had been well cared for by local staff. There was ample space to house the Consul General and me, but the opportunity to accommodate us on site had been rejected.

Q: Oh yes. Well now, how long were you in Alexandria?

COLESHILL: I was there for about two and a half years.

Q: You were there from when to when?

COLESHILL: I was there from, April 1968 until June of 1970. It was a troubling time. The British and the American Ambassadors, having been declared persona non grata in 1967, we had a very small home-based staff working in Alexandria. The British had two in Alexandria and, I think there were about the same number in the American Consulate General. There were number of restrictions where we could travel. We were unable to use the Delta road to Cairo but could take the railway to Cairo that ran through the Delta. I made the journey between Alexandria and Cairo at least once every month, sometimes twice. Because I was known to be carrying “diplomatic” bags, to and from the British Embassy in Cairo, I was well known, by name, to the crew on the diesel expresses, to and from, Cairo. One of the many loveable things about Egyptians is they enjoy telling jokes against themselves and their government. They also hated their Russian occupiers. The result was the train crew was always ready to point out to me the so-called secret air bases the train passed and to help to count the numbers and identify types of Russian aircraft to be seen from the train.

Q: (laughs) I take it the Russians were not well received there.

COLESHILL: The average man on the street loathed the Russians. Nevertheless, the Russian imposed restrictions. If western diplomats were found in a location which had been declared “off limits” to western diplomats, it was likely the diplomat would be declared “persona non grata.” I was never found in those places as I had an access to a rental car. As a result the wonderful fish restaurants in the Delta, among other places, could always be visited. The ever-alert security police never stopped me.

Q: Well, what sort of work were you doing mainly?

COLESHILL: In a two-man post I was asked to do everything. My boss was experienced, having spent twenty years in the Service. He spoke fluent French and German and claimed to be highly regarded by the local authorities. During his frequent absences from Post I did his work and my own. However, my usual tasks were to administer the Office

and to ensure all the regulations were being obeyed. Although there were few able-bodied British and Commonwealth subjects living in the Alexandria Consular area, we had hundreds of sick and aged British subjects living in retirement homes, hospitals and nursing homes that had married Egyptians. In the main, these unfortunates existed on British Government pensions. They generated substantial correspondence and supervision by the locally recruited staff. My job was to ensure the locally engaged staff followed established procedures, that the Consulate General functioned well, that we were always ready for a further evacuation of British nationals and, at the same time, if circumstances permitted, we were ready to expand our operations without undue delay.

Officially we worked from 7 am until 2 pm without a break. In the winter, that was fine. In the summer, you tried to avoid the heat of the day. Late in the afternoon I played golf at Alexandria's delightful Sporting Club. Given the French, Greek, Italian, German and Spanish diplomatic communities were under no restrictions, there was a considerable amount of official entertainment to attend most evenings. It was hard work being out almost every night, being wined and dined! Someone had to do it. Except for the numerous reports that had to be written following the entertainment, I thoroughly enjoyed my life in Egypt.

Q: Was it still the world of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria's Quartet?

COLESHILL: I never found any trace of the world of Justine, Mountolive, Balthazar and Clea. Some of my Egyptian chums assured me, if you burrowed deeply into old Alexandria, that remnants could still be found. I had other ideas when meeting my twenty close expatriate or Egyptian friends. We would meet once or twice a week in Alexandria's Beau Rivage Hotel on the Corniche. There I would be regaled with stories of what life was like in Egypt between the two wars, during World War II and, again subsequent to World War II up to 1952 with the hurried departures of King Farouk, the Jewish, the French, and the British populations who had inhabited Alexandria.

Q: Well --

COLESHILL: Many Egyptians never forgave the British for the ignominious treatment which we had meted-out to them. Apart from occupying vast areas of Egypt with British bases, where Egyptian law was ignored, at the other end of scale there were the signs in public parks which read, "Dogs, nursemaids and Egyptians not permitted on these lawns." I was never surprised at the way Egyptians lionized Colonel Nasser and the way he freed the country from foreign domination. I was in Alexandria when Nasser died and was invited, nay instructed, to attend his funeral procession. Among other tasks, I was bidden to follow the cortege, to walk miles during the heat of the day through the City and to be present at the ceremonies marking his death.

Q: Could you go to the Suez Canal, or was that off limits?

COLESHILL: The Canal was off limits to diplomats but within the responsibility of the Embassy in Cairo. However, I once went to the Canal with a party from the Embassy.

They were responsible for keeping in touch with the British seamen on vessels still confined in the Canal. The Egyptians authorities had deliberately blocked the Canal by sinking ships across it. There were, I think, fourteen ships in the blocked section of the Canal. Their cargos had been forfeited as the insurance companies had paid out on their value. Many of the ships were carrying fruit to Europe from Australia and New Zealand.

Q: I would imagine the men must have been going stir crazy, were they?

COLESHILL: I suppose they were but, as told to me, the seamen had a greater fear the Egyptians were about to attack the ships. They and their crews would be "sitting ducks." The ships never were attacked and, eventually, the Egyptians permitted a certain amount of crew rotation. As far as I can remember, when the Canal was unblocked all the ships steamed to safety.

Q: How about when Nasser was there and after they left, the Secret Police, did they sort of harass you or not?

COLESHILL: Oh yes, we were constantly being harassed. On one occasion I spent a night in one of Cairo's better hotels. In the morning, I found my vehicle tires had been deflated by having the valve stems removed. Fortunately, I had a spare set of valve stems in my kit of spares in my vehicle. The problem was to arrange for all four tires to be taken to a garage for re-inflation. Another problem concerned the meeting of British diplomatic couriers at Cairo Airport by male members of British Embassy staff. The diplomatic couriers arrived from London at regular intervals. A home based Officer and an assistant would be detailed to meet the courier. If the home based officer had a wife, she would be telephoned within five minutes of the departure of her husband. She would then be verbally assailed by a voice speaking in a variant of the English language. The Egyptian authorities always seemed to know who the home based officer was to be for any particular evening. The Embassy never discovered how this was done as the instructions were whispered to the Officer in question in the garden of the Chancery. The only link was that the Embassy drivers were told at about four in the afternoon to go to a particular Officer's house at 6 pm and take him to the airport.

Q: And then what would happen?

COLESHILL: One or two younger wives felt the strain of living in Cairo. However, most treated the harassment as part of the price one paid for living in Cairo or as some sort of a game along with the Cairo traffic jams that had to be endured.

Q: Well, how about the Egyptians you'd meet? Would they -- you mentioned the people on the train were very friendly. I mean did you find that this hostility permeated society, or was it pretty much official?

COLESHILL: Those in the Government, Military or Civil Service, toed, the Party Line. If they did not, they were in trouble. I lived on the thirteenth floor of a block of apartments close to the Consulate General in Alexandria. The owner of this apartment

was a senior Civil Servant, who was stand-offish, officious and who never bent in any way whatsoever. Lawyer friends of mine would meet me in various hotels and enjoy drinks and playing games. Many of them were superb bridge players. I was taught to play bridge, in French, by Suez Canal pilots who had nothing else to do as the Canal was blocked. However they were being paid to remain in Egypt on the off chance the Canal would be suddenly unblocked and shipping through the Canal was resumed.

(Break in tape)

Q: Hello?

COLESHILL: Yes, the connection was cut.

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: Early one morning I answered the telephone in my bedroom. A voice I did not recognize suggested I come immediately to a downtown hotel for coffee. After alerting my wife, I went to the hotel and sat with a complete stranger who suggested I drive fifteen miles west of Alexandria to the town of Agami. We finished our coffee. He played the bill and left. Thirty minutes later at Agami village I found what appeared to be a joint Russian-Egyptian beach landing exercise in full flight. A fleet of Russian landing craft had floated onto the beach. Their cargo of men, tanks, vehicles, material, was being discharged and, with some difficulty, was being brought to shore. They then began making their way towards Cairo. I sat, quietly taking notes for an hour or so. At the time I was unsure of what I was witnessing. Was it a Russo/Egyptian beach landing exercise or was it the beginning of a military coup by the Russians to take Cairo and Egypt? Whatever, I knew I had to telephone the Embassy.

Much later I was told Embassy collateral sources had subsequently confirmed I had witnessed a beach landing exercise, but not before the Foreign Office in London had been alerted to the possibility of an alternative scenario. All that information thanks to an early-morning telephone call from an unknown friendly source!

Q: Oh my God, yes.

COLESHILL: As you will well know, it pays to have contacts at all levels.

Q: Was there much shipping type of work for you to do? I mean other than the ships stuck in the Canal?

COLESHILL: In Alexandria Harbor there were very little British or Commonwealth traffic. We did have a few British registered vessels of between 500 to 1,000 tons, calling, especially during the agricultural produce season. Then there were two or three British registered vessels that would do a clockwise or anti-clockwise trip around the Mediterranean, picking up various bits and pieces bound for Northern Europe. There was also a Commonwealth registered, liquid gas vessel, which came in with some regularity.

From memory she sailed between Alexandria and East Coast America. I might be wrong there. But there was very, very little shipping work that was done.

The only unusual case concerned an Egyptian airliner flying from Cairo to Europe. After sending a May Day message, the aircraft crashed into the sea near the British Sovereign Bases on Cyprus. There were no survivors. Immediately on receipt of the May Day message, Royal Air Force high-speed air/sea rescue launches set out and collected most, if not all, of the corpses. Many of the dead were thought to be Egyptian. The British Embassy in Cairo contacted the Egyptians immediately and suggested, as a humanitarian gesture, and in spite of the ban on British warships entering Egyptian waters, the British would be willing to bring the remains to Alexandria. It took time for the Embassy to receive an answer. Eventually it was agreed that one RAF launch - the largest we had in the Sovereign Base Areas - could enter Alexandria Harbour.

With due solemnity, and in a moving ceremony, the dead in their shrouds were handed over to the military authorities on the quayside of Alexandria. The RAF launch departed immediately for its base in Cyprus. In time, the Embassy in Cairo was officially thanked for the humanitarian gesture. Nothing appeared in the Alexandria press or television.

Q: Well, what about you're dealing with the local Egyptian officials in Alexandria? Were they aloof? Difficult? Or what?

COLESHILL: Those who remembered the days when the British were the dominant power in Egypt were, by and large, friendly towards us. They remembered the way British officials based at Alexandria, and elsewhere, worked, played sport and socialized with them. Staffs in the former British-owned banks and other companies were particularly helpful. However, the younger employees could be very officious as they knew they would be severely treated by their superiors if they were found to be too close to British diplomats. However, for a British diplomat to lose face was fatal. If one treated Egyptian officials courteously and never raised one's voice above a hush, problems could always be overcome. A well-wrapped bottle of good Scots whisky at Christmas always worked wonders!

On one occasion a senior Egyptian Customs Officer came to me with a problem. A senior African diplomat wanted to import 36 back axles, ostensibly for his Embassy car pool. I was able to point out to the Customs Officer the concerned Embassy did not have 36 vehicles in their fleet. Additionally, the back axles were likely to fit many Cairo's taxis. Some three months later, it was with some pleasure I noticed the sudden departure of the culprit. After that cooperation, the delay problems with our imports drastically reduced.

Q: Could you have a queen's birthday reception or not, or?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: You could?

COLESHILL: I think I enjoyed three Queen's Birthday Parties (QBP) during my time. We were still able to entertain fairly well! Hard liquor was served, as we had not yet reached the era of the dreaded lunchtime Vin d'honneur. We would invite the senior two officers and their wives from every Mission with whom we had diplomatic relations, plus more from the larger Missions such as the French, German, Italian and Spanish. Invitations would be extended to all the senior officers in the Armed Services, Prefecture and Ministries. Perhaps three or four Egyptians would be instructed to attend. The Governor, as far as I can remember, never came to the QBP during the time of the Soviet occupation but sent his Deputy. In the aftermath of the QBP, careful attention and analysis would be given to the number and to the status of the Egyptians who attended.

Q: Were you there when the Soviets left Egypt?

COLESHILL: Yes, I was.

Q: After Nasser died, yes?

COLESHILL: President Sadat was appointed. Those who knew the political situation, or claimed to know, told us President Sadat would not last long as President as the Muslim Brotherhood would take him out. They were wrong of course. Then suddenly there were stories circulating about what happened when Sadat told the Soviets and their allies to leave Egypt. The best story of the bunch was the claim that Henry Kissinger called President Sadat and asked why he had not been told in advance? Had you done so, I would have given you anything. It was claimed President Sadat had replied: "Henry, I did not believe I had to. I have done this for Egypt alone."

With the Soviet grip weakened, life became easier for the Egyptians and for the diplomatic community. All else apart, western diplomats were able to travel to many more places that, hitherto, had been forbidden to them.

Q: The French and the Germans, did they have more power in the area during the Nasser time or not, or were they also under constrictions?

COLESHILL: No, I think they were under the same restrictions. Remember, it was the French who were allied to the British in the abortive attack on the Suez Canal.

Q: Alexandria, I take it there was no particular port visits by NATO ships at that point?

COLESHILL: No. With the exception of the RAF launch mentioned above, I can remember no port visits except from the Soviet bloc.

Q: What about tourism?

COLESHILL: There wasn't a lot of it. Cruise liners didn't come to Alexandria. The nearest approach to tourism came with the regular cross-Mediterranean ferry services from France, Spain, Italy and Greece

The nearest thing to great events was the celebration of the Cairo Millennium. I believe each nation was allocated a week for their on-site celebration. I recall my Consul General and I decided that we would each have three days in Cairo. The British sponsored celebration consisted of six performances by the entire company of the Sadler's Wells Ballet who were flown from London. They performed under the stars on an open-air stage in front of the Sphinx. The invited audiences rapturously received the breathtaking performances.

Q: Well, this is the millennium of what?

COLESHILL: The thousandth anniversary of the inception of Cairo.

Q: Were there many ties to Greece? Alexandria used to have an awful lot of Greece.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: But how about when you were there?

COLESHILL: One of my closest friends was an Egyptian lawyer. He was married to one of the most extravert Greek ladies I have ever met. Through her, and invitations to their home, I knew many Greek families. The lawyer's wife fluently spoke six languages. She taught English language at what had been the best school in the Middle East. When the British left Egypt, the English Girl's School changed its title to the Egyptian Girl's School. As late as 1969/71 the British Government would encourage British teachers and school principals to come, in mid-Summer, to Alexandria to assist with the teaching at E.G.S. of the English language.

Q: I was in Athens from '70 to '74 and the word was that the best belly dancers in Egypt were of Greek origin.

COLESHILL: You may be correct. However, I can assure you that through the same Egyptian friends I met a number of belly dancers who performed in Alexandria.

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: My friends had invited me to see the star belly dancer in Egypt. Although I admitted I preferred my ladies a little leaner, I went to the show and found we had the best table in the room. There were a couple of warm-up acts before the star came on. Within seconds she had the patrons enchanted. My friend, Ali, was almost frothing at the mouth. Helen, his wife, was promising Ali an even better performance later that night. I was surprised how this tall, chubby, woman could so capture, and hold, the attention of an audience of sophisticated Egyptian male and females.

Q: Well, you're supposed to be! You know.

COLESHILL: (*laughs*) Of course -- if you'll pardon the expression-- she threw it all around - and did this wonderful thing with her raven-black hair which hung way below her waist. She waved her arms, swayed her body and agitated her belly like mad. When she began to croon words of Arabic love and desire, the Egyptians went ape. After five minutes with the audience in turmoil, there was a drum roll and a clash of cymbals and the performance was over. After a standing ovation, she sashayed through the audience, who stuffed paper money into her "bra" and she was gone. Ten minutes later a rather chubby short- haired woman approached our table and sat between Ali and Helen who were clearly her friends. A couple of minutes later I was introduced to the star of the show. In flawless English she asked what I thought of her performance. I lied and told her it was the best of many performances I had seen in Cairo and the many towns between Cairo and Alexandria. She was delighted and invited me to come to her show the next time I was in Cairo. With that she said good night to all her fans and left accompanied by two massive bodyguards.

A couple of days later I met Ali for a drink and asked about the performer with the long, raven-black hair. He explained it was all part of the act. It is partly the skill with which she controlled this manufactured hairpiece, made for her by the best wig-maker in London. As I continued to enjoy the company of ladies much slimmer than the best belly dancer in Egypt, I never saw the lady again. A pity, perhaps, and I still have happy memories of yet another delightful evening with Egyptian friends.

Q: Oh yes, well I --

COLESHILL: Three factors come to mind whenever I think of Alexandrians. The first is their ability, at all levels of the populace, to speak a multiplicity of languages. The second is how easily the city dwellers would turn violent which, in turn, could lead to mob rule. It was in Alexandria that I first heard the phrase: "Rentamob." Third, the ease with which the citizens would disfigure the City by dropping trash everywhere. There were garbage bins on each street corner and they would continue to strew rubbish across the pavements.

Q: Did Egyptians that you knew have any interest in Israel? Did they have questions about Israel? Was Israel much of a topic?

COLESHILL: Israel was always a topic because of the war. The fighting had stopped but Egyptians were as concerned as ever about their Arab brothers in Palestinian. To answer your question: I lived on the thirteenth floor of a modern apartment building close to the Consulate General. President Nasser's Mother lived 50 yards further along this delightful street. Would you believe, when the remainder of Alexandria suffered power cuts and water shortages, we had no problems with water or electricity supply or garbage removal? All was peaceful and calm. However, a couple of times each week a dawn patrol by Israeli jet fighter aircraft would fly along the coast. Five hundred yards from the shore at around two thousand feet they would fly just below the speed of sound. There would be no sleep after that wake up call. There was also that illuminating incident when, in a radio speech, President Nasser said that General Mohammad had told him that no

Israeli aircraft will ever fly across Egyptian territory. The next morning they did just that. Israeli jet fighter aircraft flew above the speed of sound low over the Parliament Building in Cairo. Every window in the place was broken!

Q: (laughs) Gosh.

COLESHILL: We knew Israeli aircraft were encroaching Egyptian air space by day and by night and doing it in a rather disingenuous manner. They would circle, at around 30,000 feet, way out in the Mediterranean, and wait for an inbound passenger aircraft heading for Cairo West. They would then tuck themselves up close underneath the belly of the civilian aircraft. As the aircraft descended into Cairo West, they would follow it down until they were inside the defenses of Cairo. The Egyptian radar image showed only a civilian aircraft obeying the flight controller's instructions to land. Then suddenly the Israeli aircraft would release themselves from the shadow of civilian aircraft, fire-up their after-burners and create merry hell for Egypt's air defence forces.

There was another incident I can recall. During Easter 1969 to celebrate my daughters' visit, we decided to do something special. We drove from Alexandria to Luxor. We overnights in Cairo, and then spent a night in a Catholic nunnery near Manfalut. The following morning we were halted at the Nag Hamada Bridge that carried the main road and the railway southwards across the Nile River. The cause of the delay was a surprise attack during the overnight hours by Israeli helicopters that landed close to the bridge. The Israeli forces mortared the bridge and damaged it. The defenders fired anti-aircraft guns thinking they were being bombed. After an hour the Israeli helicopters flew at a low level, back across the desert to Israel. We were held up for about two hours whilst the bridge was inspected. Eventually we were allowed to cross the bridge at a very slow speed. With my wife driving, I took notes. On arrival at our Luxor hotel I phoned the Embassy and, throwing caution to the wind, reported everything I had seen, heard, or noted.

Q: Ah-ha.

COLESHILL: Later I was congratulated for my telephoned and timely report as it countered claims made by both sides in the conflict.

Q: Well, during the time you were there, how evident was the Muslim Brotherhood and fundamental Islam?

COLESHILL: I wasn't aware of the extent except that which I gleaned from friendly informants who claimed the Brotherhood was a power to be considered. But I had no firm corroborated information.

Q: The two of you, the Consul General and you, I assume you sent in political reports from time to time of things you could glean to the embassy.

COLESHILL: Yes. But the reports had to be hand carried in the diplomatic bag to Cairo. There was no secure telephone or cable service between Alexandria and the Embassy in Cairo. When we spoke by telephone to the Embassy in Cairo, or anyone else for that matter, we knew we were being overheard. We heard clicks and scratches on the line and even snatches of Arabic conversation. The Egyptian listening services were not sophisticated. At times, there were even occasions when dis-information could be given to the Egyptian listening services.

Q: Well then, you left there when?

COLESHILL: I left in April of 1970 and returned to UK for leave. In June 1970 I was posted to the British Embassy in Algiers. I had been a temporary Second Secretary for about three years. I was confirmed in the rank of Second Secretary when I arrived at the British Embassy in Algiers.

Q: You were in Algiers from when to when?

COLESHILL: From June of 1970 to September of 1973.

Q: '73. What was the situation there at that time?

COLESHILL: Well, life was very difficult. The Algerian guerilla forces, having beaten the French Army in 1960/62, suffered immensely as a result of the War. They achieved independence for Algeria on 5 July 1962. As a result, almost all the French, Italian, Spanish and Maltese population left Algeria. Very few Britons were left. However, in 1970 there were an enormous number of French-language-speaking Canadians in the oil and gas fields in southern Algiers. In total there were 300 Britons employed on projects such as building paper factories and over a thousand Canadians in the oil/gas industries. The problem was that Canada had no Embassy in Algeria and expected the British Embassy to provide Embassy and Consular coverage for their nationals. As the Management and Consular Officer, this produced problems for me, as I was given no staff to deal with the additional responsibilities. The absence of trained artisans in the local work force (they disappeared at Independence) made it difficult to manage the Embassy building and maintain the fabric of our staff houses.

Q: What were relations between Great Britain and Algeria at that time?

COLESHILL: We had diplomatic relations. We were trying to improve our commercial relations. It was difficult working alongside the Algerians as they had a brittle strain in their character and were not terribly welcoming. Virtually all aspects of Algerian commercial work had been nationalized. Even the hotel industry was under the control of a government department. As a result, negligible amount of tourism took place. Two or three cruise liners arrived but did not return because of the lack of facilities and the absence of a welcome by the authorities. I found this situation to be bizarre as Algeria is a beautiful country. The responsible government department built a series of marinas along the coast and wanted to encourage tourism. But then they took the attitude if foreigners

came to Algeria to enjoy Algerian sand, sun, and sea, foreigners shall be charged high prices for the pleasure. As a result tourism never expanded.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: That was lots of money around in those days. I found the Algerians to be, unlike the Egyptians, who would smile as they stole from you. Whether stealing from you or not, the Algerians never smiled.

Q: I've heard somebody describe the Algerians as dour.

COLESHILL: Yes, that's correct--

Q: Which is what you'd call the Scots?

COLESHILL: Perhaps. I have no wish to forget the many happy moments I have spent in the company of Scotsmen and women in places around the world. However, I do recall the many occasions I have been served superb French-style food in hotels on the Mediterranean littoral from Oran to Annaba by unsmiling Algerian waiters. When traveling, I would take my coffee in a town square and enjoy the cooler evening air; I would be surrounded by, perhaps, a hundred Algerian men in drab garb drinking their coffee. There was little talk, no jokes, no smiles and no women. After a while the men would get bored and go home. It was no surprise to me that many wanted to leave their lack luster country.

Q: Well, what were British interests in Algeria at the time?

COLESHILL: We were interested in the liquid gas and the oil, which Algeria wanted to sell. And we were interested in building factories and infrastructure that would further develop those and other industries. .

Q: What function were you performing there?

COLESHILL: I was the Management and Consular Officer.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

COLESHILL: The ambassador was Sir Martin Le Queens. He was a fluent linguist. A Jersey man from the Channel Islands. He was filled with self-confidence and did not suffer fools gladly. He knew the country well from his time with the British Army and the pursuit of the German Army in 1942. Ronnie Burrows followed him. He was quiet man. I believe in his earlier life he had trained in a seminary. If memory serves, he had flown torpedo-carrying, outdated bi-planes in the gallant British Fleet Air Arm action against the German battle cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau which, with the cruiser Prinz Eugen forced their way through the British-controlled English Channel. Mr. Burrows' aircraft was shot down in the attack on the ships. The crew of a German E-boat

pulled him from the water of the Channel. He spent the remainder of the war in a German P.O.W. Camp.

Q: Oh yes, I remember those two battle cruisers.

Q: Was there much residue or feeling towards Britain there from World War II by the time you got there, or had that been well gone?

COLESHILL: Not that I noticed. The only time that would be mentioned was in Oran. If you remember, in 1940, Churchill ordered Admiral Cunningham, the Commander of the Western Mediterranean Fleet, to seek the surrender of the French Fleet at Mers-el-Kébir rather than allow the Germans to take them over. When the French Admiral refused, the British fleet opened fire against their former allies causing many deaths and casualties among the crews. It will be many years for the French collective memory of the action to be forgotten and forgiven. With one exception, the ships of the French fleet were destroyed or badly damaged.

Q: Well no, this is a very difficult time, during the war. I remember that.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: Could you travel around? You know, later when you get up in the hills and all it became very, very dangerous.

COLESHILL: The Algerians continued with the arrangement the French had put upon the international community when they were the colonial power. I was allowed to travel, unhindered, only within metropolitan Algiers and perhaps 25 miles outside the city. Thereafter I had to ask permission if I wanted to travel elsewhere in the country.

Q: Yeah, so there was --

COLESHILL: I traveled to the west as far as the Moroccan border, or east as far as the Tunisian border. Having submitted the necessary applications, I knew if something went wrong in the community, or if I wanted to travel to Annaba, to Arzew or Oran, I could proceed without delay.

Q: Did the Algerian equivalent to the Secret Police, follow; harass you, or anything like that?

COLESHILL: I was never overtly aware although I suspected the Algerian watchers were present. Very occasionally a black colored vehicle would fall in behind me. They were such amateurs at the tailing procedure. So much so, I would often stop and indicate by signs the way I was going. I did not want my tail to get lost. As Kipling wrote: "It was a Great Game."

Q: Ah.

COLESHILL: I knew my home was bugged, as a small, white-paneled van with an antenna would be outside my residence for two or three days a week. My family accepted it. The only time I was furious was when my home in Algiers was burgled. I was away on a consular trip and my wife and my adult daughter came home from working in the Embassy to find the house in disarray. It was not a professional job as nothing of value was taken. We accepted it was the political police entering the house and looking for something they wanted. The burglary was never reported to the Algerian police or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Q: Did you have people in jail, you know, for traffic or various things?

COLESHILL: I don't remember any prison or jail visits in Algeria. The probable reason was because we were off the beaten track for the popular backpackers routes. There was nearly a tragic incident where a Briton arrived with a young wife and two infants in a beat-up, bald-tired, London taxicab. He came to the Embassy and asked if we would provide him with a road map showing the route south through Algeria and on to South Africa. He was refused any help for such a perilous journey. After driving some 200 miles to the south, he eventually returned and left Algiers by road to the Moroccan border.

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: Algiers could be a fun place to be. It was here I worked closely with my opposite number, the American Consulate General. The American and British Embassies combined their operations on the staff medical field. The Americans provided the accommodation and the drugs; the British provided the staff. So, if the staff of either Embassy were sick, they went to the clinic in the American Embassy and found British staff working there. It was a splendid combined operation. We worked very closely together.

Q: You were there from when to when?

COLESHILL: I was there from June of 1970 to September of 1973.

Q: Well now, the Yom Kippur War was what, '71?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: Were there repercussions back in Algiers?

COLESHILL: Not that I can remember. We knew about the terrorist training camps that had been set up in the desert and so it is more than likely the Algerians were helping and training their Arab brothers in their struggles. Given the declared policies of the Algerian Government it would be folly to believe otherwise.

Q: Well now, during that period was Gaddafi messing around? Was he a presence?

COLESHILL: Other than the fact that British Forces leaving Libya, I have no recollection about the repercussions that followed the arrival of Gaddafi.

Q: I'm not even sure when he came into power, so.

COLESHILL: He came to power in 1969.

Q: Well, how about with Morocco. First place, was the Polisario, had that started or was that later?

COLESHILL: The Polisario front began, I recall, in 1969 when students began supporting the independence arrangement for the Western Sahara. The movement was supported by both the Algerian and Libyan Governments.

Q: Well, was Tangiers where the Brits were supposed to send their remittance men?

COLESHILL: They may have. I suppose it was the hedonistic life style in the International Zone that attracted them.

Q: In the old days, anyway.

Q: Well, you left in '73?

COLESHILL: I left Algiers in 1973 with few regrets. At FCO I was told I was going to be trained in British nationality and citizenship law, a somewhat specialized subject.

Q: Yes, particularly with the commonwealth and all that.

COLESHILL: Indeed. I must admit that for the first three months of my training with a colleague who had been working on the subject since 1947 it was tough sledding. I read law books for hours on end with a cold towel around my head. In the evenings, I swam to drive the tension away from my body. Eventually this arcane subject fell into place. I then lectured to colleagues who needed to know these facts before being sent overseas as Passport Officers and Consuls.

Q: Well, I think this is probably a pretty good place to stop.

COLESHILL: Yes, indeed.

Q: OK, today is the 19th of April 2012 with Walter Coleshill. Walter, we got to 1973 and you finished becoming an expert on citizenship.

COLESHILL: Nationality and citizenship, yes.

Q: So what did you do?

COLESHILL: What did I do in the Foreign Office while I was doing there?

Q: No, you took the training.

COLESHILL: Yes, I took the training.

Q: And what did you do afterwards? Did they send you out or were you a trainer or what?

COLESHILL: I worked at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). My job was -- after I learned the trade, as it were -- to train new Consular Officers, and Passport Officers who were about to be sent overseas, in UK nationality and citizenship law. Not only British law, but the citizenship law of the territories with which they would be involved. It was just a hard slog to have a working knowledge of some forty different citizenship laws into my head so that I could speak with authority on them in the Foreign Office and elsewhere.

Q: Just to get a feel for the British Foreign Service, were new officers put through sort of Consular training, or were some dubbed to be Political, others Economic, others Administrative, others Consul Officers?

COLESHILL: We did not have the coning system at that time that the U.S. had. In the junior ranks we were not coned at all. At one post you could be a Consular Officer, at the next you would be the Controller. The only people who seemed to keep more or less on one course were the Senior Economic Officers, the Commercial Officers, and the Political Officers. In my career, I have performed in everything, except economic and commercial work

Q: Well, did you feel that there was in the Foreign Service at that time almost a class system? You know; if you were a Political Officer you were sort of dubbed to be fancier than if you were a Consular Officer?

COLESHILL: I have little doubt in my mind that most officers appointed to be Ambassadors and High Commissioners came from the ranks of those who had performed well in the political, economic and commercial departments of FCO.

Q: You mentioned Southeast Asia. Had you just decided this is going to be the place you wanted to be, or what?

COLESHILL: There were probably about eight officers dealing with nationality and citizenship problems in the Department, Each of us took a part of the world in which to specialize.

Q: How did you find the training of Consular Officers for coming out of the emerging former colonies? Was this a real problem?

COLESHILL: Some were reasonably smooth. The ideal situation was Kenya in November 1963. By then, the lawyers who drafted Independence Acts whereby successive British colonies etc., were transformed into Independent nations, knew most of pitfalls when drafting the necessary legislation. The Kenya Independence Act, of November 1963, was generally regarded as the definitive document.

Q: Did most of these independent countries want to still use Britain consular posts and all to help them?

COLESHILL: Yes, There was normally an inclusion clause to the independence regulations that covered that matter. The rule of thumb was that if one of the newly independent countries was not represented in a country where there was a British Embassy or High Commission then the British looked after the interests of that newly independent country until other arrangements were brought into play.

Q: Where did you go and when did you go after this training?

COLESHILL: I sailed to Cape Town, South Africa on 14 June 1976 and arrived in Pretoria, the capital, some three weeks later.

Q: And you were in Pretoria from when to when?

COLESHILL: Until November of 1979. I was the head of what was known as the Rhodesia Passport Office. The Office was a former part of the British High Commission in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. When, in 1965, the Ian Smith Government declared the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), most of the British High Commission staff in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, returned to London. The Passport Office and some of the staff were sent to Pretoria, South Africa. The Office was sited in the grounds of the British Embassy.

My first six months at the British Embassy in Pretoria life was peaceful and calm. I performed the task I had been allotted. However on New Years Eve 1976 it was announced that David Owen, the British Foreign Secretary, planned to send a team of experts from FCO to Salisbury to bring about the end of the political problems which existed in Southern Rhodesia. I was asked to fly to Salisbury to deal with the administrative arrangements. I took up residence in Meikles Hotel on the morning of New Year's Eve and set to work. The meetings between the representatives lasted five days. When they were satisfied progress was being made, a press statement was issued. The British team of experts then flew to Pretoria's Waterkloof Air Base, where discussions were held with the British Ambassador to South Africa, Sir David Scott, and his colleagues from the British Embassy, Pretoria. I accompanied the team.

Q: Well, what were you doing in this?

COLESHILL: On my arrival in Salisbury on New Years Eve, I found the news media had been alerted by the Rhodesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (RMFA) I had arrived to “deal with the political situation” and would be staying at Meikles Hotel. I did not appreciate this announcement, as I knew many Rhodesians had no love for the British Government. When I mentioned the matter to the Rhodesian Cabinet Secretary he placed an armed Special Branch Officer outside the door of my hotel suite. During the following days I was swamped with demands for interviews and telephone calls, many of them abusive and life threatening, from all over Rhodesia from people of every political stripe. Before the arrival of the FCO team from London, I was the target of those who wanted, in one way or another, to influence the outcome of the projected talks. Every discussion I had, every telephone call I received, was logged with the essential points that had been made. On their arrival, the digest I had prepared was presented to the leader of the FCO team.

Q: Well, what was your impression of the Ian Smith regime?

COLESHILL: It was composed of Ministers and Members of Parliament from the Rhodesia Front. They were the right wing of Rhodesian politics led by Pieter (P.K.) van der Byle as Minister of Defense. Ian Douglas Smith, as Prime Minister, was the acceptable face of the Government in whom, most white-minority Rhodesians trusted. They were a group of ministers dedicated to maintaining white supremacy. As worldwide sanctions began to bite, no other nation recognized the Rhodesia government. Only the Republic of South Africa and, the pre-carnation rebellion government of Portugal, allowed Rhodesia to set up a diplomatic mission. Guerilla warfare continued. Much of the land was a no-go area to the Rhodesian Military. Not that one would have known the fact by reading the tightly controlled Rhodesian media. In Salisbury all was calm. However, friends in the Rhodesian forces warned me never to travel more than five miles from Salisbury city center. I tried to follow that advice.

Q: Well, how was this for family life?

COLESHILL: It wasn't very good. The usual form was I would fly to Salisbury and have meetings with representatives of the African political parties and of the various white minority factions, of whom there were hundreds. I was also summoned to the MFA for discussions. Late on a Thursday, or on Friday I would return to Pretoria to present my reports to my Ambassador, Sir David Scott. Much of Saturday and Sunday I would deal with the work connected with the Rhodesia Passport Offices before collapsing into bed late on Sunday. Then, come Monday perhaps it would start all over.

Life became a trifle hectic. My wife, even though we had many bridge-playing friends, was not happy with our domestic arrangements. I explained that I had been given a job to do and I proposed to continue to do it to the utmost of my ability. With servants to see to most of her requirements, an adult daughter living in Durban only a telephone call away and, even in my absence, numerous invitations to luncheon, dinners etc. it seemed to me that life in Pretoria should have been pleasant for her.

Q: I'd like to ask you, did you deal with Stephen Low at all?

COLESHILL: Yes, I did. He was the American Ambassador to Zambia.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: Yes, Stephen Low, David Owen, the name of the British representative, who was head of Rhodesia Department at FCO I cannot recall. But I remember the name of Andrew Young who was the American Ambassador to the United Nations at that time.

Q: You mentioned when we talked before that Andy Young was not that much fun to work with.

COLESHILL: No, I found Andrew Young had an enormous chip on his shoulder. He was impolite to many, including my wife, when she attempted to be of help to Ambassador Young. If I remember correctly, he had been the Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia.

Q: He was.

COLESHILL: And then he became the American Ambassador to the United Nations.

Q: Jimmy Carter at the time was our president and had come out of Atlanta.

Q: I was wondering how did you find David Owen as a person and a negotiator?

COLESHILL: This is an extremely difficult question. I owe a lot to the man who is now Lord Owen. I worked for him. He advanced my prospects in the Diplomatic Service. He was a handsome man and a skilled speaker. When he spoke in the House of Commons, Parliament listened. I was never certain of his skills as a negotiator. He certainly did not solve the problems in Southern Africa. He was helped by his delightful and charming, U.S. born wife, Deborah. I recall being at dinner with them at Enterprise House in Salisbury when we were discussing the arrangements I had made to take Mrs. Owen to see Robert Mugabe's sister. She was a seamstress at the Chishawasha Church Mission outside Salisbury. Deborah Owen leaned across the table and, with a straightest of faces, asked at what time I was going to knock her up in the morning?

Q: Oh-ho-ho.

COLESHILL: Fortunately I knew the different meaning of that phrase on both sides of the Atlantic. I leaned across the table, winked, and asked how she would like my answer? "In the American or British versions of the English language?"

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: The twenty diners around the table collapsed in laughter. They knew Deborah was being coquettish. She may have posed the question on previous occasions.

She had a delightful sense of humor and I warmed to her. But to answer your question: I knew many colleagues who said David Owen had little negotiating skills. He could be extremely scathing in his comments to junior ministers and subordinates. He never succeeded in solving the problems in Rhodesia.

Q: Well, Mugabe, he was the African leader?

COLESHILL: In much of the pre-Independence era, Mugabe was not allowed to enter Rhodesia. As a result, he was the one black African leader I did not interview in Salisbury. He was a dynamic leader and an academic. Some claimed he held as many as five Doctorates. His sister, who I met many times, claimed he was a man of peace who believed in the power of the ballot over the power of the bullet. Events both before and after Independence proved how misinformed she could be. During the course of my various visits to Salisbury, which extended over a period of 18 months or so, I met all the others, Nkomo the leader of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), who spent much of his time in Bulawayo; Bishop Abel Muzorewa the United African National Council (UANC) leader and so many more who were representative of various factions of the white, African and Indian ethnic people that made up the political scene in Rhodesia. As Mugabe, a Shona and Nkomo, an Ndebele speaker, espoused communist ideologies, the British Government's preference was for Bishop Muzorewa to be the post Independence President. This view was held until about 48 hours prior to Independence when the word from the villages was that Mugabe would be the predominant choice.

Q: Did you have any feel for where Rhodesia or later Zimbabwe was going to go? I mean did you feel that they would be headed in the right way or was it pretty much a disaster?

COLESHILL: During my time in Salisbury I preached the line that history was not on the side of the minority white-dominated government. History has taught the will of the minority must eventually fall to the will of the majority. Apart from the lessons of history, I reminded senior Rhodesians they did not have unimpeded access to the sea, did not have access to oil and was dependent on an external power – South Africa - for the materials that enabled the war to continue. Not for the first time – nor the last – I was told I was wrong.

Q: Did you feel at this point that you were dealing with a foreign power, even though they were, you know, Brits? How did you feel about the end of the white Rhodesians?

COLESHILL: From the moment I arrived in Salisbury and spoke for three hours with the Rhodesian Cabinet Secretary I had the maximum cooperation from Rhodesian Ministers and Civil Servants. I was told I could go anywhere, speak to anyone and ask any question, providing I did nothing illegal! The cooperation was forthcoming, in part, because most Rhodesians were tired of war. They were tired of atrocities. They wanted the problems to end. I was someone who could help that process. As a junior British Diplomat, I had little personal clout. However, at that moment I was a conduit to British Ministers and senior diplomats. Rhodesians needed my input; as a result, their cooperation was readily forthcoming.

To answer your second question: I looked upon most white Rhodesians as kith and kin. Many hailed from the United Kingdom. However, I was certain they were misguided in their continued support of the Smith Administration. In part, this was due to the leavening of Afrikaner mentality they had absorbed and the constant flow of propaganda that came from South Africa. At that time a widely held view in southern Africa was that all Africans should be treated as children or second-class citizens. As I had lived in west, north and southern Africa for over ten years, I did not share that view – and said so. I had enjoyed the company of many intelligent African men and women who had taught me much about living in harmony with them. My opinions did not make me popular. Nevertheless, I knew the Smith Administration must eventually fall to the onslaught of democracy.

Q: Well, you were doing this for what, two years?

COLESHILL: I lived this peripatetic life for about eighteen months. An official at FCO would telephone me in Pretoria with instructions that I should travel immediately to Salisbury, Rhodesia. My secretary would alert the airline and Meikles' Hotel of my imminent arrival in Salisbury. I would phone my wife to say farewell and give her an estimate of when I might return to Pretoria. After a quick word with the political section of the Embassy to confirm my imminent departure, I would pick up my previously packed luggage and go to the airport. A few hours later the phone in my hotel suite would be ringing off the hook with calls from FCO and elsewhere around the world. Life was hectic yet again.

Q: Well, by the time you left, could you say when you left and how stood things when you left?

COLESHILL: The negotiations had come to a halt. It wasn't until the arrival of the Conservative-led government and the decision by Lord Carrington, as British Foreign Secretary, that negotiations re-started. These discussions were successful and were eventually brought to a conclusion in 1982.

Q: Well, then where did you go?

COLESHILL: In late 1979 at the behest of the Foreign Secretary, I was cross-posted to the British Embassy in Bangkok Thailand. The Embassy had a problem dealing with a difficult consular case involving a young woman named Miss Rita Nightingale. She had been apprehended at Bangkok's Dong Muang Airport, with four kilos of heroin...

Q: Eeh.

COLESHILL: ...in her suitcase. After the customary cautions had been administered to Miss Nightingale, when the Thai customs officers examined her suitcase they found a false bottom, which concealed four kilos of heroin. Miss Nightingale denied knowledge of the heroin. She claimed friends in Bangkok, who had given her the suitcase, had also

packed it for her. Miss Nightingale's lawyer was an American who had lived in Bangkok for many years. Abe Lyman was then in his seventies and had arrived in Bangkok at the end of WWII where he had served with the U.S. Navy. He was Jewish and, from my very pleasant memories of Mr. Lyman, he had been called to the Chicago Bar in 1936.

Having examined the evidence, which included video footage of the opening of her suitcase at Don Muang Airport, as Miss Nightingale's legal advisor, he advised that she should plead guilty to the charge. Miss Nightingale stubbornly rejected the advice and continued to claim she knew nothing about the heroin concealed in her suitcase.

Miss Nightingale was then advised if she persisted she would receive the full sentence of Thai law, whereas if she pleaded guilty to the charge of possessing heroin her sentence would be halved. In a Bangkok Court, against the advice of her Counsel, Miss Nightingale pleaded not guilty. She was sentenced to four years in the woman's correctional facility just outside Bangkok. In prison, Miss Nightingale was regarded as less than a model prisoner. She did not keep her peace and made life difficult for the prison authorities. These outbursts were not helping the normal even tenor of Anglo-Thai relations. Something had to be done!

The case eventually presented to the Thai authorities was that additional evidence had been discovered which, had it been presented at the trial of Miss Nightingale, may have resulted in a failure of the prosecution case. After a year of negotiations between the two governments, The Royal Thai House instructed the Thai Corrections Department to release Miss Nightingale. It was agreed she was to be released into my custody and deported within 48 hours. Thus ended the dozens of prison visits and the burning of many hours of midnight oil that were devoted to the release of a British woman, caught up in the worldwide trafficking of drugs. After spending two nights in my home I took Miss Nightingale to Bangkok Airport where we flew to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Miss Nightingale then flew to London in the company of a reporter from London's *Daily Mail*.

For ten days after Miss Nightingale's release from prison, we were the subject of intense worldwide media scrutiny. It took longer to quell the belief that political reasons caused the British Embassy at Bangkok to expend so much time and effort to bring about the release of Miss Nightingale. To criticism from Thai friends, it was a simple matter of asking my critics if His Thai Majesty was wrong in ordering the release of Miss Nightingale? End of all criticism! Others were not so easy to convince.

Q: Well, Thailand at that point, particularly Bangkok, was sort of the sex capital of Asia, wasn't it?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: This meant that -- well, I know that the Japanese had sort of sex and golf tours (chuckles).

COLESHILL: When you visited Bangkok's Don Muang Airport anytime during the early 1980s, there would be two hundred or more golf trolleys parked waiting for their owners and their return trip to Japan and elsewhere. And it wasn't just the Japanese.

Q: Oh yeah, I mean over the years they had terrible problems with pedophiliacs coming from Europe and from the States and elsewhere.

COLESHILL: I have lost count of the number of British nationals, male and female, who arrived from overseas to enjoy the bars and nightlife of Bangkok who eventually came to my notice. Bangkok's "69" and "Love" hotels were favorite expatriate meeting places to drink and pass the time with Thai men and women, boys and girls! During my four years in Bangkok over four hundred British nationals were tried in Thai Courts and received prison sentences.

For all that, Thailand was a pleasant place in which to live and work. I traveled widely. The only places I did not visit were the six provinces on the Mekong River. Although I do remember going to the Thai/Lao border on one occasion. The Lao had shelled a refugee camp in which there were a number of British male and female nurses from the British charity, Save the Children. Living in Thailand was a wonderful and rewarding experience. It was enhanced by working for two brilliant British Ambassadors: Peter Tripp and Justin Staples, -- Justin Staples spoke not only fluent Thai, but also, Royal Court Thai. Peter Tripp had been the former High Commissioner in Malaysia, and was well known and much respected in the area.

Q: Well, did you get involved with refugees from Vietnam and from Cambodia?

COLESHILL: No, That was an American problem.

Q: This is a period of boat people too, wasn't it?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: Was the British Navy or the embassy involved with boat people?

COLESHILL: Not that I can remember. By that time there was little Royal Navy presence in the seas in the area.

Q: How did you find the Thai officials? Particularly imagine you'd have to deal an awful lot with the police.

COLESHILL: I had a very rewarding relationship with the police and the corrections authorities. Many senior Thai Police Officers spoke fluent English. In fact they had a wonderful cadre of foreign language speakers of most European languages. They were very understanding and wanted to show they could deal sensibly with the foreigners who flocked to Thailand. I was invited on many occasions to accompany various police teams to Don Muang Airport and elsewhere, to see how they operated. Late one night, I recall

we were watching departing passengers at Don Muang Airport when a woman Thai police officer noticed two approaching European women who, to her alone, were clearly not as pregnant as they appeared to be. When a doctor examined the women it was found that heroin-filled bicycle tires were the cause of their body enlargement. When asked what alerted her suspicion that all was not as it appeared to be, the Thai policewoman replied that the two women did not walk like pregnant ladies should. The males in the squad, and I, learned a lesson that night!

Q: Oh boy.

COLESHILL: At all levels I found I enjoyed their great cooperation. From the governors of the provinces, down to the ordinary Thai police officer, the assistance I received could not be faulted. With the assistance from the helpful Head of the Foreigner's Police Department I was able to find a girl aged sixteen years, who had been kidnapped from England to a Thai provincial town some four hour's drive from Bangkok. With the backing from my Police Liaison Officer I had two closed Provincial Government Departments opened during the weekend. As a result the girl was found in twelve hours, apprehended and escorted to my home where she was detained for two nights. In the charge of a British Airways Purser, I put the girl on a London bound British Airways aircraft on Monday evening. At London Airport she was given to the charge of the British Welfare Services and The Metropolitan Police.

Q: Well, you were in Thailand; did you ever run across a Thai-speaking British Foreign Service officer, Malcolm McBain?

COLESHILL: Yes. I believe he was in Thailand before me.

Q: Yes, he may have been. But he eventually ended up as Ambassador to Madagascar. The reason I ask is that Malcolm and I are -- he's running an oral history program for the British Diplomatic Service.

COLESHILL: Is he?

Q: Out of Cambridge University at Churchill College. By the way, you can access this and see maybe some of the ambassadors and others you've served under. He's got several hundred oral histories. And just go to Churchill College, Cambridge University on the Internet. And go for the British Diplomatic Oral History Program.

COLESHILL: I will do that.

Q: M-C-B-A-I-N.

COLESHILL: Here we go. McBain, David Malcolm. That's the man. Yes, 1968 First Secretary, Information, Bangkok, 1970, Consul Bangkok and Consul Chiang Mai. Well, that was a lovely job.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: Chiang Mai was that northern outpost, which looked after the Lanna Thai population who, apart from being lighter skinned, were different from the Thais in the rest of the Kingdom. We had a wonderful old teak-built Consulate General building in Chiang Mai, which we were ordered to sell during the Thatcher years, because it was not being used 365 days in any one year. The buyer recovered his purchase price on the sale of the teak. His profit came from the sale of the superbly landscaped site alongside the Ping River.

Q: Was there much other than sort of other than people who'd gotten too much to drink, too many drugs, and too much sex. What other sort of consular problems did you have?

COLESHILL: Credit and debit card fraud and “kiting” checks were prevalent in urban centers. In Bangkok there were many examples of males and females being drugged during the course of sexual dalliances with a Thai they had engaged in the so-called “Love Motels” or bathhouses. The Thai, who usually disappeared before the victim awoke, took money and passports. In extreme cases we knew of incidents where the victim’s clothes were also taken. When that happened, it added another dimension to the problem the victim faced. No papers, no funds, no clothes. Oh dear!

On another level, the U.S. Congress started something with a worldwide effort to bring convicted U.S. citizens back to the U.S. to serve out their sentences. Even though they had been convicted in foreign lands for crimes committed overseas, they were prepared to bring them back to United States to complete their sentences.

Q: Yes, it was exchange. It was serve their sentences in American jails.

COLESHILL: That’s right, yes. Eventually, UK followed suit with our bi-lateral Agreement. Some hailed the Agreement as a humanitarian act for the prisoners. However, among the British prisoners in Thai jails the Agreement was not always regarded as beneficial. Many prisoners assured me they were happier serving out their sentences in a Thai jail than being transferred to the much more rigorous life they would expect to experience in British jails. To better understand this thinking one has to understand the sentencing and remission procedures as practiced in Thailand. This is neither the time, nor the place, to explain that part of the Thai justice code.

Q: You left there when?

COLESHILL: I left in 1983.

Q: OK. How did you and your wife find social life in Bangkok?

COLESHILL: Oh, stimulating. In January 1979, there was so much money in Bangkok, so many businesses were doing well that it was nothing unusual to have invitations to three drinks parties and dinner every workday evening. If one decided to be selective and

“regret” the invitation that action may cause the host to be offended. Saturdays and Sundays were spent golfing, at the seaside homes of friends, or be invited by one of the hotel chains to sample the facilities at an attractive beach resort.

Q: Ah-ha.

COLESHILL: There was a downside to this overwhelming hospitality. On Christmas Eve 1979 I asked my wife if we might have fish for Christmas luncheon. She answered in the negative and said we were having turkey on Christmas Day and ham on Boxing Day. We are entertaining or being entertained on both days. Why do you ask? In reply I said that I had gone through our entertainment schedule and found from 15 November until 23 December we had been invited to, and eaten, thirty-seven celebratory Christmas luncheons and dinners. I am tired of beef, ham, pork and poultry!”

Q: (laughs) Oh God.

COLESHILL: The answer was still in the negative. Later I arranged for our cook to go to market and buy fish, which I had for a light Christmas lunch. However, I ate turkey that evening when we entertained twelve friends to Christmas Dinner.

To answer your question: Yes. In Thailand in 1979 there was money to burn. For some, life was sublime!

Q: Did you have children there?

COLESHILL: No, my children never stayed with me from 1964 onwards. Even when I returned to work at FCO from 1973 to 1976, they were always in boarding school in UK.

Q: I was thinking I've talked to people who've had children at that time, Americans. And they say it was a real problem. Because one, there were obviously drugs there was all the sex around, you know? It's not a good place for kids.

COLESHILL: You are correct if you are speaking specifically about Bangkok. I remember an incident at the American High School in Bangkok involving one of the ice cream trucks outside the school gate. He was loading his ice cream with drugs and selling it to the students. There was one a hell of a scandal over that problem. Most British diplomat's children were in boarding schools in England and only came to Bangkok at holiday times. However, parents were constantly on guard against criminals who tried to corrupt the children.

Q: (laughs) Well, at the time were you at all concerned about Vietnam or the rebel movement down in the peninsular towards Malaysia and all that? Were these of concern?

COLESHILL: Yes we were concerned and were ready to put into place the necessary arrangements to protect our citizens should Thailand be invaded from any quarter of the compass.

Q: Well, also that whole southern area down there that got hit by the tsunami was not the tourist Mecca that it became, was it?

COLESHILL: Southern Thailand. In the 1980s, Phuket Island and Phang Nga Bay were well-known British tourist destinations. During my four years in Thailand, I traveled widely visiting British citizens, some of whom were medical missionaries, who lived and worked in southern Thailand. On more than one occasion I was invited to go to the hospital surgical wards where I found injured police officers alongside the wounded bandits they had been pursuing. Both sides complied with the rules of the British missionary hospital that the pursuit of criminals was to be suspended on hospital grounds. British and Commonwealth subjects were frequently imprisoned on drug-related charges in Songkhla and Hat Yai Top Security Jails. They were visited at appropriate times.

Phuket Island was also the unlikely port of call for a visit by a British Royal Navy warship. The Naval attaché and I had an enlightening time arranging the visit and dealing with the aftermath. The local authorities were very generous to the Captain, his officers and crew, all of whom were appropriately entertained by the community. It was the only time I can recall a modern, chauffeured, Rolls Royce vehicle being put at the disposal of a visiting Royal Navy Officer. A veil shall be drawn over the events that, sooner or later, we learned transpired during the six days of the Port Visit. Fortunately, when departure time came, all were safely back on board the departing Royal Navy frigate. Many tearful young Thai ladies lined the jetty. The Naval Attaché and I breathed sighs of relief and returned, with a fund of stories, to regale our colleagues in Bangkok.

Q: Well, then I think this is probably a good place to stop.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: So we'll put at the end, where did you go after you left Thailand?

COLESHILL: Well, I went home to England. Unfortunately, the end of my time in Thailand was rather emotional for my wife and me. In October 1982, The Embassy enjoyed a Royal Visit from H.R.H. Princess Alexandra, who came to look at the refugee camps in which she had an interest through the various charities of which she was Patron. The Princess was glamorous, energetic and very much her own woman who knew precisely what she wanted to do and see. She, and her small entourage, arrived from UK on a commercial flight and were accommodated at the Ambassador's Residence. After a couple of days acclimatizing in Bangkok she flew to the refugee camps that had been established close to the Mekong River. She spent a full day in the heat and humidity speaking to the refugees and the British medical volunteers who were stationed in the camps. She completely mesmerized and endeared herself to those of us who were accustomed to other royal visitors.

On her return to the Embassy Her Highness allowed herself an hour to recover from her full day in the sun. She then appeared, beautifully coiffed and glamorously gowned with

elbow length gloves at an outdoor drinks party to meet selected British residents. More than one guest was heard to say that Her Highness looked every inch of what a Royal Princess should look like. She then spent ninety minutes in the heat of a Bangkok evening speaking at length to the invited guests. It was only when the Ambassador mentioned that she should be leaving to attend a dinner in her honour to be given by His Thai Majesty at The King's Palace that the Princess was prevailed upon to leave the Embassy reception.

It was close to midnight when the Royal Party returned to the Embassy after attending King Bhumibol's dinner. Princess Alexandra seemed tireless after a day filled with hard and tiring labor in the heat and humidity of Thailand. Many toasts were raised to her energy, endurance and good humor. We genuinely enjoyed her stay and expressed the wish that she should soon return to the scene of her triumph. The following morning, Princess Alexandra left Thailand on another commercial flight, this time heading for Hong Kong.

A few days later my wife and I were at a dinner party with friends when she bent down to retrieve a napkin that had fallen from her lap. As she did she uttered a cry of pain. Fortunately she was sitting next to one of the three doctors who took care of the health of the Embassy staff. He advised my wife to see him without delay. Four days later my wife was diagnosed with cancer.

Q: Ooh!

COLESHILL: Immediate arrangements were made to fly both of us to London and, without delay, have her admitted to a specialist hospital in London. There was little time for the round of seemingly endless farewells that are made for diplomats when they leave post definitively. Nevertheless, we were overwhelmed with messages of sympathy, and farewell gifts in the few days left to us in Bangkok.

My wife, Audrey, was admitted to Charing Cross Hospital on her arrival in London. She endured the procedure for the removal of the cancerous growth from the Pouch of Douglas and then, over a number of months, underwent numerous periods of chemotherapy. In April we were told the cancer was terminal and that Audrey would be well advised to return to our family home in Devonshire and, surrounded by her family, to live out the rest of her days.

Q: Ugh.

COLESHILL: Audrey died at 4:00 am on 15 August 1983. Four hours later Toby, our second grandson was born to our daughter, Janice. .

Q: Oh, that's really sad -- must have been awful.

COLESHILL: It was. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office had been wonderfully understanding in the way I was treated. When I first reported my wife's condition I was immediately told to disappear and take what is euphemistically known as "gardening

leave.” I will never forget how sympathetically the powers-that-be-in the F.C.O. treated me during this dreadful period of my life.

When, in early September 1983, I returned to my Office, I was asked what I wanted to do? I said I wanted to rid my thoughts of the present unhappiness and get out of London at the earliest opportunity. In June 1984. I flew to Nairobi. .

Q: All right Walter, this is very interesting.

Q: OK, today is the 30th of April 2012, with Walter Coleshill. Well Walter, we left it off, your wife had died and you had asked to leave London.

COLESHILL: That’s right. I settled on the job as First Secretary in the British High Commission in Nairobi.

Q: And you served there from when to when?

COLESHILL: I served there until September 1986.

Q: And you went out when?

COLESHILL: I went in June 1984, and left Kenya in September 1986. On paper and as seen from the F.C.O. the main task was to run the Consular Section of the British High Commission in Nairobi, Kenya. However, as the British population numbered over 29,000, much of my time was spent traveling around Kenya speaking with the representative of those British citizens. Many had gone to Kenya from the United Kingdom in the 1920’s and 1930’s and had been settlers in British administered Kenya Colony. Some were of Indian descent from fathers who had been recruited from India and had come to build the railway from Mombasa to Nairobi and on to the British Protectorate of Uganda. By their religion, the latter group might be Hindu, Moslem or Sikh. The linking factor with both groups was that they held British passports. As such, they were entitled to protection from the British High Commission.

Making arrangements to meet and speak to the hundred of isolated groups dotted throughout Kenya was time consuming. As I also had the responsibility of supervising a busy Consular Operation in the High Commission in Nairobi, I realized, to introduce a sense of humor to a difficult schedule, I was going to be busier than a one-armed paperhanger. Fortunately my High Commissioner, Sir Leonard Allison, who was much experienced in the ways of diplomacy in Africa, gave me his complete support when I reported to him that I could not complete the task he had set in front of me unless he accepted I would be absent from Nairobi and on trek around Kenya, for ten days in each month. So began another peripatetic existence.

Q: What was the Kenyan government at that time?

COLESHILL: At that time, the Head of the Kenya Government was President Daniel Arap Moi.

Q: He was still there.

COLESHILL: Kenya became independent in November 1963. A substantial number of British Colonial Civil Servants remained to run the country after Independence. When I arrived in June, 1984, there were a number of senior posts still occupied by British ex-Colonial Civil Servants, who were being paid by the British government to help run the country. There were five men under a Kenyan Inspector-General.

Q: How big of an expatriate group of Brits did you have there?

COLESHILL: The British expatriate population numbered nearly thirty thousand. Kenya was a very pleasant country in which to live, whether it was at sea level along the Indian Ocean coast with its sea breezes or in Nairobi with its perfect climate around the five-thousand feet. Up-Country, there were a substantial number of Britons running tea plantations, coffee plantations, arable and animal farms, all widely spread throughout the country. Rich and influential Africans owned some of these farms.

Q: I hate to ask it, but was the Happy Valley establishment still in tact?

COLESHILL: As far as I knew from reliable informants who had lived through that period, that sort of life for the expatriate community had ceased to exist.

Q: Yes. I've heard the story that they used to say Kenya was for officers and Rhodesia was for other ranks.

COLESHILL: That is almost how I found both territories. Kenya was populated from the Officer's mess: Rhodesia from the Sergeant's mess. The reason is simple to explain in broad brush terms: In the years before and after World War I, the British Government deliberately targeted the British ruling class to send their funds, their sons and daughters to Kenya Colony where they would live a life of ease in the sun. The campaign was hugely successful. For documentary confirmation one only has to examine the shipping advertisements for the years either side of the First World War.

Q: (laughs) Ah.

COLESHILL: And of course the other jocular comment on meeting someone in the late 1960's who said they lived in Kenya, was to ask if they were married – or did they really live in Kenya?"

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: It was said the incidence of divorce and remarriage was probably higher in Kenya than in any other territory.

Q: Well, did this -- I mean the sort of aftermath of this reflected all on your, on your work. I mean was there a problem with sort of the, you know, with sexual relations? Not you, but I mean, you know, your clientele?

COLESHILL: No. That was something in which I tried never to become involved. That was a family, not a consular, problem. Apart from remarking: "Adultery. No good can come of it!" I have nothing to add except, if they can, any wide-awake Consular Officer will stay well clear of family problems!

Q: Well, you know, as a long term Consular Officer, I know. But sometimes, you know, family quarrels can get out in the open, unwanted children, you know all that.

COLESHILL: Yes. It happened to me. I recall in Algeria there was a rather nasty case. Of course, the male Algerian believed he had the absolute right to say what his wife and child could or could not do. And within the law of many countries, whether we like it or not, such is still the case. Expatriate wives did not always agree with that part of the law of the country in which they were resident. Therein lays the problem.

Q: Well, what were your biggest issues that you dealt with in this job?

COLESHILL: In Nairobi?

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: Part of my task was to re-assure British passport holders that my staff at the British High Commission listened to their comments and complaints and dealt fairly with them. During my travels around Kenya I was frequently invited to speak at meetings about immigration to the UK. This was a contentious problem, as many British passport holders resident in Kenya did not have the right to immigrate to Britain. It was my job to explain British law as laid down by the British Parliament at Westminster. Frequently, this resulted in long and, sometime, noisy meetings. I hugely enjoyed the thrust of these debates.

Q: What about the native British residents there? Did they give you a rough time for being close to the Indian class?

COLESHILL: Thanks to the depth of my training and experience, I never allowed anyone to give me a rough time. I knew my subject matter and was always delighted to expound at length upon it. I said I would give equal weight to problems facing all British passport holders, irrespective of their racial origin and the color of the skin. Many of the white settler population, who were resident in pre-independence Kenya, had renounced their British citizenship after Kenya Independence to become Kenyan citizens. When British Immigration Regulations changed in 1981, the mere possession of a British passport did not always entitle the holder to live into Britain. Many former British citizens mistakenly believed they had the automatic right to revert to their former British citizenship. This

was made more poignant if the passport holder had fought for the British during a time of national conflict. It was sometimes difficult to convince them they were misinformed about current British citizenship regulations that inhibited their return to Britain.

Q: Did the troubles in Burundi and Rwanda spill over to Kenya or involve you at all?

COLESHILL: No. The only time we had any serious problems was the June 1985 rebellion in Uganda. The British arranged for an evacuation convoy of civilian vehicles containing expatriates of many nationalities to drive from Kampala to the Kenyan border. Members of the British Army Training Team, who were stationed in Uganda, controlled the convoy. As I had excellent relations with the Heads of the Kenya Immigration and Passport Departments and many Kenya border guard authorities, I was able to arrange for chartered Kenyan busses to cross the Kenya/ Uganda border. Expatriates who owned vehicles that broke down or were confiscated at the Uganda border were brought to safety in these busses. Thanks to the efforts of the British Army and British diplomats the evacuation of many expatriates from Uganda was a complete success. No injuries or deaths were reported among those who they helped to leave Uganda.

Q: Oh boy.

COLESHILL: Most expatriates who wanted to leave Kampala were included in the evacuation convoy. These included British and Commonwealth nationals along with many Europeans and Americans.

Q: Was this when Idi Amin took over or?

COLESHILL: No. That was when General Okello deposed President Milton Obote. Then a few months later Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's NRA overthrew Okello.

Q: He'd been away.

COLESHILL: Obote, yes. --

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: --That was a very successful evacuation. I also flew five times to Juba to ensure that arrangements were in place to bring out Britons who may be caught up in any problems in southern Sudan. At Juba International Airport, as it was called, was perhaps the most dangerous airport I had ever flown into and out of. Air traffic control, if it existed, was elementary to say the least. On one occasion we were about to leave a taxi track and enter the main runway when a large military aircraft raced towards us. Fortunately the missionary pilot, complete with clerical collar and a captain's rings on his epaulets, halted his aircraft, turned to me and murmured: "Let us pray." We did. All the way to Nairobi Airport!

Q: (laughs) Oh God.

COLESHILL: That was a very hairy moment.

Q: Kenya is surrounded by trouble. How about Somalia at the time? Were there any problems there?

COLESHILL: Not as far as I was concerned. But there were always problems in what at one time was called "The Northern Frontier District" of Kenya. As we had nobody living in that particular district, I never went to the NFD.

Q: How about along the coast? Mombasa -- did you have any English visits or other visits there, tour ships?

COLESHILL: I cannot remember a cruise liner coming in to Mombasa or Malindi during my time. We did have a ship visit by a passing Royal Navy warship. The three-day visit to Mombasa passed without incident and was soon forgotten. Most tourists destined for Kenya's Coast Province arrived at Mombasa by air on packaged tours. The Italians favored Malindi where an Italian-run hotel catered for Italian nationals. I spent a delightful Thanksgiving holiday weekend, playing bridge at the hotel with four American ladies, one of whom I later had the good fortune and even better sense, to marry. For the Thanksgiving dinner, I ordered a Thanksgiving turkey to be served at our table. Unfortunately I had forgotten to mention we also wanted lots of stuffing to accompany the bird. In later life, whenever my wife and I meet the other three bridge players I am reminded of that unforgivable lapse which allowed Thanksgiving to pass without the consumption of turkey stuffing. Even Homer nods!

A number of problems did arise when tourism took off along the Kenya Coast. The principal cause seemed to be the number of female tourists who came to enjoy the sun, sea and sandy beaches and to escape the European winter. They did so by disporting themselves, topless, on the beaches. This offended the susceptibilities of the Muslim communities that lived along the Kenya Coast. In consequence, there were a number of incidents when nubile young Nordic ladies were arrested for gross indecency. Fortunately, most British ladies were not quite so uninhibited. Representations were made to the local authorities. They knew that tourists were essential to the local economy. Eventually a system was worked out that certain beaches would be designated for the use by the bare-breasted brigade. Other beaches were allocated to the Muslim communities that dominated that part of the Kenya Coast.

Q: That area there of course later became where we were worried about Muslim terrorists and involved in the blowing up of our embassy in Kenya.

COLESHILL: Indeed. And the simultaneous explosion at our Embassy in Dar es Salaam! To this day, we still look back with particular horror at what has happened at the American Embassy in Nairobi. The explosion caused the death of a very dear friend of ours.

Q: Well, during this time when you were in Kenya, did you find that you had joint work to do with the Americans or with the American Embassy?

COLESHILL: Oh, long before my wife and I became an "Item" I had good relations with many of the staff at the American Embassy. In fact, on my arrival in Nairobi I founded an organization called the Nairobi Consular Corps. I founded the organization as I had been Chairman of the Consular Corps in Bangkok, Thailand and knew how the organization aided the members to re-act decisively with the host Government. My aim was to bring all Consular Officers together who were accredited to The Kenya Government and were based in Nairobi. This brought me into close contact with my fellow Consular Officers and permitted us to share our problems and helped to provide the answers especially for those who had little or no consular experience. The Consul-General at the American Embassy was Bill Caldwell who had vast experience in his field. Ronnie and I spent much time in the company of Bill and his wife, especially after I began dating the lady I eventually married.

The American did have a particular problem in dealing with the arrival at Mombasa Port of U.S. Fleet from the Persian Gulf.

Q: I think it was the 5th.

COLESHILL: The ships used Mombasa as a rest and relaxation center. Very few of the ships -- as far as I can remember -- actually entered Mombasa Harbor. They anchored outside the harbor and used the City as a recreational facility. It must have been interesting to be present in the ancient City with four or five thousand red-bloodied American --

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: -- sailors who brought certain problems to the area. On the first fleet visit, when the sailors returned to their ships all manner of trouble ensued because of certain distressing medical conditions they had contracted. The second Fleet visit was quite, quite different. The young sailors had been warned what would happen if they contracted social diseases and what affect it would have on their careers. That had an unusual repercussion. The local ladies of the night and those who came down from Nairobi found there was little business as the sailors had been warned off. They were considerably out of pocket following the non-fraternizing rule that resulted in the lack of trade.

Q: (chuckles)

COLESHILL: As a result the U.S. fleet sailed away from Mombasa and back to the Persian Gulf in good order and naval discipline.

Q: Well, how were medical facilities in Kenya at the time?

COLESHILL: Some of the hospitals were poorly run due to the lack of funding. There were plenty of pharmacies. Over the counter medicines that would be prescription drugs elsewhere were freely available. There was no shortage of medical drugs. Perhaps the more exotic and the more expensive ones were difficult to obtain. Given the number of airlines that flew in and out of Nairobi, you could obtain medical supplies from Europe and from America without any problems. There were always people bustling back and forwards who would always pick up whatever specialized drugs and medical equipment that was needed. I'm not talking about --

Q: No, medical drugs.

COLESHILL: Medical drugs, yes. You always get them. Many medical wholesalers had branches in Nairobi where you could get these drugs.

Q: What about the tourism? Did you have problems with your clientele going out to pet the lions and things like that?

COLESHILL: The world was happy to come to Kenya and enjoy seeing whatever, whether it was elephants, or the big five. Bird watching was fabulous. In my excursions around Kenya on behalf of the British government, I found it preferable to plot my many trips through the various tourist camps, resorts and game parks. The one on Mount Kenya, Mount Kenya Safari Club, a neighbor to William Holden's Mount Kenya Game Ranch, for example, was absolutely wonderful. Film actress Stephanie Powers set it up as a wildlife preservation after Holden's death. From these resorts, I would then make my official calls on the governors and Kenyan officials in the nearby cities and towns. This arrangement was superior to living in hotels that had seen better days. The food and service were better. Additionally, the game reserves had areas where animals could be seen, around the clock, in the wild and from the comfort of a hide or viewing platform.

One of the more pleasant reasons for living in Nairobi was that Nairobi Game Park was almost at your doorstep. It was only five miles from the city center. We would get up at 4:00am, drive to the Nairobi Park entrance when the gates opened at 5:00am. We would drive around the Park, watching the animals, then drive to Nairobi Airport in time for a departing aircraft around 7:00 am. On two occasions we found the Airport gates closed and a pride of lions sitting, watching the line of cars with passengers, waiting for the game wardens to escort the escaped lions back to the confines of Nairobi Park. The escaped lions caused considerable inconvenience to arriving and departing passengers and to airline schedules.

Q: Obviously, you met Ronnie in Kenya.

COLESHILL: Yes. We met over the bridge table. Both of us played bridge for relaxation.

Q: Oh yes, what a delight.

COLESHILL: The first time we played together, I asked if she played “Acol,” which is a convention played throughout the British Empire. It allows one to open the bidding with four card majors. It is unknown in American bridge playing circles. Her reply, “No. But I play the recorder.” At that moment I knew I would have problems with my new partner. The result is we are still together. And still playing bridge!

Q: How is the bridge where you are now?

COLESHILL: Happily it is thriving. I have just agreed to drive 25 miles to collect Ronnie from Raleigh, where she will be attending the ballet and then drive 20 miles to ensure we can play a regular bridge game with eighteen friends. With twenty of us playing there will be five tables. We belong to four different bridge schools and we still cannot get enough of this stimulating, satisfying and competitive game.

Q: One of the things -- I've noticed that none of my kids play bridge. I mean it's sort of a generational thing, isn't it?

COLESHILL: Not only generational: But also cyclical. My elder daughter is aged 60. When she was eleven and her sister, aged nine, would fly to Ghana for holiday visits. Both girls were competitive at children's card games but, steadfastly, refused to learn to play bridge on the grounds that: “Only Old People” played the game!

By the time that eleven-year-old became twenty-two she had learned the game. Thirty years later she was living in Antigua and playing international bridge for the Antiguans.

Q: OK, well I was wondering where did you go from Kenya?

COLESHILL: From Kenya, we went around the world.

Q: Where did you get married?

COLESHILL: We married in Nairobi on 13 of June 1986. Believe it or not, it was a Friday and exactly a year after our first date. Ronnie was given in marriage by U.S. Ambassador Jerry Thomas, in the garden of the home of the U.S. Public Affairs Officer Len Lefko.

After our marriage we had to decide whether Ronnie should take a year of sabbatical leave from the American Foreign Service and stay with me in Kenya or, if I should take premature retirement from the British Diplomatic Service, and accompany Ronnie to Washington and her new post as her dependent spouse.

Q: (laughs)

COLESHILL: In the event, that is what we did. We flew round the world on a delayed honeymoon in Mauritius, Singapore, Jakarta, Bali, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Seattle, New Orleans and thence, via Florida, to Washington, DC. We were enrolled at Foreign Service

Institute which was then in Rosslyn and studied the French language during the bitter winter of 1986/87. We studied for five hours every weekday at FSI then, in the hope of clearing our minds, we walked across Key Bridge and through Georgetown in the biting cold. By the time we arrived at our apartment hotel at Foggy Bottom, close by Watergate, we were nearly frozen, exhausted, hungry for a light lunch and ready to continue with our language studies. We did that for eight months. I enjoyed living in Foggy Bottom! Then we went, as planned, to Zaire.

Q: OK, well I was thinking this is probably a good place to stop. And we'll pick this up when you're off to Zaire and we'll find out, you became a spouse.

COLESHILL: *(laughs)* I can assure you it was done effortlessly. We had a very good marriage and --

Q: Well, I want to get a little feel for being the male spouse. I don't do many of these and yours should be particularly interesting since you've been in the trade for a long time.

COLESHILL: Indeed. And that's how -- and I'll say right up front, I found that my briefing as a spouse by the State Department was infinitely superior to any I received from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The language training and the area studies, in particular the area studies, was always first class. But more of this later!

COLESHILL: Good afternoon, how are you? This is Walter Coleshill.

Q: All right, are you ready to have at it?

COLESHILL: I am indeed.

Q: Well, let's start from the beginning. You'd studied French and you're off to where?

COLESHILL: After studying sub-Saharan French, we went to Kinshasa, Zaire.

Q: What's Saharan French?

COLESHILL: It is slightly different from the Metropolitan French that is spoken in Paris. Although I had spoken the language for a number of years, I was no expert. However, I understand some of the verbs have differing meanings and FSI prefers to have the language taught by Francophone Africans

Q: How did you find it?

COLESHILL: A confession: I am a duffer at languages. I found that very early on in life. I was 11-years of age in 1939 when I began my schoolboy French. It soon became clear to me that while I enjoyed all other forms of learning, I was not good at languages. Even though I eventually joined the British Diplomatic Service, I had a frustrating time

learning a foreign language, whether it was French, Ga, Afrikaans, Hindi, Thai, Brazilian Portuguese or German. I simply do not have the ear for languages.

Q: I join you in being a duffer at languages. I've taken French, Spanish, and Latin in prep school and went to the Army Language School and studied Russian and I studied Serbian. I got somewhere in Serbian, but other than that I'm still a -- I've never really been overly exposed to language. And I've gotten by with what we're talking now.

COLESHILL: *(laughs)* Yes. It is claimed a British language student was once asked what he would do if the person in the colonies to whom he was speaking did not understand what was being said. The student replied: "Oh, I'd shout louder." A typical British response.

Q: When did you get to Kinshasa?

COLESHILL: That was in the summer of 1987.

Q: What was the situation there at that time?

COLESHILL: President Mobutu was in power. Presidential guards, trained by the Israeli Army, protected him. Mobutu looked upon Zaire as his personal fiefdom, as the Belgian King Leopold had done before. Much of the profit from exports went into the pockets of Mobutu and his friends as were most of the aid and assistance monies. The citizens were badly treated. The rule of law did not exist. I soon learned to pray each evening that, eventually, we would be allowed to leave Kinshasa, alive, with all our possessions and pets.

I worked full-time for the American Embassy. I found this employment to be immensely instructive as the Embassy was self-sustaining. It had just about everything done on site. Outside the Embassy, there was virtually no national telephone network. All communications were completed by portable telephones that we carried on a belt around the waist. An indication of how important one was in the Embassy hierarchy could be gained by the number of portable radios that hung from the belt around the waist. By that yardstick: the supervising General Services Officer was the number one as he had nine portable radios hanging from his belt. We had everything from our own security forces from the Zairian Army to an in-house hospital facility that could do minor surgeries.

Q: Now, what were you doing this? You were a spouse, but how did you work a role for yourself?

COLESHILL: At the beginning of our tour, I read books and exercised our pets. We lived in an apartment block that overlooked the Zaire River. There was little else to do except shop and drive Ronnie to and from the office. There were few places to go, as the roads ceased to exist a few miles from Kinshasa and became earthen tracks. If you went across the Zaire River there was little of interest in Brazzaville, Congo. Kinshasa was probably about the most difficult country in which I had ever lived. It was jokingly said that there

were 81 persons in this country who mattered. Twenty were ministers, twenty were members of parliament, twenty were exiles to their villages and twenty were in jail. It was a bit like musical chairs. Every six months or so, they all changed positions. The only constant was President Mobutu. That comment may have been made in jest. Nevertheless, there was a certain amount of truth to it.

Q: Well, were you concerned about the Congolese Military? Because you know, there'd been trouble, not paid, sort of roaming the streets, or was that a problem when you were there?

COLESHILL: Yes it was. The problems were too numerous to quantify. The principal problem was that there was little regard for the rule of law and for human life. Under the former colonial power the Congolese people had been badly treated by the Belgian State. Murder and mutilation had been common up to the time Zaire won its independence. As an example I would cite the occasion when we were returning to our home. In the village in which we lived we saw the body lying in the road. A heavy truck had struck the man. The truck driver, knowing this had happened, did not stop. The next vehicle to arrive was driven by a professor from the local university. When he was forced to stop by the mob, he was dragged from his vehicle and, literally torn limb from limb. What remained of his body lay in the gutter for two days before the police removed it. No action was taken by the authorities to establish who the truck driver was or who the culprits who murdered the professor were.

Q: Oh God.

COLESHILL: Another example is that we knew of an incident where a mother nursing a child -- threw the child over the tailboard of the truck in which she was riding into the path of a following vehicle, which happened to have a CD plate. The child was killed instantly. If that car had stopped, the driver would have been killed by the mob or he/she would have appeared before a tribunal and made to pay enormous sums because the death of the child. The fact that the mother threw the child from the truck into the path of the oncoming car would never have been mentioned. For us, Zaire was a very, very dangerous place in which to live and work. Both of us prayed nightly that, come the anti-Mobutu revolution, our pets, our belongings and we might be allowed to leave Zaire.

Q: Well, were you able to make any friends with the Zairians or not?

COLESHILL: No. We had many friends in the diplomatic and the expatriate business communities. We had no friends who were Zairians. More to the point, we had no wish to be friends with Zairian Ministers, senior Government or military officials. That would have been dangerous for them.

Q: Did you find yourself an odd fit with the embassy community? Most of the spouses were wives, and here you were an experienced Foreign Service Officer and all.

COLESHILL: No. It was, laughingly, said I had a strange accent. I, smilingly, replied it was they, and not me, who had the accent. With relaxed good humor I found I fitted in very well with most of the Embassy community. Annually, around the July 4 Celebrations, I was joshed about the British being defeated with the surrender at Yorktown. I had a ready riposte that had General Cornwallis not been defeated at Yorktown in 1781, he, having retained the confidence of the British Government, would not have been sent by the British Government to India where, in his campaign of 1792, he defeated the forces of Tipu Sultan which brought about the (first) pacification of India. (No mention was made of the defeat of the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857.) India then remained part of the British Empire until August 1947 and paid the British well to occupy the sub-Continent. These facts usually fell upon deaf ears, especially my wife's. Nevertheless, my answer established I had a grasp of history and was not to be taken as an easy mark!

Life improved immensely when I was offered a job with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). I was the Deputy Executive Officer. I was comparatively well paid and enjoyed working with Americans. It was at this time I realized the vast amount of aid in the form of funds and equipment the United States was giving to Zaire, in particular, and Africa in general.

During the time I worked for USAID I unknowingly, suffered a minor heart attack. I was found, slumped over my office desk. When I came too, I made an appointment with the Embassy doctor who had previously prescribed a course of treatment that included the daily consumption of eight Aspirin tablets.

Following my appointment with the Embassy doctor I flew to London and was admitted to the Humana Hospital in St. Johns Wood. A specialist examined me and said he had no idea what was wrong with my health. Whatever was wrong with me in Kinshasa, I now appeared to have recovered. He recommended I take a week off in England, see my dentist, and then go back to work in Kinshasa. Twenty years later in Vienna, an examining cardiologist reacting from data only from blood samples, accurately diagnosed the date on which I had suffered the previous minor heart attack that was not discovered in Zaire or London.

Q: Well, why were you taking eight aspirin? That must be very dangerous.

COLESHILL: I had a toothache that was being caused by an undiscovered abscess in the gum. There was no dentist on the Embassy staff and none to be recommended in Kinshasa. It was thought the consumption of aspirin would relieve the pain. It did, but it also brought about blood in my stool! After two visits to my dentist in Exmouth, I rapidly recovered my good health and returned to work in Kinshasa.

Q: What type of work were you doing with AID?

COLESHILL: I was the Deputy Executive Officer. I organized and ran the motor pool that consisted of some twenty vehicles and an equal number of drivers. I ensured that all

the office services, cooling, lighting, office equipment and that the supply of potable drinking water was always available. Drinking water was suspect in Kinshasa, because there had been no repairs to the pumps after the Belgians left. The Embassy produced hundreds of gallons of potable water every day for the domestic use by the staff and also water fountains in the office. I accepted I was over-qualified for the job, but was pleased to accept, as I was bored with life in a hot and humid Zaire where there was so little to engage my enquiring mind.

Q: You arrived there and left when?

COLESHILL: We arrived in the summer of 1987 and left in, September 1989. Let us say it was something like two years, three months, and 11 days. But who's counting?

Q: Yes. You left with --

COLESHILL: Yes. We were pleased to leave because you never knew what was happening. A white face on the streets of Kinshasa was likely to be stopped by a patrolling policeman who would stick out his hand out and expect to have money placed in it. He wanted money to feed his family. To escape this harassment, I carried a fake hand radio made of bent coat-hanger wire. When I saw a Zairian policeman coming towards me, I would pick up this mock radio and start talking into it. This usually brought the reaction from the policeman who asked if I was from the American Embassy. I would say yes and the policemen would walk away. The police knew the U.S. Embassy had a company of armed Zaire soldiers, immediately ready, to go to the aid of any employee being harassed on the Kinshasa streets. The results were invariably unpleasant for the person doing the harassing. Had the person been an employee of a commercial company he would have given the policemen money.

Q: So much for little tricks.

COLESHILL: Yes. In Zaire we were careful where we went and to whom we spoke. Due to the absence of the rule of law and the absence of the value of human life, Zaire was one of two countries to which I would never return.

*Q: So where did you go back to after you left there?
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COLESHILL: We went back to Washington. Ronnie was assigned Executive Director for African Affairs at the United States Information Agency (USIA).

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: She was enjoying being "St. Ronnie of the Little Posts." She really believed in what small posts could accomplish if only they had a little bit of program money. She ensured that each Public Affairs Officer had discretionary program funds, knew how much they had, and what their programming options were. It seems that was a

new concept at the time. It was supposed to be a two-year assignment, but when she was asked if she was interested in going to Brasilia as Executive Officer, she jumped at the chance. It was a stretch into a Senior Foreign Service position Who in their right mind would turn that opportunity down?

We then went to a private language school for Portuguese language training and FSI for area studies.

Q: You were in Brasilia from when to when?

COLESHILL: We were in Brasília from May 1991 to September 1995. We were there for four years. After a rather shaky start, we thoroughly enjoyed living in Brasilia.

Q: Well, what were you doing there?

COLESHILL: Ronnie was the Executive Officer for USIS in Brasília. This meant she worked at the Embassy but also had responsibilities at the United States Consulate Generals in São Paulo and Rio and in the Consulates in Recife, Bella Horizonte and Porto Alegre. For the second time in our life together, Ronnie seemed to be spending more time traveling than she did at home.

Q: And --

COLESHILL: To make better use of my time at Post, I had various temporary jobs around the Embassy. I worked for the Administration section, Foreign Commercial Service and for the Economic Counselor. Then I became the CLO.

Q: Community Liaison Officer.

COLESHILL: Yes, indeed.

Q: Could you explain what you were doing?

COLESHILL: My joint responsibility – because it was a job share – that is to say there were two of us doing the job, was made all the more difficult as my colleague was the wife of a communicator who was on his first State Department overseas tour. On the other hand, I had served overseas for over thirty years with two Foreign Services. As an experienced diplomat there were situations I would not permit. However, my colleague would permit the same situation to happen. It was a rather unusual marriage of responsibilities. We both tried to remain professional but there were problems that related to her background and her large family who were resident at Post.

Q: Could you give any examples of where this would come to the surface?

COLESHILL: My colleague thought it permissible for her children and other Embassy children to walk long distances through heat and cold, wind and rain to and from the

Embassy School. I took the line that, as children of U.S. diplomats they must be protected at all times – they should be nurtured – and driven in buses, fitted with seat belts, and have a monitor present at all times to ensure the protection of the children.

The other problem was that instead of doing the normal duties which fall to the lot of CLOs around the world, I once estimated that ninety percent of our time was spent typing and reproducing the Embassy weekly news letter. This was expressly forbidden in instruction issued by the Family Liaison Office at State Department. When I raised this matter I was told to return to my office and, if I did not want to comply with my instructions, I could resign. I pointed out that as CLOs we were extremely well paid in comparison to the pay of a local typist. To me, the situation was indicative of a hidebound mentality, an appalling waste of State Department funds and the misuse of the skills that we should be using to enhance the standard of life in the Embassy community.

Q: Well, how did you -- how was living for you all there?

COLESHILL: Before I reply to that question, you should try to understand the geography of Brasília, and how the American Embassy staff was housed. Between the junior and senior ranks there was very much a sense of *them and us*. This could be seen quite easily by where one lived. By and large, junior staff lived in Embassy-owned apartment blocks alongside a sixteen-lane highway. Senior ranks lived on the other side of a large lake, in spacious villa, often complete with a swimming pool. The sixteen-lane highway enhanced the problem. As an example, compare the road with (say) I -270 in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Then double it. Then add buses that stopped, only a short distance from the apartment every few minutes at traffic lights. This problem continued from five in the morning until two in the morning the following day. Without double-glazing in the windows of the apartments, the noise and pollution produced by the traffic and crowds of passengers passing close to the apartments, it was no small wonder the junior staff that inhabited the apartments were vexed and discontented with their lot.

!

Q: Oh God.

COLESHILL: What made the problems worse was it was almost impossible to find a villa that did not have a swimming pool. Apart from the amenity value of the pool there was also the climate to consider. For six months of each year, no rain fell in Brasilia. The atmosphere became so dry that children were not allowed to play outside in the sunshine as they became dangerously dehydrated. It was believed the multiplicity of private swimming pools in Brasilia helped to maintain a level of humidity during the dry season.

Q: Well, where did you end up?

COLESHILL: On our arrival we were temporarily housed in an apartment block. We quickly empathized with those who were permanently housed there. After two months or so, we found a house, complete with a pool and a garden with fruit trees on the nicer side of the lake that divided the city of Brasilia.

A month later tragedy struck. Ronnie was diagnosed with colon cancer. We were told the treatment could not be obtained in Brazil, and State Department would arrange to med-evict her to Miami. Thereafter, we would have to find a hospital and surgeon who could undertake the procedures to deal with the colon cancer. After arrival at Miami Airport, no further assistance would be provided by the State Department. This was at a time when criminals were shooting at tourists, intent on robbery at Miami's Dade Airport. Needless to say, we were horrified at this cold, calculating and heartless treatment and said so to the Embassy. To add insult to injury, if I wanted to accompany Ronnie to the U.S. I would have to pay my own way. In the event, Ronnie's parent agency (USIS) came to her assistance and arranged to fly her to Washington DC and then, because we would be in the Washington area, State Medical identified an experienced surgeon and an appropriate hospital for the procedure.

Q: Well --

COLESHILL: After consultations with her surgeon, Ronnie underwent surgery at Sibley Hospital. We then spent some time in a Georgetown hotel where Ronnie recuperated from the procedure. Eventually, the surgeon pronounced the operation to be completely successful and that Ronnie would not have to endure chemotherapy or radium treatment. At that moment we embraced each other and, with tears in our eyes, congratulated Dr. Bachhuber and ourselves at this joyful news. Some two months later Dr. Bachhuber, somewhat reluctantly, agreed that Ronnie was fit to travel to Brasilia.

During the time Ronnie was recuperating in Washington, she frequently signed documents that were being faxed to her from our Embassy in Brasilia that required her approval and signature. She was USIS's only officer with a contracting warrant and the Post's GSO refused to sign USIS procurements and grants. These documents were then returned to State Department for transmission, via the Diplomatic Pouch, to Brasilia.

We left Washington, DC en-route for Brasilia. Around 10:00 am on the morning of our arrival at Brasilia Airport we walked from the aircraft and looked up at the terminal building. Imagine our surprise to see on the rooftop promenade almost all the staff of the USIS. They were holding large banners which read in the Portuguese and English languages: "Welcome Home Ronnie!" Remember, she had only been at Post three months prior to her medical evacuation. Very early on after our first arrival in Brasilia, we had very soon learned that Brazilians are very touchy-feely people. They enjoy the act of embracing their friends. As Ronnie said, after being greeted by her colleagues, it was the first time she had actually been embraced by all the drivers who welcomed her back. In this present age of political correctness, I believe nowhere else in this world would you receive such an exuberant and heartfelt welcome.

Q: Oh wonderful.

COLESHILL: We had a wonderful time. Brasília was very much an open-air city if you liked to play golf, play tennis, to swim or do any of those outdoor games. If you were

looking for nightlife or café society, forget about it. For nightlife you went elsewhere: São Paulo, and Rio.

Q: I'm interviewing a man who was in Brasília around that time and his daughter took up horseback riding and became quite good -- she won medals and all that because of her horseback riding.

COLESHILL: Yes, we loved our life in Brasilia. There those who hated the rural backwater that Brasília was. There was a certain amount of -- what should we say -- lawless is the wrong word. The rich and powerful had a special place. For example, in the district in which we lived there was a main road. The young adult children of the rich and the powerful used the divided highway as a racetrack every Saturday evening. They would go to the bars, get tanked up, and then take their cars and use this divided highway as a racetrack. Representations were made to the police but their attitude was that as these were the adult children of the elite they dare not intervene. The police advised we should stay away from the divided highway on Saturday night. We heeded this sound advice but recognized, at the time there was one law for the Brazilian rich... and another for the poor Brazilians!

Q: Ah-ha.

COLESHILL: We spent most of our time in outdoor pursuits. We also played bridge and squash at various clubs.

Q: Well, this Community Liaison Office, when you weren't typing up the newsletter what were you doing?

COLESHILL: Making sure the children of the embassy staff got to and from school on time. We found a contractor who would provide a service that equated with the standard provided in Fairfax County, Virginia. The search was long and hard, but eventually we found a contractor who would retrofit seatbelts in his buses so that our children could safely be transported to and from school. Mind you, anyone who rode in an embassy car was required to wear a seat belt. Doesn't it just make sense that the school bus also has a seat belt requirement?

We were the recipients of many stories about the misdemeanors taking place on our school buses. One concerned a young lad who pointed an imitation revolver out of an open window at a passing patrolling police car. Unfortunately two weeks before one of the policemen's colleagues had been shot and injured by somebody on a bus. The bus was stopped and the boy was rebuked by the police officer. This incident became a cause célèbre as the parents were disinclined to believe their child would try to pull such a dangerous prank. About a week later when one of our busses was stationary at a traffic signal, a boy mooned passers-by who, not surprisingly, took grave exception. This incident caused a storm in a teacup for ten days as again, the child's parents, did not believe their child could do such a thing. There we many other incidents I could recall.

Q: How did you find the parents reacted to all this? Were they contentious or did they work with you or were there problems?

COLESHILL: It was all a question of approach. There were some who believed their children could do no wrong. There were others who believed that boys would be boys and girls would be girls. And at times, boys and girls misbehaved. The amount of misbehavior decreased on the buses when we were able to convince the Embassy Administration to put an adult who supervised the children and reported on their behavior. Perhaps the greatest problem we experienced was the scheduling of buses around our large catchment area. Our children had to get up early to board the buses to take them on a long journey to school. If one of the children wanted to leave school early because of (say) medical arrangements, one of the CLOs had to be there to make sure the revised arrangements worked perfectly. Sometimes the arrangements failed. Then hours would be spent in dissecting the arrangements we had made. We always tried to make the arrangements work but, to quote the Ringling Brothers. "You can't please all of the people, all of the time."

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: Most parents had confidence that, uppermost in our minds, was the protection of the Embassy children. There were some, for whom, our efforts were never sufficient. But you know - that's life!

Q: And then you left there -- you were there four years?

COLESHILL: Yes! We left in September of 1995 for a short home leave and then before heading to New Delhi for a three year tour. As a tourist, I had been in New Delhi before when I shuttled between London and Bangkok

Q: Well I'm looking at the time. It probably is a good place to stop. And we'll pick this up once again in New Delhi.

Q: All right. You were in New Delhi from when to when?

COLESHILL: We were in New Delhi from September of 1995 until the June of 1998.

Q: OK. Were you playing the spouse or were you doing more than that there?

COLESHILL: No, I was doing a little more than that. The Ambassador when we arrived was Frank Wisner, who was the son of Frank Gardner Wisner, the --

Q: CIA (Central Intelligence Agency).

COLESHILL: -- yes, the CIA Chief.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: Yes. Ambassador had an able Deputy Chief of Mission. About a year after we arrived in New Delhi, Matt Daley introduced a requirement where the non-State Department constituent parts of the Embassy were made to pay for Embassy involvement when the constituent part's representative visited Post for whatever reason. The plan was that if, for example, The Department of Education (DoE) or Congress had a delegation visit the Embassy or the host government, DoE or Congress would be charged at an hourly rate for the time State Department expended on arrangements which were made for the delegation. Fiscal data had to be provided before a country clearance cable could be sent approving the visit. I was named as The Visit Coordinator.

Q: Uh-huh.

COLESHILL: Over the next two years I handled about 150 delegations including Senators and Congresspersons, sometimes with their associated spouses, plus delegations from many US Government Departments and Agencies. My involvement extended from drafting the Embassy's Welcome Cable to the wrap-up at the conclusion of the visit. I also sent notes of appreciation to all who had been helpful to the delegation.

I found the work was stimulating and enjoyable particular my working closely with those departments of the Embassy with which I had previously not had access. Escorting the wives of Senators and Congressmen around the tourist sites in New Delhi and, especially, Old Delhi, was sheer delight. The wives were charming and rarely forgot to pen a personal note of thanks for my efforts.

Shortly after I gave up the work I was asked to write a handbook for my successors. Some five years ago I met someone here in the US who recognized my name and asked if I had worked at the US Embassy in New Delhi. She later confirmed the handbook is still in use in our Embassy in New Delhi.

Q: I mean mostly CODELs will say, "What the hell is this?" you know.

COLESHILL: Maybe so. Cables were sent explaining the reasons for the procedure. However, as I recall, it was simply a matter of: No fiscal data - No visit.

Q: Did you find yourself getting involved in arguments about charges and this sort of thing?

COLESHILL: No. I was simply the messenger. This procedure had been approved by Ambassador Wisner. This was what he wanted. End of story! All I can add is that I thoroughly enjoyed meeting many pleasant, sophisticated and interesting men and women who, but for my employment within the Embassy, I would not normally have met. When Ambassador Richard Celeste replaced Ambassador Wisner, he presumably had no objections to the procedures that were then in place. I simply carried on with my duties.

Q: What was life like for you in New Delhi?

COLESHILL: It was very pleasant indeed. Ronnie had the task of keeping in touch with the staff at all the US Consulate Generals in India. We traveled widely into the Himalayas, to Mumbai, to Agra, the Ajanta Caves and many other tourist sites. I was also close at that time to the British High Commission where we played squash regularly on the courts of the British High Commission. It was a busy time, both for work and play. There was a great deal of entertaining within the Diplomatic Corps in New Delhi and we had a very pleasant time.

Q: How stood, from your reflections on it, American-Indian relations?

COLESHILL: American-Indian relations were bedeviled because of the test blast of an Indian atomic device. Intelligence received from US satellite over flights in the area of the test, gave advance warning that the test was about to take place. Later media releases informed the Indian Government the US had learned of the forthcoming test from the installations photographed from US satellites. The second Indian atomic explosion was not known in advance to the US Government as the Indian Government, having been forewarned, buried the test installations and essential equipment so they could not be photographed from space. At the time we were not supportive of the Government of India. I think there was a legacy feeling that the Indians aligned themselves too closely to the former Soviet Union. We supported the Pakistan Government, as it was believed they wanted to be allied to the West.

Whichever of the two powers we supported, I remember a lengthy conversation with a senior Indian General who blamed the British Government of Harold Wilson for the schism between the American and the Indian Governments. He claimed that prior to Prime Minister Wilson coming to power, successive British Governments had sold their time-expired warships to India. When the Socialist Government of Prime Minister Wilson was returned to power, he refused to continue the practice on the grounds that the sale of second-hand warships only fuelled the Indian-Pakistan conflict. The Indian Government shrugged-off the embargo and promptly went to the Soviets, who were happy to dispose of their worn-out submarines and warships to the Indian Government. The US Government declined to take over the former British role as the supplier of naval vessels to the Indian Government.

Q: Did you see many signs of Indian-Russian cooperation?

COLESHILL: No. But then I was in no position to know of any cooperation between the two powers. The Indian Government was socialist oriented and so there must have been much cooperation between them. Also this was a time that Indian Government was unstable. They had three Prime Minister from three different political parties in the years from 1999

Q: I assume that the great majority of spouses were wives there in the community.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: Did you find you were able to latch on to what was a female dominated organization or not, or did this work?

COLESHILL: I'm not sure about the female dominated organizations. As far as I was aware, apart from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, there was not a great deal of female domination in Indian political thought. --

Q: I was thinking in the diplomatic community.

COLESHILL: Oh, in the diplomatic community?

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: I cannot bring to mind the name of any female Ambassador who was accredited to New Delhi.

Q: Did you find that, you know, in dealing with the diplomatic community, that people were either on the British side or the American side? Were you at all conflicted?

COLESHILL: No. Indeed not. I let it be known, as I traveled on an American diplomatic passport, in spite of my English accent, I was, at all time, to be regarded as a citizen of the United States. At my naturalization as a US citizen, I had sworn allegiance to the flag and the nation it represented. That was the end of the matter.

I had many friends in the British High Commission in New Delhi. Some I had known and worked with during the time I was a member of the British Diplomatic Service. I went to the High Commission to play squash with my British chums. Many invited us to social events, inside and outside, the High Commission. The high spot was when we were invited by the British High Commissioner to attend the gala garden party for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh. During the course of the party I was singled out for presentation to The Duke of Edinburgh. I introduced myself by name and then added "American Embassy." The Duke looked at me rather oddly and, without missing a beat, picked-up on this statement and asked what I was doing at a British garden party? I replied I had been honored by Her Majesty and, from the medals I was proudly wearing, he could see I was a member of the Order of the British Empire. I had also been a member of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service for more than twenty years. I was now a citizen of the United States working at the American Embassy in New Delhi. He nodded, made some slighting comment to his aide, and moved on.

Q: How were your quarters?

COLESHILL: Our quarters were of a good standard in an, outer, up-market, part of the New Delhi suburbs. The district, Anand Niketan, was home to many rich and influential Indians and to fellow diplomats. On the day our heavy baggage arrived from the US, the

container was being stripped under supervision in the street. Our boxed possessions were then carried into the house. As the double garden-gates were wide-open, into our compound shambled a scruffy Indian with a yoke over his shoulders. From the yoke dangled two gunny bags. Inside the bags were two cobras that slithered onto the lawn and were enticed to sway to the music of the pipe the Indian played. I have a mortal fear of all snakes and could not bring myself to watch the dance of the cobras. Many passers-by gathered at our gates to watch the performance. I was more concerned that, in the confusion, items may be diverted from their orderly transit from the container to our house. As far as I could tell, we lost none of our personal effects that day. Other expatriates were not so fortunate when the cobra-man came to call.

We had the usual alarms and excursions that are normal for expatriates living in India. Our cook, an ex-Indian Army man, who came highly recommended to us, was found to be drunk during our first party. He had taken possession of a bottle of whisky and a bottle of gin. He mixed the two and was drinking the concoction faster than I deemed possible. He was sacked on the spot and immediately escorted, with his possessions, from the premises. Two days later we were robbed when a couple of hundred dollars worth of rupees were stolen from what, hitherto, we had regarded as a secret hiding place.

Q: Oh boy.

COLESHILL: On another occasion I became aware of responsibilities that had been wished upon us. Our cook had been given a month leave. To cover her absence we hired a replacement. Around dawn on the first Sunday I heard a hammering on our garden gate. When I went to see who was making the noise, I found four bedraggled Indians who asked about our cook. When I asked about their reason for enquiring, I was told she fed them every Sunday. I said I knew nothing about that and suggested they see the Indian family who lived next door. An hour later our neighbor telephoned and said our cook had fed the four starving Indians every Sunday from food from our storeroom. However, our neighbor had dealt with the problem, and would feed them for the next four Sundays. She further suggested that when her cook went on leave, our cook could also feed the four Indians her cook feeds every Sunday. Somewhat befuddled, I agreed.

When my cook returned, I taxed her about feeding the four Indians and asked why I had not been told of the arrangement. She replied, as she was a Christian; it was the Christian thing to do! All Western diplomats, for whom she had worked, fed Indians on the Lord's Day. None were aware of these arrangements. If I wanted the feeding to stop she would seek employment elsewhere! As she was a jolly-fine cook the feeding continued. Now you know how, without knowing, Westerners feed some of the millions of starving Indian citizens.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

COLESHILL: Very sadly we said our farewells to hosts of Indian friends when we left New Delhi in June of 1998.

Q: And where did you go?

COLESHILL: We went back to Washington. Ronnie worked as the Special Assistant to Henry Howard, the Director for Management in USIA. He was a political appointment. She was on a one-year gap assignment waiting for her position as Director for the Regional Program Office (RPO) in Vienna to open up. She worked on the integration of USIA into the State Department. We had a wonderful year in Washington catching-up on the culture that is so freely available in the nation's capital.

Q: What were you doing there?

COLESHILL: I studied German at FSI as Ronnie was posted to Vienna. Ronnie had been hoping for the Management Counselor position at the Embassy in Bonn, Germany which would have entailed moving the American Embassy from Bonn to Berlin. All along, she recognized she was not the number one candidate. Eventually, after rejecting posts in our Embassies in Madrid and Rome, she was offered the RPO Director position. This was a regional job that provided products and services to Eastern European posts and the newly-independent former Soviet Union states. She actually did not report to anyone in Vienna, but rather to the head office in Washington. She had a German tutor come to her office four hours a day to brush up her native childhood German. We were in Washington about a year, and then took ourselves off to Vienna for four years.

Soon after we arrived in Vienna in July 2003, we realized what a mistake we had both individually made by ruling out, early in our careers, a posting to Europe. Vienna was a wonderful city in which to live and work. Although a much smaller city than, say, Rome, London or Paris, it was manageable and had every cultural activity imaginable and almost as many museums as the Smithsonian. It also functioned superbly as did all of Austria. Trains and busses ran to time. If Austrians said we want you to come to a party, within days there would be an invitation. Many invitations would be to rather grand affairs. At the beginning, we were temporarily housed in a rather difficult situation as we lived on the heights approaching the Vienna Woods in an Embassy-owned apartment block that I dubbed 'Motel 6.' These were junior staff apartments that had been built just after the Second World War. Not a lot of thought had been put into their construction. Eventually we moved from there into one of the grandest addresses in Vienna. This was to another Embassy-owned apartment building on Rathaus Strasse, in the fashionable First District immediately behind Vienna's impressive town hall.

With Vienna's underground railway and bus and trolley services close at hand we were able to travel widely on public transport. Ronnie was able to walk two blocks to her office. We found it easy to make friends with Austrians, many of whom were delighted to extend their, and share our, hospitality. We thoroughly enjoyed almost all of our life in downtown Vienna. The only aspect that caused us concern, as culture seekers, was the price charged at performances in the concert halls and opera houses. This was due to the number of international tourists who, year-round, continued to flock to Vienna's cultural attractions. It was only when we discovered we could hear the same music, see the same operas and ballets in Bratislava, Slovakia, only 45 minutes drive away, that we rejected

Vienna and switched to the delights of another part of the former Austria-Hungarian Empire. The concert halls may have been slightly smaller, but the music; singing and dancing were equally enchanting. The food and service in the hotels and restaurants were of the same high standard but at half the price in dollar terms. Many Friday evenings throughout the year we would drive to the capital of Slovakia to be entertained. We were so regular with our visits the friendly Slovakian border guards would greet us by name and enquire which cultural activity we had enjoyed or where we had dined in their capital city. With marked lanes for the use by diplomatic vehicles, we were rarely stopped for passport formalities.

Q: How did you find the attitude of the Austrians at the time? I mean were they happy in the new integrated Europe or not or what were you gathering?

COLESHILL: Communists apart, I found the average Austrian was pleased to be a part of an integrated Europe. From my reading of history, I had concluded the nation was prone to make the wrong decisions and ally themselves to the losing side. This problem started long before 12 November 1918, with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. If you examine the map of Europe before that date it is amazing how much land was included in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in comparison to present-day Austria. From Galicia to Herzegovina, from Tyrol to Transylvania all this was part of the Empire. By the time Churchill, Clemenceau and Wilson had concluded their deliberations, post World War I, Austria was much smaller, not only in land area, but also in wealth and influence. Then the fateful decision in March 1938, to allow German forces to enter Austria without a shot being fired.

Q: Yes, this was the Anschluss

COLESHILL: That was indeed The Anschluss. That was in 1938. Then came the speech by Hitler from the balcony of the Hofburg, when he addressed a delirious and supportive crowd of Austrians estimated to number about a quarter of a million, in which, he claimed, Austria was being welcomed back to its rightful place in the sun as a part of Nazi Germany. Austrians did not realize their nation was about to become the eighth German Province. The name of Austria would disappear, and be replaced by "Ostmark." As a result, when Britain declared war on Germany on the 3 September 1939, she also declared war on Austria. In due course, Austria paid the penalty for allowing Germany to enter their territory without firing a shot when, from 1943 until the end of the Second World War the American 15th Air Force and the British Royal Air Force bombed their capital with impunity. With the exception of The Dom, Vienna's Cathedral, allied bombing destroyed much of central Vienna. That which remained was then pulverized by the ranks of massed Russian artillery. For many months after the war, in Vienna and much of Austria, there was little food, no power and little water. To heat their houses, citizens scavenged downed trees for wood from the eternal Vienna Woods. The picture of destruction at the end of the Second World War was vast, complete and appalling.

Ever the survivors, even under four-power domination, the Austrians rapidly picked themselves up and began to recover part of their former status. The United Nations

declaration meant that Austria should, henceforth, enjoy a most favored nation status rather than being part and parcel of the dreaded Nazi war machine. The declaration helped the Austrian recovery; it also meant Austria was a victim of Nazi aggression rather than being part of the aggressor nation.

Q: Oh yes.

COLESHILL: Millions of dollars of American [aka Marshall Aid] aid was subsequently pumped into the Austrian economy. Two United Nation's Agencies were set up, and continue to this day, in the Vienna. Since 1965, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Headquarters has been in Vienna. All this activity helped revive the national economy and brought legitimacy to a once powerful and feared Empire.

Q: Well.

COLESHILL: We were blessed by the US ambassadors we had at Vienna. The first was a brilliant woman called Kathryn Walt Hall. She was a political appointee by the Clinton Administration. As far as I can remember, her grandfather owned vineyards at Mendocino in California. Eventually, Kathryn and her husband, Craig, started a winery in the Rutherford Valley of California and then developed it.

Q: Yes. There was a -- the equivalent to, if not a Nazi, at least an extreme right powerful political party.

COLESHILL: The English translation of the name of the Party was the Austrian Freedom Party (FPO). Jorg Haider, who was the Governor of Carinthia, a Province in southern Austria, formed it.

Q: Haider. Yes!

COLESHILL: Haider was the leader of a right-wing political party, based in Carinthia. Haider later became Chairman of a political party named The Alliance for the Future of Austria. (BZO). Although the party formed an alliance with the governing party in Austria, Haider stated he had no interest of being part of the government of Austria. Not everyone believed he was content to remain Governor of Carinthia. The problems began to form when Haider, as Governor of Carinthia, made controversial public statements about Nazi policies, plus xenophobic and anti Semitic comment. It was also alleged that Haider received substantial financial support from Libyan President Gaddafi and from Iraqi President Hussein. At the time, the Portuguese Government had the chairmanship of the European Union. Following Haider's egregious statements, the Portuguese Government proposed putting sanctions on the Austrian Government. State Department instructed Ambassador Hall to inform the Austrian coalition government that the US too would put on sanctions. The reaction from Ambassador Hall was that sanctions should not be applied. Her reasoning being, as Austria had a freely elected and democratic government, and as long as Governor Haider remained outside the Austrian Government, sanctions should not be applied.

One thing led to another between the Ambassador and State Department. Eventually, as the story circulated in Vienna, the matter was referred to both the Vice President, Al Gore and to the President. It was President Clinton who told Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, that Ambassador Hall's opinion should prevail. Clearly this decision did not sit well with the Secretary of State. However, a compromise was established which resulted in Ambassador Hall shuttling between Vienna and Washington, DC every month to report to the Secretary of State what she had accomplished in restricting the views expressed by Governor Haider and were having no undue effect upon the actions of the Austrian Government. After a number of months flying, to and fro, t'wixt Vienna and Washington, DC, the Austrian Government alliance disintegrated. Haider and his party were no longer a threat.

In 2000 when the Republican Party was victorious in the national elections and when it is normal for US Ambassadors, world-wide, to submit their resignation to State Department, Kathryn Hall was allowed to continue at post for six months until her daughter graduated from the local high school. The Austrian Government was delighted. Before Ambassador Hall left Vienna in the fall of 2001, the Austrian Government honored her on many occasions. The Government and many of her staff in the American Embassy were sorry to see her leave.

The American Embassy eventually welcomed a successful businessman, Ambassador W. Lyons Brown. A Republican Party political appointee, he came to Post speaking good German. I believe his father had been the American Military Attaché in Vienna. As a young man, he had grown up in post-World War II Vienna. Many of his youthful contacts of that era were now to be found in senior positions in Government and businesses throughout the Austrian Republic.

Now: A quick translation from the sublime to the ridiculous - from the Ambassador to the CLO. And please do be careful when you use that term in a German-speaking environment as, in that language, a "Klo" is colloquial, especially among German children, for toilet, much like "john" or worse "potty" in American English and "loo" in British English. However, around the world in U.S. Embassies, a CLO is the Community Relations Officer.

Q: Well, tell me, about this Community Liaison Officer.

COLESHILL: That's right.

Q: What were you doing there in that position?

COLESHILL: To set the scene I must tell you that Vienna has three U.S. Ambassadors. Vienna being the capital of the country, it had the Ambassador who dealt with the bi-lateral relations between the United States Government and the Austrian Government. Additionally there were two other United States Ambassadors; one who dealt with U.S. relations with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); the other

headed the United States Mission to the International Organizations in Vienna. (UNVIE) These three U.S. Embassies have a combined management office, parented on, and housed in, the bi-lateral Embassy. My role as the co-CLO (there were two of us performing this function) was to ensure the welfare needs of the staff of the three Missions were taken care of efficiently. From the moment we received information relating to the impending arrival of a new member of staff, we would ensure he/she was informed of where he/she would be housed, what sort of accommodation it was and who would be his/her sponsor during the first few weeks after their arrival in Vienna. On arrival, the officer and spouse would be invited to an hour-long briefing on what they could expect during a duty tour. The CLO Office was staffed each workday by up to four staff. Apart from weekly, on-site, visits to the other two American Embassies, both CLOs were busy with a stream of callers and telephone calls from members of staff and their families. There was rarely a dull moment.

Q: Did you have any problems with teenage children and that sort of thing? You know, kids are kids.

COLESHILL: The American children in Vienna were a fairly well disciplined bunch at school. I do not recall any places where drugs were used. By and large in Vienna, American children were very well behaved. And it may be that this is because Austrian children were well behaved. In part, this is because Austrians themselves are conscious of the laws that direct many aspects of their daily life. Austrians respect their police and the authority they have been given. There were no no-go areas in the city. If there was any doubt about a law or a regulation -- as Austrians said to me on more than once -- we looked for the law that told us what we could do; if the law says we can do it, we did it. If there is any mention of what we cannot do -- it was not done. For example: It was almost unthinkable for an Austrian to park a vehicle on a double yellow line.

Another example of law-abiding Viennese: The Viennese underground train network is well organized, it ran to time and is run on an honor system. Travelers passed through a turnstile and boarded their train. At the destination they alighted, passed through another turnstile. That's it. Tickets would be purchased from a machine but no ticket collector. Every now and again on the platform or train, you might meet a uniformed inspector who would ask to see your ticket. If you could not produce one, you were taken to an office where your name was checked into a computer. If you had not been caught before, you were rebuked and warned as to your future behavior. If you had previously tried to bilk the system the offender was taken before the Courts, fined and administered a severe rap across the knuckles. Perhaps the worst punishment of all was that your name and address were published in local newspapers as someone who had been convicted of trying to bilk the railway system. In a law-abiding community, there is nothing like shame for keeping citizens honest!

Q: How about the community itself, I mean the adult community? Were there any problems with them?

COLESHILL: You mean inside or outside the embassy?

Q: I was thinking within the embassy community.

COLESHILL: No, as far as I knew there were, there were no problems. There was little to complain about living in Vienna. Of course people are human and they always do. But as far as I knew, most of the Embassy staff was reasonably happy. Prices of goods and services were high, but everything was available. Vienna is one of the major crossroads of Europe and an international destination for many airlines. By rail you could dine in Vienna and have breakfast in Rome, Paris, and Berlin and be well on the way to Moscow the next morning. One might experience petty larceny on some of the trains to Rome where items had been known to disappear from locked compartments. It was believed a number of compartment keys had been duplicated and were in criminal hands.

The only time we had a minor brush with the law was just after we arrived when our car still had an American tag. We were stopped in the center of Vienna by a police officer and I could not find my American driving license. In perfectly accented English, I was rather brusquely told to get into the passenger seat and allow my wife to drive. When I asked the police officer why I had been stopped I was told I was driving a foreign car that had an American number plate. The reply did not go down well but history has taught never argue with a man with a gun. As my wife drove on I had to smile with admiration for the linguistic ability of the Viennese police. Two minutes later I found my driving license in an unused section of my wallet!

Q: Well, on a completely different thing, how about terrorism? Was that going on at the time?

COLESHILL: One had to be fairly cynical about this, as it was believed the Austrian government had come to an arrangement with a number of terrorist organizations. There had been a murderous incident in Munich, Bavaria when eleven Israeli athletes and a German Police Officer had been killed in 1972. Austria wanted nothing like that to happen on its territory. The Austrian Government believed foreign diplomats accredited to Vienna were targets for terrorists; the government therefore decreed that a vehicle owned by an Embassy or by a foreign diplomat was not to be registered with a tag plate that could be identified. It was the only time my privately-owned vehicle did not have a “diplomatic” tag. Apart from an armed police presence close to the Embassy and the erecting of “Jersey walls” which inhibited vehicular access to the Embassy there was little overt protection against terrorists.

The only time I can remember a problem with Austro-U.S. relations during the first Iraq War concerned the flight of US warplanes across Austrian airspace. Austria refused to sanction flights from U.S. bases in Germany to Kuwait. This means that the aircraft had to avoid national air space, which added 40 minutes to an hour to the flight time between Frankfurt and Kuwait. It was widely reported the only time US military aircraft were permitted to cross Austrian airspace on these journeys was if there were wounded American personnel aboard the aircraft, and, provided there were no warlike material on board.

Q: Did this cause difficulty? During the Gulf War, how was this playing in Austria?

COLESHILL: Not surprisingly the embargo caused a rift in the even tenor of American-Austrian relations. However, when speaking with my Austrian friends they backed their government to the hilt. The information was widely reported in the media and the citizens agreed with the decision by their government. One has to remember that after the Second World War, Austria was regarded as another Switzerland. They were neutral in these matters and wanted to stay that way. After their disastrous experiences in the Second World War, they were not interested in going to war or to have their airspace or land space invaded by any warlike power.

Q: Well, how about after Vienna? Wither?

COLESHILL: Before we leave Vienna, I have to comment that our last three months in that delightful city were probably the most difficult in my life. We were living in a superb apartment that was owned by the US Government. It had been decided the entire building, originally erected for the very top echelons of the government of the Austro-Hungarian Empire needed an external face-lift. One of the problems was the environmental concern expressed by the City of Vienna that during the reconstruction, the entire building should be wrapped in a cocoon that would not allow dirt and old building materials to escape into the atmosphere. In the initial announcement the occupants of the building were told the material to be used to envelope the building would be permeable. The material used by the contractor was impermeable. In Vienna, during the months of May and June, the temperatures are high. Sometimes as high as 30 – 31 degrees Celsius. That's 88F. So there we were, perhaps 15 families with ages ranging from a few months to seventy years, wrapped in an airless cocoon with not a breath of fresh air in a non-air conditioned building going through a major construction. The contractor was removing perhaps one hundred years of accumulated dirt, plaster, grime and pigeon droppings through our living space. To say the conditions were unpleasant is an archetypal English understatement!

Some three weeks after the renovations started, I arrived home and felt unwell. I sat on my bed and found I could not stop shaking. I telephoned Ronnie, who came immediately from her nearby office. On her arrival she took one look at me and called the Embassy doctor for an immediate appointment. He referred me to a cardiologist who, after an examination, told me to have a bag packed the following morning as he expected to admit me to hospital.

The following morning I was admitted to the Allgemeines Krankenhaus der Stadt Wien. More usually known as: AKH. This is the large, modern, teaching and General Hospital for Vienna. The specialist found one of my arteries was clogged. Angioplasty was performed and three stents were inserted. Here I have to comment that if, at any time, one has to suffer cardiac problems, do try to arrange for it to happen in Vienna, Austria. They have superbly trained specialists and a very well run Cardiology Department at AKH. The specialists, doctors and nurses labored on me for two weeks before I was allowed to

go home. Given the welfare state that existed in Austria the hospital authorities were more than surprised I did not go to the proffered two weeks of convalescence that is normal in Vienna following this procedure. I had to explain I was not an Austrian national and did not enjoy their welfare privileges. As a United States citizen, my insurance company would not cover the cost of convalescence that was likely to be prohibitive. And the US State Department medical scheme certainly would not pay any charges after I left the hospital. The upshot was that on my return home I was much weaker. At one time I could not walk without assistance and had to use a wheelchair.

Some three months before we were due to leave Vienna we had ordered a new Volvo to be delivered to Oakland, California so that we could fulfill life long dreams of driving across the United States. After my heart attack, we had to quickly change plans and have the car shipped to Baltimore. Nevertheless we flew from Vienna to Washington, Dulles Airport and then on to Oakland. At Vienna, Washington, DC and Oakland I used a wheel chair as I found I did not have the strength to walk any distance. On arrival in Oakland we rented a vehicle to visit old friends in Walnut Creek and Lake Tahoe we had not seen for years. After being welcomed by our friends we traveled to Oregon for a relaxing and gentle three-week holiday in the hope that with gentle exercise, a sensible diet and early nights I might recover my strength. It worked! In June 2003 we flew from Oakland to Washington DC where Ronnie took up her duties as the Executive Director of the Economic Bureau of State Department.

That would have been in June 2003. She had two years with the Economic Bureau working for Assistant Secretary Tony Wayne. In her final year with the Department she was a Senior Inspector in the Office of the Inspector General. That was interesting and challenging for her and for me. I suppose one might say that our relationship had come full circle. Before we were married, Ronnie spent as much as eighty percent of her life traveling around East and Africa. Now, some twenty years later, she was spending much time traveling in South America. Fortunately for the marriage, both of us enjoyed the adventure and pleasure that well-planned travel can bring. Ronnie undertook three inspections, one where she went to Colombia and Peru. Much to my disgust, for security reasons, I was not allowed to go to Colombia because of the security problems in the country. However, I was allowed to go to Peru where we spent some time in Lima traveling around the country. I behaved as a happy and contented tourist should, and inter alia, thoroughly enjoyed flying over the Nazca Lines in the desert. We then traveled, high into the Andes Mountains, to the wonderfully ancient town of Cusco where we acclimatized ourselves for the train trip to Machu Picchu. All the superlatives have already been expended for this regal ancient site. I have nothing to add which will do justice to the builders of Manchu Piccu – and to the US citizen (Hiram Bingham) who had the funds, the organization ability and the brilliance to rediscover the sites for the world's pleasure.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: There was another splendid inspection trip where we went to Buenos Aires and to Santiago where Ronnie took her part in the inspection of the two United States'

Embassies. I have always enjoyed being in Buenos Aires, Argentina as I think it is one of the most fabulous of all South American cities. A city built by Spaniards and the Italians and financed, in part, by the British. With its many wide avenues and streets and a refurbished dock system catering to the ever expanding tourist and conference industry there can be little, certainly not the excellent food and service, not to like. It is always sad to see the long-nationalized and silent old Harrods' building in the heart of Buenos Aires looking so drab and wasted. But this fact only serves to underline how British influence has waned in this vibrant part of the world. Thence to Santiago, Chile where I spent my time as a tourist exploring the underground subway system, the many museums and the Concha y Toro wine estate. I found them all to be superb in their own way and well worth the time I had to explore. The Inspection team was headed by Ambassador Eileen Malloy who was a very experienced team leader. I understand she was extremely efficient and fair in her dealings with the Missions her teams inspected. Personally, I found her an inspiring conversationalist with a fund of interesting stories about her life in the American Foreign Service. Altogether, she was always delightful company.

Q: Well, how did you find being a spouse with an Inspector? How did that work?

COLESHILL: Having a spouse as a Senior Inspector with The Office of the Inspector General, (OIG) was absolutely splendid. For much of the year Inspectors travel the world. From one season to the next they know little in advance where they are going. For me there was no problem if, at my expense, I was to be allowed to accompany a team on their travels or whether, for one reason or another, I had to remain in Washington DC. In today's world, where there is instant and cheap private electronic communication, there is no longer the sense of isolation there would have been only ten years ago. Planning is the keyword. And central to that theme, is to ensure, when a spouse is deeply into their work, especially in an overseas environment, the spouse should have ample subjects to fill his/her time. I have never been bored for one minute of my hectic life. The reasons are numerous, two of them are: I always have a number of books in my library that I have not yet read. The other is there are always projects I am pursuing that have yet to be enhanced or completed.

Q: Could you talk a little louder please?

COLESHILL: At that particular time I was becoming interested in my family genealogy. So, when it was too hot, too wet, too cold or whatever, that I could not be out and about, pounding foreign pavements, sticking my nose into churches, markets, harbors, cemeteries and all manner of odd places in countries all over the world, I could usually be found at a computer researching into the seven branches of my family genealogy in which I have a vested interest. It really is much more than simply keeping busy! That, to use South American cities as an example, is no problem in places like Buenos Aires, Santiago, Rio de Janeiro, Valparaíso or Lima. All it requires is an enquiring mind, a sense of adventure and the will to climb the next hill and establish what shade of green the grass is! Travel, by land or sea, is a love that Ronnie and I share. We have frequently said, one to the other: "A dollar spent on travel, is money well invested!"

There is an added bonus, of which I have never before spoken. And that is, during the time Ronnie spent as a Senior Inspector and I had the privilege of going with the teams on a number of foreign trips and one domestic inspection to Charleston, South Carolina. I found most, if not all, her colleagues to be intelligent, articulate, understanding and modest folk. Some had much humor to share. I do not recall one that I would not be happy to invite to join us for hospitality at our family dinner table. To me, that has always been the highest accolade we can bestow on friends.

Q: How did your genealogy come out?

COLESHILL: As a result of very considerable research on my paternal family line, I have researched as far as A.D.1605. There is a lacuna of about 70 years, when the records are missing and have probably been destroyed. However, I am aware of members of my paternal family who were born, thirty miles due west of London in Great Marlow in Buckinghamshire, who go back perhaps into the 1400's. The Parish at Great Marlow was established in 1592. Before that date one needs a knowledge of Latin and Latin script to explore other local parish records. My research is a work in progress. I plan to take it up again when I am in Qatar in the Arab Gulf where Ronnie is planning to be later in the year. God and British Airways willing, I plan to be with her for about seven weeks.

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: Before I finish with the work Ronnie did with the OIG I must say a word about Charleston, South Carolina. This is a splendidly vibrant city and so full of charm. What helped to make Charleston even more interesting was it was February. We were blessed with fine weather; there were few tourists. We had driven from Washington, DC to Charleston, so I had my own vehicle to use. It was a pleasure to drive, not only in the non-crowded city, but also in the surrounding countryside and to the old plantations, some of which still exist.

Q: Well, were you looking for a place to retire?

COLESHILL: By that time we had already settled on Fearington Village in North Carolina as a place in which we should retire.

Q: Well, then after this inspection time, did Ronnie retire? I can't remember.

COLESHILL: Yes! She retired on 1 October 2006.

Q: So you were to become a southern country gentleman?

COLESHILL With my English accent, I fear I could never become a southern country gentleman.....! Here in Fearington Village we are surrounded with -- how shall I say? -- Well, there are a lot of Yankees here. Like me, there are lots of ex-Aliens. With rare exception, in the Village there is hardly a trueborn North Carolinian. There are a number of former American Foreign Service types here. In fact, Ronnie is the Treasurer of an

organization called The Carolina Friends of the Foreign Service. They hold a meeting four times a year. Often 60 to 80 members will come from North and South Carolina to hear the invited speaker.

Living in Fearington Village is interesting on many levels, not the least that we appear to be on the cusp of where north meets south. We live in Chatham County, which is named after William Pitt 1st Earl of Chatham, who was the British Prime Minister from 1766 – 1768. Pittsboro, the County seat is, however, named after his son, William Pitt the Younger, who was also a British Prime Minister at aged 23 and was opposed to the harsh British Colonial Policy sustained by King George III. As one approaches the center of Pittsboro there is a life size monument to “Our Confederate Heroes.” The grey metal statue looks unceasingly north as if watching and waiting for the arrival of those Yankees. To me, there is no question about which side is still locally supported in the conflict of so long ago.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: It is some time since I learned not to speak about the war that never really finished -- especially as an Alien.

Q: (laughs) Yes, my grandfather took a grand tour through that part of the country with a gentleman named Sherman.

COLESHILL: *(laughs)*

Q: Who's an officer --?

COLESHILL: Yes, into the sea, yes!

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: They still talk about that.

Q: The Carolina Campaign, yes.

COLESHILL: Our plans for the coming summer -- I hope they don't inconvenience you. On 31 July, Ronnie is flying to the Persian Gulf. She has been invited to go for twelve weeks to assume the position of Management Counselor at the US Embassy in Doha, Qatar. For some of the time, I shall accompany her.

Q: Well, I hope you enjoy that.

COLESHILL: It's going to be a little on the warm side. But this brings everything back into a nice circle. In 1975 I was working at the British Foreign Office and was put on notice that in mid-1976 I was going to be the Assistant Political Officer in the British

Embassy in Doha. Rightly or wrongly the transfer was canceled when a crisis occurred in Pretoria. In July 1976 I was working in the Republic of South Africa.

Q: Well, you didn't miss much.

COLESHILL: Nevertheless, Doha has always been on my mind. I still wonder what I missed in Doha.

Q: I can tell you, I was a Vice Consul in Dhahran back in the '50s.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: And we covered all the Trucial States.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: And Doha was the least promising of them all.

COLESHILL: It was a little pearling port I believe.

Q: Yes.

COLESHILL: Things have changed slightly.

Q: Oh yes.

COLESHILL: It has been great fun talking to you.

Q: Well, I've enjoyed this very much.

COLESHILL: *(laughs)* Take care and thank you very much indeed for thinking of me. I've enjoyed my reminiscence.

Q: OK, take care.

COLESHILL: Good-bye.

End of interview