

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

ALICE A. DRESS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: Okay, today is the 27th of August 2009 with Alice A. Dress, D-R-E-S-S. What does the A stand for?

DRESS: Amelia. I was named after my grandmothers. "Alice" for my mother's mother and "Amelia" for my father's mother.

Q: This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

DRESS: I was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1946, at the beginning of the baby boom.

Q: Let's talk a bit about your family, how about on your father's side?

DRESS: My father William Benjamin Dress was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1905. His family was German Lutheran. My mother Margaret Oline Myers was born in Savannah, Georgia in 1913. Her family was English, Irish and Welsh and of the Baptist persuasion. I have two older brothers, Bill and Richard. Both my parents passed away many years ago - my mother in 1976 and my father in 1980. My father earned a degree in electrical engineering from Evansville College in 1929, the year the U.S. stock market crashed. He joined Igleheart Brothers, a subsidiary of General Foods, immediately on leaving school and worked there his whole professional life.

Q: What do you know about the Dress family?

DRESS: My father's family is entirely German. They came over from Hanover on a sailing ship around 1850. The original name was Kohrsdreßs. Several years after they got to Cleveland they dropped the first half of the name and stuck with Dress.

Q: I've got a lot of kraut in my family too; they are from Chicago and Wisconsin. How about your grandparents on the Dress side?

DRESS: My paternal grandfather was William Henry Dress. He was born in Ohio in 1879, trained as a Lutheran parochial school teacher at the Addison Seminary in Illinois and moved to Evansville, Indiana in 1897 at the age of 18 to teach school and play the organ at the Trinity Lutheran Church. I have pictures of him with his students. His son (my father) was in some of his classes and I have his report cards. Classes were taught in English and German. My grandfather spoke German beautifully. He got into local politics and was elected mayor of Evansville on the Democrat Party ticket in 1934. He served for three terms and died in office in 1949. The town named the main levee on the Ohio River in his honor and at one time the local airport was called the Dress Memorial Airport. I was three when he died, but I remember him. He was a wonderful man, charming and a great storyteller.

Q: How about grandmother Dress? Do you know anything about her?

DRESS: Amelia Stuehmeyer Dress was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1881, the child of Prussian immigrants. She had a high school education and a year of finishing school. She was a staunch Lutheran, very strict and a dedicated hausfrau (house wife).

Q: "Kinder, Kirche, and Kuche?"

DRESS: Yes, Grandmother was all about "Kinder, Kirche and Kuche" (children, church and kitchen) and keeping everyone in line and ship shape.

Q: What about on your mother's side? What do you know about the family there?

DRESS: My father was a Yankee, but my mother was a Southerner with an abundance of charm. One of her ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War; another fought at Gettysburg and died from wounds received in the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864. Her uncles on her mother's side were Baptist ministers and schoolteachers. On her father's side they were doctors and dentists. She graduated from high school in Tampa, Florida. Although she did not go to college she took some classes at Evansville College (now University of Evansville) in later years.

Q: How did they meet?

DRESS: They met at a dance at the Palma Ceia Country Club in Tampa, Florida. Mother was living with her parents in Tampa and Daddy was there on business for General Foods. Anne Yandre, a friend of Mother's, introduced them. Mother told me about their dancing at the club overlooking Tampa Bay. It was very romantic. They married in Tampa in 1936 and returned to Evansville to live. I think it was hard for her as a Southerner to get used to the cold, grey winters in Indian and to living with a bunch of Yankee in laws -- and German Lutherans to boot.

Q: Let's talk about Evansville. What do you remember when you were a little girl growing up?

DRESS: In the early 1940s, Daddy bought land and built a house near a little town called Darmstadt, north of Evansville. In fact, his five acres were just across the road from his sister and brother-in-law's place. My brothers and I grew up in the country, surrounded by thick woods, apple orchards and cornfields.

Q: Darmstadt is also a city in Essen, I know, because during my time in the Air Force I was stationed in Darmstadt for a while.

DRESS: Darmstadt, Indiana was settled in the early 1800s by German immigrants and was (and is) a small farming community. The area around Evansville was settled by Germans, both Catholic and Protestant. In fact, German was so widely spoken before

World War I that there were stores in Evansville with signs in the window saying "English Spoken Here."

Q: How important was religion in your family?

DRESS: I am a lapsed Lutheran now, but when my grandparents were alive, my family regularly went to church and my brothers and I went to Sunday school. All three of us studied Luther's Small Catechism and were confirmed in the Lutheran church, which qualifies you at around age 13 to take Holy Communion. After her marriage, my mother became a Lutheran.

Q: What was family like as a family, as a group? Did you get around the dinner table at night and talk about things?

DRESS: We read, listened to music, explored the woods with the dogs, and caught turtles, snakes and poison ivy. We didn't have television and when we ate dinner we sat down together in the kitchen around a large trestle table. Daddy would say grace - "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed." Mother was a great cook. Sicilian spaghetti, clam chowder, and lemon chiffon pie. Just about the time my oldest brother was ready to go to college, my parents got divorced. That was in 1958 when I was 12. The family split up. Mother took me and my brother Richard to Florida. Bill stayed with our father and went off to Antioch College after graduating from Reitz High School. He was the only one of us to go to high school in Evansville.

Q: Where did the family stand politically?

DRESS: Our grandparents on both sides were Democrats, but our parents voted Republican. My brothers and I are conservatives.

Q: You mentioned reading, were you much of a reader? What about music?

DRESS: Oh yes, when we were little our parents read to us. One of my earliest memories is of my mother reading Winnie the Pooh. When we learned to read, we read voraciously. Not having television was a real blessing in that regard. I remember reading Mary Poppins, The Wind in the Willows, and The Magic Garden when I was small. We also listened to opera and musicals on long playing records. I remember listening to Bizet's Carmen and the musical My Fair Lady.

Books and music were important but we also spent a lot of time outdoors, roaming the woods with our dogs (fox terriers) and learning about snakes, box turtles, raccoons, possums and poison ivy. I even had a horse for a few years although my brother Bill got stuck with taking care of him a lot of the time because I was only about 10 at the time.

Q: Did you get involved in singing or playing an instrument?

DRESS: I am an appreciative listener but not a performer. My piano lessons were a bust. However, my brother Richard is a talented banjo player and Bluegrass musician.

Q: What about school?

DRESS: My brothers went to the Lutheran parochial school in Darmstadt for several years before switching over to the Scott Township School in Vanderburgh County. When graduated from kindergarten to the first grade, I followed them to the country school. We all commuted by yellow school bus. I completed the sixth grade in Indiana but went to junior high school and high school in Orlando, Florida after my parents divorced.

Q: Well let's stay in Darmstadt. How did you find school? Were you a good student or...

DRESS: I enjoyed school especially in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades when I was lucky enough to have the same teacher three years in a row. Alfred Johnson was a very interesting man and a gifted teacher. He was Quaker. His parents had been deaf mutes and he was a conscientious objector who drove an ambulance during World War II. I remember him reading us books such as Ann Weil's Red Sails to Capri and Walter Farley's Island Stallion, and showing us a Life Magazine article (circa 1956) about the Russian Revolution, featuring the gory details of Rasputin's murder. Kids are bloodthirsty and we loved the story of Rasputin's being poisoned, shot and drowned. One year we put on a puppet play. I wrote the script based on the Brother's Grimm fairy story of the Bremen town Musicians and we made the puppets and the puppet stage. We also made plaster of Paris head of the Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal, which showed human evolution. Mr. Johnson was fun and he stimulated our thinking and creativity.

Q: Did you go to movies much?

DRESS: I can remember we used to go into Evansville to see movies on Saturday mornings. Back in the 1950s movie houses showed short films or serials before the double feature - Roy Rogers and Johnny Weissmuller and his chimpanzee. Our parents were perfectly comfortable dropping us off at the movies and picking us up afterwards. In those days, people didn't lock their front doors or cars. We played in the woods out of sight of the house and were gone for hours. Mother was protective but she didn't worry that someone was going to do something bad to us. It was a more innocent age.

Q: You moved to Orlando in 1958. Where is Orlando and what was it like?

DRESS: Orlando is in the middle of Florida. In the late 1950s when we moved there it was still pre-Disney World and the whole area was nothing but orange groves, lots of lakes and McCoy Air Force. By 1964 when I graduated from high school, my friends and I were all desperate to get out of Florida because there was absolutely nothing to do. About the most exciting thing we ever did was visit Daytona Beach or go to the local drive in burger joint. In fact, I still feel that way about Florida. "There is no there there," to quote Gertrude Stein.

The divorce and the move were difficult. Our family split up, my father and older brother were in Indiana while my brother Richard and I were in Florida with our mother. We missed the house, the woods and the dogs and had to make new friends, learn to live in an apartment and go to a new school. And we had to get used to our mother working outside the house.

Q: What was school like?

DRESS: The schools were good, partly because the space program at Cape Canaveral was pulling in a lot of highly educated people who lived and worked in the area and demanded good schools for their kids. I was fast tracked in some science and math courses. I studied German and I took four years of Latin. I took German because my brothers studied German and went to Germany. On reflection, I think Spanish or French would have been more useful for me since I didn't pursue a hard science. 1962 was an exciting school year. We got out of class so we could see John Glenn in orbit and we huddled under our desks during a drill in response to the Cuban missile crisis.

Q: During high school did you find yourself reading anything in particular? Did you know what you wanted to do later on?

DRESS: I read voraciously, fiction, biographies, plays and poetry. When I was about 13 I developed a life-long interest in comparative religion. I was studying Luther's Small Catechism under a Lutheran pastor and when he told me that everyone else was damned, that struck me as not only harsh but wrong. In 1958, I asked for and was given a Time-Life book, The World's Great Religions. I still have it in fact. It covers Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Q: I take it your mother was living in fairly stringent circumstances?

DRESS: In her mid forties, after 20 years as a wife and mother, she had to go to work too. She went to a vocational training school in Orlando where she learned typing and shorthand. She started in Orlando as a bank teller and a secretary. She was attractive, charming, skilled and worked hard. In 1965, she went to work for S. Dillon Ripley, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in his ornithological laboratory in Washington, DC. Her niece Marjorie Halpin, a docent in anthropology at the Natural History Museum, told her about the job opening and helped her get in for an interview. In the mid 1970s she worked in the Old Executive Office Building for Fernando De Baca, advisor to President Ford for Hispanic Affairs.

Q: When did you graduate from high school and what were your plans for the future?

DRESS: I graduated in 1964, an eventful year. Barry Goldwater ran for president, the Vietnam War was heating up, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement was agitating and the Civil Rights Act passed. But for me the highpoint was the "British Invasion of America," which is what the Beatles' visit to the U.S. was called then. I was too young for Elvis Presley but I fell in love with the Beatles, their music, their joie de vivre (joy of life) and

their look. I bought their first album released in the U.S. "Meet the Beatles" and every album they released as a band. And I saw their movies "A Hard Day's Night" and "Help."

As for my future, like most of my friends I wanted to get out of Florida. My brother Bill was getting his doctorate in physics at Harvard University so I checked out schools in the Boston area. I still cringe when I remember my disastrous interview at Radcliffe College. I didn't know how to prepare for a college interview and I was so intimidated I blew it. Then in May 1964 my mother took a job at the Smithsonian Institution and we moved to Washington, DC a month before I was due to graduate from high school. I ended up taking my final exams and getting my diploma by mail. I spent my freshman year at George Washington University as an anthropology major and lived on Capitol Hill with my mother. I still wanted to go to school in Boston and was accepted my sophomore year at Jackson College for Women at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts.

Q: Were you feeling the impact of the civil rights movement then?

DRESS: No, not really. I knew from TV and the newspaper that there were marches, protests, and violence, but I didn't know any African-Americans. I went to segregated schools in Indiana and Florida. When I got to college I think the only Blacks there were from Africa.

Q: Well you had two things going or several things going anti-Vietnam war, we had civil rights, you had sort of free speech and don't pay attention to anybody over thirty and all that.

DRESS: There was a lot going on in the late 1960s politically and socially, which created a turbulent atmosphere for college students. I recall campus protests against DuPont for napalming Vietnamese babies, Black comedian Dick Gregory on a hunger strike to protest racism, and attending a Masters and Johnson talk on human sexuality. It was difficult to concentrate on schoolwork but I was motivated to succeed. I felt an obligation to my parents for paying for my education and wanted to make the most of the opportunity. I knew that I had only myself to depend once I was out of school so it was either get a good education into order to get a good job or starve. That kept me focused amidst all the unrest, turmoil and agitation.

Q: Well did you focus on anything in particular in your studies?

DRESS: My major was political science but I found it a too academic and full of jargon. I think social sciences bend over backwards to show they are "scientific" when they aren't hard science. Economics was more interesting and more practical, although I didn't have the math skills to take some of the econ courses.

Q: Well in the political science field had the computer arrived, you know what I mean...

DRESS: The only computer experience I had Tufts was in connection with a political science class project. I put together a questionnaire and tabulated the results using computer punch cards. It seemed rather mysterious but primitive at the same time.

Q: Were you working?

DRESS: I did some part time work on campus, maybe about eight hours a week. I earned just enough money to buy Christmas presents for family. In view of what a college education costs today, I am amazed when I realize that the \$200 a month I was getting from my father was enough to pay for room, board and tuition at Tufts, a private college in the Northeast. I turned 21 my senior year and my father very generously agreed to keep the money coming so I could complete school. I graduated with less than \$1,000 in education debt. How kids manage today I don't know.

I also worked on Capitol Hill for two summers -- in 1966 for Winfield K. Denton (D) and in 1968 for Roger Zion (R), both representing the 8th congressional district in Indiana. Denton had known my grandfather and Zion knew my father; so family connections came in handy. I had fun showing visiting constituents around the Capitol building.

I want to say a few things about 1968, the momentous year that saw the Prague Spring and its demise, President Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King's assassination, the subsequent riots in Washington, DC, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the opening of the musical "Hair" and women's liberation. All of which I was aware of at the time and remember. The other major event of 1968 was my graduation from Tufts. I graduated cum laude and was very proud to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa (an academic honor society). The science fiction writer Isaac Asimov spoke at the Phi Beta Kappa ceremony and my mother drove up from Washington to attend.

Q: Where did you go to graduate school?

DRESS: Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, which was on the Tufts campus.

Q: What attracted you to Fletcher?

DRESS: My attraction to foreign affairs and foreign countries was long standing. I was conscious from an early age of my family's German background and that my grandparents spoke German. From a young age I was also excited by the adventure of foreign travel. My brother Bill took a trip to Mexico in the early 1950s and visited family in Germany in the mid 1950s before graduating from high school. Our uncle Colonel Frank Hay was in the U.S. Air Force and he and his family were stationed in Wiesbaden. Then in 1955, Mother visited Italy and Sicily with Violette Niedermayer, a close Sicilian-American friend and came back with lovely souvenirs and taught us phrases like "Mangia bene" (eat up). During his junior year at Antioch College my brother spent a year in Germany attending Tübingen University and working at the Opal factory in Stuttgart.

As far as Fletcher was concerned, it was right there on the Medford campus with Tufts University so I knew about its excellent reputation. It was also attractive because it was a professional rather than academic school. I was convinced that going there would help me get a job doing something interesting for a decent salary. I was over 21 and child support had run out and I knew I needed to support myself. Fortunately, I got financial aid for the year I was at Fletcher. The other strong selling point was that Fletcher offered a one-year master's degree. I figured why spend two years getting a master's degree when I could get one in one year and then get a job.

Q: I know when I went to Boston University it had a one-year master program in history so I took that and I think the calculation is basically correct, you don't get that much more out of college.

DRESS: Certainly, for me at the time, getting out of school and getting a job and being independent was all-important.

Q: Fletcher, of course, has a significant number of foreign students who come there often with significant jobs that they are coming from. It's a sort of finishing school for an awful lot of foreign diplomats and others. How did you find Fletcher?

DRESS: I really enjoyed graduate school. It wasn't just a continuation of college but a qualitatively different experience. The courses were much more interesting, more focused and I didn't have to work as hard. Fletcher was more exciting and Fletcher students were more mature and came from varied backgrounds. There were some older students, such as military officers and returned Peace Corps Volunteers, as well as students from all over the world. I felt like an adult for the first time and was treated as an adult. It was great.

Q: I have a good account in one of my oral histories with Winston Lord who graduated from there, later ambassador to China and very much involved with Kissinger and his wife Bette Bao who is a writer of some renown. Did any foreign country intrigue you at all? Did you start thinking about Foreign Service or work abroad?

DRESS: A lot of us at Fletcher wanted to join the Foreign Service, but at that particular time everybody was being put into the CORDS (pacification) program and sent to Vietnam. I was one of those who decided I really didn't want to go to Vietnam. It wasn't a war I supported; most college kids didn't. So even though I took the written exam, which was hideously long, and passed it, I didn't go any further in the application process.

Q: While you were avoiding Vietnam I was consul general in Saigon in '69-'70. What were your feelings about Vietnam?

DRESS: I thought it was a mistake for us to be there. I didn't buy the domino theory that we had to stop Communism in Vietnam or it would proliferate. So many lives were lost. Every night on the news we heard about body counts and saw the devastation. It seemed

unwinnable. I felt queasy whenever I heard President Johnson or Defense Secretary McNamara talk about the war.

Q: Were there any issues about the job market in general and about job prospects for a woman at that time or not?

DRESS: Unlike today when women make up over half of new Foreign Service Officers, lawyers, doctors and bankers, in 1969, when I was interviewing for jobs, women were distinctly in the minority in many professions. When I talked to recruiters who came to Fletcher from the large New York banks (Chase and Citibank) they told me they weren't interviewing women because they weren't hiring women. That was indicative of the times.

Q: So what did you do after you got your graduate degree in 1969?

DRESS: Well, the first thing I did was head for Europe. I borrowed money from my brother Bill and went to Boppard, Germany where I studied German at a Goethe Institute for two months. Then I hopped on a train to Berlin, Prague and Vienna. I stayed in youth hostels along the way. I visited a couple Fletcher friends, one in Geneva and one in Madrid. When I returned home at the end of the summer I started job hunting. I asked my dad for names of people I could contact and tips on how to write a resume. My mother, who was working at the Smithsonian at the time, asked some people who asked some people who put me in touch with Bob Pelican at the Treasury Department. He hired me. Now that I think about it, I got a job through networking, although I don't think they called it that 40 years ago.

Q: You worked at Treasury from when to when?

DRESS: I worked at Treasury from 1969 until 1985 when I joined the Foreign Service. My first job at Treasury was in the Office of Trade Policy under the Office of the Assistant Secretary for International Affairs (OASIA). That part of Treasury is like a mini State Department, with geographic desks as well as offices dealing with international banking and finance. But it's much smaller, more specialized and staffed with civil service employees.

Usually management interns don't have contact with the top brass, but when I joined Treasury, Secretary David M. Kennedy had just arrived and was interested in meeting his staff. I have no idea how or why but he invited me to lunch in the Secretary's private dining room (long since closed) and asked me about my work and myself. I remember thinking he was a very nice man but I was more than a little overawed.

Q: Okay, let's talk about the Treasury Department. Did you have to take a civil service exam at all?

DRESS: Once Bob decided he wanted me to come work for him, I had to take the Civil Service exam and they brought me on as an intern. I then had to take some statistics

classes at George Washington University so I could meet the job requirements for an economist.

Q: Well then what was the office in Treasury dealing with and what were you dealing with?

DRESS: A big issue for the Office of Trade Policy at that time was border tax adjustments within the context of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), which predated the World Trade Organization. The U.S. was concerned that some of its trading partners were fiddling their export taxes to gain unfair competitive advantage. I found the technical aspects arcane. I'm smiling because I'm remembering how difficult it was to adjust to working at Treasury, which was a male-dominated, extremely conservative bureaucracy. We all had to adjust to a working environment when we left school but it's a huge culture shift and it's not easy. Forty years ago Treasury was pretty stodgy. I was told when I came on board that I was the first professional woman that they had hired since World War II. All the other professionals in the office were men, as were most of the rest of the professional staff in OASIA.

Q: Did you have to wear suits?

DRESS: Men work suits and ties and in those days professional women tried to dress as much like men as possible. So I as my paychecks allowed I developed a wardrobe of suits. Because I was the youngest person in the office I was calling everybody "Mister." I finally realized it made them uncomfortable, and they got me to call them by their first names. I realize now that when you have some young coworker calling you "Mister" or "Ms." it makes you feel old.

Q: As you progressed were you able to compete and move up at all?

DRESS: I think it took me a couple of years before I learned enough substance and technique to make a contribution and establish a good reputation. I also had my eye on one of Treasury's few overseas posts. At that time, Treasury had financial attaché positions in U.S. embassies in London, Paris, Bonn, Tokyo and Rome. President Nixon took the United States off the gold standard in 1971, the dollar depreciated which put pressure on European currencies so Treasury was very interested in keeping an eye on key currency markets. I was picked for an assistant financial attaché position in Rome and took language training at FSI, which back then was in Rosslyn in a high-rise building. I served at Embassy Rome for two years, from 1972 to 1974. It was a wonderful experience. A lot of fun.

Q: How was your experience in Rome at the Embassy?

DRESS: I loved Rome, the history, the art, the architecture, the food and the people. I had a marvelous two years there. Of course, I was working hard and learning about the Italian economy, developing contacts, improving my language skills and writing reports and

cables. But I was in a junior position and didn't have any management responsibilities so there was less pressure. I was young, blond and pretty and I could relax and have fun.

My start there was tough. I lived in a little hotel for four months waiting for my household effects to arrive. Treasury didn't want to pay State for general services support so I had to do everything -- locate, rent and furnish an apartment. And in Europe then an unfurnished place was bare. I had to buy a hot water heater, kitchen cabinets, kitchen appliances, light fixtures and a toilet seat. The upside was that I ended up in a newly renovated apartment near Piazza Navona in the Centro Storico (historical center) within walking distance of the embassy. That was especially useful when the bus system went on strike. I would just walk up the Spanish Steps to Via Veneto and there I was.

Q: Treasury has always had a sort of competitive posture toward the State Department and vice versa I guess. Was that the case there?

DRESS: Treasury is in essence a finance ministry. And the mission of all finance ministries is to guard the national purse and say "no" to every hair brained, expensive idea the foreign ministry comes up with. And by definition, as far as the finance ministry is concerned, just about anything a foreign ministry does falls into the hair brained and expensive category. Saying "no" is an easy default position that doesn't take a lot of creativity or thought.

Q: Were you within the economic section of the embassy?

DRESS: No, the economic section and the Treasury office were physically and organizationally separate. The Economic Minister Counselor Michael Ely, a Senior Foreign Service Officer (FSO), ran the economic section. Don Templeman, a civil servant from Treasury, ran the Treasury office. The economic section covered trade policy, aviation policy, and certain aspects of macroeconomic reporting. The Treasury office focused on balance of payments developments and exchange rate issues. In addition to two Treasury employees (me and my boss), the Treasury office had one FSO Ed Sackett and two secretaries Darlene Mann and Mary Pozzinni.

Ed was a great guy, an Italian American who spoke fluent Italian and knew his way around Rome. We used to take coffee breaks on the Via Veneto at Harry's Bar made famous in Fellini's 1960 film "La Dolce Vita."

Q: From '79 to '81, when I was consul general in Naples that whole Embassy was just full of Italian Americans.

DRESS: Italian Americans like serving in Rome. When I arrived in 1972 Graham Martin was ambassador. When I saw him, which was rarely, he seemed very somber. He had lost his son in the Vietnam War. Ambassador Martin left Rome in 1973 for Saigon where he and the Embassy staff were evacuated by helicopter from the roof of the chancery. John Volpe succeeded him in Rome. Ambassador Volpe had been governor of Massachusetts and Nixon's Transportation Secretary. His father came from the Abruzzo, a very poor

region. The Ambassador took Italian language lessons at post because most Italians didn't understand his Abruzzese dialect.

Q: Well since you were sort of a trailblazer as a woman at Treasury, how was it dealing with the Italian ministry of finance?

DRESS: It's funny, but I never had a problem with the Italians. Officials at the Banca d'Italia (central bank) and the finance ministry were always happy to talk to me. They were perfectly charming. It was the American men who were nervous about having a young woman in a position of responsibility in the conservative world of finance. I will never forget that during my consultation rounds at Treasury before heading off to Rome Jim Ammerman, head of the banking office, told me: "You must realize sending you to Rome is a test case to see if women can serve overseas." Actually, as I look back on my career, this was a theme that came up over and over. Male bosses and American male colleagues would express concern that as a woman I wouldn't be taken seriously. I think because they themselves had doubts about women in the workplace. But foreigners always did me the courtesy of treating me as a representative of the United States, no matter how their culture viewed women.

I'd like to add here a bit of context for the 1972-1973 timeframe. In September 1972, just as I got on the plane to Rome the Watergate scandal was breaking. So I missed all the intense television coverage of Watergate and the Congressional hearings, although I remember some of my Italian colleagues scratching their heads and wondering what all the fuss was about. In late 1973 OPEC imposed an oil embargo that hit Italy pretty hard. There was gas rationing so driving on the weekends was forbidden and heating was cut back. Fortunately, Rome doesn't get that cold.

Q: Did you find a social life at the embassy included you or were you off on your own?

DRESS: Embassy Rome was typical of large European posts. People went home after work and did their thing. This was in the days before embassies had community liaison officers (CLOs) to organize outings and I didn't have an embassy sponsor to show me the ropes. But I was young, eager and resourceful. I made friends with some of the young single officers - Anne Jillson, a FSO who worked in the Science Office and Frank Pison, who worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). Each knew Italy well and had Italian friends so I was able to meet local people. Anne and I would go sightseeing in Rome almost every weekend; we visited ruins, art galleries and museums. We spent two years doing that and barely scratched the surface. I went out to dinner with Frank and his friends and we went dancing. Disco was very popular in those days. Sometimes when my boss or Mike Ely entertained I would be invited to a working dinner party or reception. I remember how excited I was the first time I went to one of Ambassador Volpe's large receptions at the residence, until I learned that I was there to work not necessarily to have fun.

Like all things Italian, the language was fun. We had a wonderful, elderly lady teaching Italian at the Embassy, Signora Marchi. I was in a small class of advanced students and

we convinced her that our Italian was good enough to read Dante's Divine Comedy. She got a kick out of teaching us the culture as well as the language. She even invited us out to the family farm in Tuscany. My mother was visiting at the time so it was a special treat for me.

Q: Speaking as the former consul general in Naples, did you did have a run in with my friends the Camorra, the Mafia in the southern Italy?

DRESS: The only thing I ever ran into was something called the "mano morto" or "dead hand." If you were a young, attractive female in a crowd of Italians - on a bus, train or on a sidewalk - sooner or later you would feel the "mano morto."

Q: What are some of the lessons you learned that stand out in your mind

DRESS: I learned very early that central bankers and finance ministries had to be extremely cautious when talking in public about foreign currency issues because the media would jump on any word and markets would react, often in a way you didn't want them to. When Nixon took the dollar off the gold standard in 1971, world currencies like the U.S. dollar, British pound, French franc and Italian lira started to float and foreign exchange markets to form. The ups and downs of the dollar-lira relationship was a major pre-occupation for my boss Don Templeman. One my first experiences in Rome was the visit of Undersecretary of Treasury for Monetary Affairs Paul Volker. Volker was a cool guy, extremely bright, very tall. He smoked cigars and spoke in a baritone. Later as Federal Reserve Chairman, he became famous in Carter's presidency for wringing inflation out of the economy by raising interest rates to all-time highs. I recall taking Under Secretary Volker to Piazza Navona for a late night espresso after a dinner at the Bank of Italy. I was only 26 at the time and I was completely over awed by the whole experience.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end. In 1974, precisely two years after my arrival in Rome, Treasury brought me back. In fact, Treasury rotated all the junior attaches that year because management, which had been leaving people overseas for years, suddenly decided to make a two-year tour last only two years. It was my bad luck. Anyway, I wasn't ready to go home and I cried almost all the way back to Washington on the plane. And then when I got home I went through major culture shock, re-adjusting to the United States. I always found coming back to Washington more difficult than going out for a new assignment and adapting to a new culture. I think because you expect everything to be totally familiar at home, and when it's not it is more of a shock. The other problem is that when you are overseas you represent the United States and you have significant work to do and you get respect and attention not because of who you are but because of the country that you represent. Then you come back to Washington and you are nobody.

Q: Nobody absolutely. How did you find it when you came back? The Treasury attaches were sort of a rare bird weren't they?

DRESS: There weren't that many and at Treasury it was sort of like "Oh gee, well you're back from Rome. What are we going to do with you?"

Q: Yeah.

DRESS: I had been so impressed with Undersecretary Volker that I wanted to serve as his special assistant. I lined that up before I left Rome, but when I got back to Treasury I discovered that he had moved to the Federal Reserve Bank and I was working for Jack Bennett, a former EXXON official, who was appointed Undersecretary for Monetary Affairs after Volker.

Q: You were special assistant?

DRESS: Yes, special assistant to the Under Secretary for Monetary Affairs, which sounds glamorous, but it turned out not to be very interesting. I don't think the Under Secretary knew what to do with me. I was just another woman sitting in his outer office along with his appointment secretary and his administrative assistant. And he was much more involved in domestic finance issues than international affairs so what little expertise I had at that age wasn't an asset.

Q: In State Department context being the special assistant is where the Foreign Service luminaries -- your Larry Eagleburger's and Jerry Bremer's and others-- made their mark. They were doing the behest of the great man or the great woman but at the same time they were getting known. Did you have that feeling in Treasury or was it a different atmosphere?

DRESS: Well, I never had the good fortune to have a powerful mentor, which can be a huge career booster. Moreover, the civil service is very different from the Foreign Service. In the Foreign Service you carry your rank with you, which makes upward mobility easier at least technically. In the Civil Service you have to shoehorn yourself into a new job description when you move up or laterally, so you can't move readily.

Q: Today is the 2nd of September 2009 with Alice Dress. So what were you doing in Treasury when you returned to Washington in 1974?

DRESS: I returned to Washington in September 1974, spent three to four months in the Under Secretary's office and pretty quickly began looking around for a more substantive position. I lined up a job in the Office of International Development Banks working for Bernie Zinmann. Treasury has the interagency lead on the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the regional development banks (the Asian, Latin American and African development banks). The U.S. executive directors report to the Secretary of Treasury and get their instructions from Treasury. And Treasury leads the delegations to bank and IMF meetings. Treasury desk officers review bank loans, bank policies and replenishment proposals and make recommendations on what the U.S. position should be. In 1974 I started working on the African Development Fund, which was concessional lending arm of the African Development Bank (AFDB) funded by non-African donors. In

1975 I went Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) to meet with bank officials at AFDB headquarters. Later that year I moved up to become desk officer for the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and was a member of the U.S. delegation the annual meeting in 1975 in Cancun, Mexico and to the 1977 annual meeting in Guatemala City, Guatemala.

In late 1975 the Deputy Secretary of Treasury Steve Gardner hosted a U.S. Congressional delegation on a tour of development bank projects in Africa and Latin America. The trip was part of Treasury's effort to allay Congressional concerns that U.S. funding of the multilateral development banks was being wasted by demonstrating that it was actually benefiting the countries and people it was intended for. The delegation, which had a dedicated Air Force plane at its disposal, was composed of Treasury principals and staff (myself included), Congressional principals and staff and a Foreign Service Officer from the Office of Development Finance in the Economic and Business Bureau.

The one congressman I recall from the trip was Clarence "Doc" Long, a congressman from Maryland who was chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. He was a key player and oversaw foreign aid. I realized only recently, when I watched the film "Charlie Wilson's War," that he was a strong supporter of the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviets. He was quite a character. He used to call up Treasury staff directly and growl questions at us about loans and policies. I picked up the phone once and he was on the line asking about the IADB interest rate policy on small loans. I was too petrified to explain coherently. Anyway, he and his wife were on this trip. We flew from Andrews Air Force Base to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire where we met with African Development Bank officials and visited some Bank projects (including a chicken processing factory). We flew up the coast to Monrovia, Liberia where we met with President William Tolbert, who was murdered in 1980 by Samuel Doe. Our next stop was Dakar, Senegal where I met Shaun Donnelly, one of our control officers, who was just starting what would be a distinguished career at State in economic affairs. Shaun was such a terrific guy; seeing him in action, handling a Congressional delegation strongly reinforced my favorable impression of the Foreign Service. Our last stop in Africa was a brief layover in Bamako, Mali, where the Sahelian drought was so severe most of the staff waited in the plane while the Congressmen took a brief look at drought relief efforts. We then flew to South America, stopping in Recife, Brazil to look at an IADB-financed pig farm before going to Rio de Janeiro, where the delegation looked at some more projects. Rio was the last stop before returning to Washington. I remember how disillusioned I was with the congressmen because they seemed to be more interested in relaxing and shopping in Rio than in economic development. For them substantive part of the trip was over and they just wanted to relax and of course, they were all older and I was under 30, idealistic and feeling that we should all be working. My German genes and Lutheran worldview were in play.

Q: As one gets older one realizes you really need down time.

DRESS: It was the end of a long, exhausting trip and people were tired.

Q: So this was your German gene, one has to be very careful about that. I've got them too, every once in a while and only now I'm able to suppress them.

DRESS: Exactly and you don't endear yourself to people either.

Back to Treasury. I recall that in 1977 when the Carter Administration came in, C. Fred Bergsten was appointed the new assistant secretary for international affairs. Fred was a Fletcher graduate, who had worked for Henry Kissinger at the National Security Council, and a very bright, energetic guy. He wanted to be responsive to Congressional fears that U.S. tax dollars were being wasted by the international development banks. So one of the first things he did when he came on board was to ask OASIA staff to evaluate development bank lending - was it contributing to developing country growth? As you can imagine this was not an easy question to answer. When there are so many variables at play in economic development how do you determine the impact one of them - in this case - foreign aid?

Q: Were you able to find plusses?

DRESS: Ultimately, the argument for foreign aid that we come up with and that Congress found attractive was that a significant portion of every U.S. aid dollar came back to the U.S. economy in the form of consultant fees and procurement. I've watched fads in development assistance come and go over 35 years. Early on we supported infrastructure projects such as dams and roads. Then basic human needs became the mantra. Then it was decided the recipient governments were corrupt and aid had to be channeled through non-governmental organizations. So development efforts were switched to building institutions and civil society. And let's not forget Jimmy Carter's insistence on injecting human rights into foreign relations. I don't take issue with bilateral aid that is clearly politically motivated, with no pretense that its purpose is anything more than to buy good will. I have grave doubts however that foreign aid or advice from outside "experts" can bring lasting economic growth and development. Lasting change has to come from within a society and culture.

The debate over foreign aid, its pros and cons, rages today. Just look at the billions of dollars we have poured into Afghanistan and Iraq. There are serious questions about where the money actually went and whether it has furthered U.S. interests and helped the recipient countries.

Q: You are in a different culture, aren't you?

DRESS: I think to a very large extent you are back to culture and what motivates people, what people themselves want and expect.

Q Are we really doing more harm than good? So many of these projects end up benefiting the top bureaucracy or the criminal element.

DRESS: There was always the concern about how much of the money was being siphoned off and how much was actually getting to the people. As I mentioned, when we were working on the plus and the minus ledger for what good development banks do, we concluded that -- and I can't remember what the exact figures were -- but something like thirty cents of every dollar that the United States put into multilateral lending institutions comes back to the U.S. in terms of contracts.

Q: Yes, because we write that in.

DRESS: And the Congressmen really liked that argument. But then you get this dichotomy -- does the money actually go to benefit people in third world countries or does it benefit the U.S. contracting community? Or even more importantly, does it win friends and influence people in the sense of building good will for the United States on the world stage?

Q: That reminds me of the very active role Michigan State plays in the development field, like sending out grad students to do surveys. I mean it's great for the grad students and the professors but it's all money going to Michigan State.

DRESS: Well, there is a vast development community of consultants, universities, businesses and charities in this country that benefit from the U.S. foreign aid budget. But Treasury was smart enough to know that that was definitively an argument that was going to appeal to Congressmen. We all know that foreign aid has no domestic constituency and Americans think the foreign aid budget is vastly larger than it actually is. Congressmen were pleased when we told them that they could tell their constituents that we weren't just throwing the money away, the money was actually coming back to the U.S. economy.

Q: This brings up a question - the role of professional women - that comes up from time to time in these oral histories. When you started working in the late 1960s there weren't many women at Treasury or the State Department in other than clerical positions. Did you find that changed over time at Treasury?

DRESS: The change was slow and gradual. By the time I left Treasury in 1985 more women had been hired and some were moving into middle management.

I would like to share at this point one of the many lessons I learned at Treasury. In the 1970s working on development bank issues I got extensive experience in the interagency process. I went to a lot of interagency meetings, was involved in a lot of interagency negotiations and came to the conclusion (shared by many who've worked in Washington) that the hardest negotiations are the interagency negotiations. Once you've agreed on a U.S. position the hard part is over; you go out to negotiate with other countries. The fights between Treasury and State that I witnessed and participated in were "veins in the teeth" and "blood on the floor" ordeals.

Q: How long did you work on development bank issues?

DRESS: Only a couple of years. By the late 1970s I had moved to the Office of Development Policy where I worked first for Jon Hartzell and when he left Treasury for the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency for Matt Hennessey. In the 1970s exchanges between developed and developing countries took place in the framework of what the developing countries called the New International Economic Order or the North-South Dialogue. One of the key demands of poor countries (the so-called "South") was that rich countries (the so-called "North") should give foreign aid equal to 0.7% of their GNP per year. Although the United States was by far the single largest aid donor, our aid contribution was far less than that target - which by the way, we never accepted - and we caught a lot of heat in international meetings not only from developing countries, but also from the "holier than thou" Nordic countries who did meet the GNP target.

At that time I was responsible for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which was established in 1977 in Rome to combat rural poverty and promote food security in developing countries. USAID had the lead on IFAD, but I represented Treasury's views in the interagency process and on delegations to meetings in Rome. I also recall that in the early 1980s I was involved in the early discussions of the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) established in 1985 as part of the World Bank Group to promote foreign direct investment in developing countries. I drafted some of the basic U.S. requirements for MIGA. I was also active in some of the work of the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) concerning developing countries.

Q: The OECD was limited to Europeans or not?

DRESS: At the time the OECD was composed only of developed countries but discussions were underway about admitting Mexico and some other major emerging economies. I attended meetings of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which was the forum for members and the multilateral development banks to coordinate development assistance and make it more effective. A major DAC undertaking was peer review of members' development policies. For example, the Japanese tightly tied their aid so that a high level of the funds returned to the Japanese economy in exports and consultant fees. The DAC tried to encourage donors to "untie" their aid so more money would remain in the recipient country. The DAC was also an important source for statistics on bilateral foreign aid. USAID had the interagency lead on the DAC but Treasury and State both had roles to play.

I also had the pleasure of working with Edwin "Ted" Truman, was a brilliant economist at the Board of Governors at the Federal Reserve System who later became prominent at the Federal Reserve Board and at Treasury, on some OECD issues. Working Party 3 of the OECD's Economic Policy Committee aims to promote smoother capital flows; in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was concern about imbalances between oil importing and oil exporting countries and heavy borrowing by developing countries. Anyway, I attended a couple WP3 meetings in Paris and I distinctly remember the brief case Ted used to haul around, held together with duct tape.

Speaking of developing country debt, I was very active in a number of the debt reschedulings that the Paris Club undertook during this period. The Paris Club is composed of major creditor countries, the French Treasury in Paris chairs its meetings and its purpose is to ensure that debtor developing countries continue to service their debts. When developing countries were unable to pay their debts to creditor governments, the creditors would get together and work out a new payment schedule. In later years, as indebtedness grew, debt write offs or forgiveness was increasingly used. Of the several negotiations I was involved in, I recall a meeting on Zaire most clearly. State had the interagency lead on the Paris Club and Charles Meissner was our head of delegation. He was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Finance in the Economic and Business Bureau at State.

Q: He was killed in a plane crash.

DRESS: Yes, tragically. I first met Chuck back in the early 1970s when he worked at Treasury. He moved to State and then under President Clinton to Commerce where he was Assistant Secretary for International Economic Policy. He was traveling with Commerce Secretary Ron Brown in 1996 when their plane crashed in Dubrovnik killing all on board.

Q: I'm going to take us back to the '70s again while we are dealing with this. There was a book written about the Foreign Service of the 1930s and the title was A Pretty Good Club. In a way I've been doing these oral histories for almost twenty-five years and still doing them because I find the people fascinating. I don't think I would find that if I was doing a basic thing of civil servants or, be that as it may, lawyers or millionaires or any other group that you can think of over time because the Foreign Service if maybe they aren't as interesting where they've been is interesting or vice versa. They are articulate and they've been around. Well let's go back to the '70s. Were you fighting the north-south battle a long time?

DRESS: Returning to the North-South Dialogue and my work in the Office of Development Policy, I want to talk a bit about my involvement with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). UNCTAD was a Geneva-based UN body that was entirely sympathetic to the worldview of developing countries, which in the 1970s and 1980s was anti-market and highly critical of U.S. economic and foreign policy. The U.S. government and especially Treasury viewed UNCTAD as a nuisance and a problem. State headed the delegations to the meetings in Geneva and I participated in a number of those meetings that dealt with development finance and economics. I got to know a number of the other delegations - such as the European Union, which at that time was called the European Economic Community or EEC. Greece had just joined and I heard some of the original members muttering about how Greece just couldn't get its act together. The U.S. was generally the most conservative member of Group B, which is what the market developed country caucus was called. The Nordics were always way out in left field, very pro-South. Then there were our good friends the French, doing whatever they could to look good at our expense. One of the things I saw again and again

was that the Europeans would say things and agree to things the developing countries wanted to hear, but then they didn't necessarily follow up. Canada and the UK would often make common cause with us in trying to be fiscally responsible and supporting market-based solutions. But we tended to take things seriously. We rarely promised what we didn't intend to deliver, which frequently put the United States on the defensive and in the position of saying "no."

Q: What about the Soviets, they had their programs and all. How did we view them at this time because this was at the height of the Cold War?

DRESS: The Communist countries or Group D as they were called were present but not that active. They more or less agreed to anything the poor countries wanted as long as they didn't have to cough up resources. The most active group was Group C or the developing countries. They were the demandeurs - for more foreign aid, for debt relief, for tariff concessions, etc.

Q: Were you thinking at all as you were doing this of looking at the State Department as a career?

DRESS: Funny you should ask. My decision to join the Foreign Service is linked to my experience at UNCTAD's fourth quadrennial conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1984. The U.S. delegation was in Belgrade for almost a month negotiating language on various resolutions and the final communiqué. One of the FSOs I worked with closely on financial issues was Adrian Basora. A very nice guy, very competent. I told him my concerns about how limited career options were at Treasury and he suggested I consider joining the Foreign Service through its mid-level entry program for women and other minorities. I gave it serious thought, talked to friends at Treasury and State to get their views and began the application process. I passed the oral exam, which consisted of questions asked by a panel of examiners, the infamous in-box test and an essay. The inbox test was a hoot; the scenario is that you've just arrived at post, your predecessor left suddenly weeks before your arrival and you inherit what accumulated in his inbox in the interim. You had about an hour to sort through the pile of correspondence, organize it, prioritize it, and figure out what to do in each case and solve the various problems.

Q: Do you recall by any chance any of the questions that were asked you during the oral exam?

DRESS: Actually, I do because two of them stumped me. I was asked about what was going on in the United States in the 1890s. The only thing I could come up with at the time, based on research I had done on family genealogy, was that the 1890s was a decade of high immigration. Now I know, because I "googled" it, that other highlights were the Spanish-American war, a financial panic and American imperial adventures in Cuba, Hawaii and the Philippines. I was also asked to name three ethnic Americans who had made a contribution to American society. I eventually came up with Marian Anderson, Leontyne Price and Eero Saarinen, who designed the airport at Dulles. Fortunately I was

able to handle the economic and financial questions because I had been diligently reading the Economist and the financial news.

By early 1985 I had completed the application process, including the physical, and State offered me a lateral transfer to a mid-level position based on my relevant professional experience. At that point I had to make a momentous decision. I could stay at Treasury and do pretty much the same job in the same place for the next 20 years or join the Foreign Service and see the world.

Q: Well if you are a restless soul, the State Department Foreign Service is great because you are changing all the time. I think some people enjoy the continuous change.

DRESS: I'm really not a restless soul nor do I particularly enjoy change, but I didn't want to turn into a stodgy, crotchety civil servant who atrophied from doing the same job for thirty years. I found the FSOs I worked with over the years much more interesting and much nicer than most of my Treasury colleagues. I wanted interesting work, collegial coworkers and challenge. State offered that and I could take my 15 plus years of experience in international economic affairs with me. So in May 1985 I joined the orientation program for new FSOs and was sworn in. Most of my A-100 class had prior work experience, almost half were female and the median age was 31. I was one of two mid-level entrants; the other one was a Black lawyer.

Q: How old were you when you joined the Foreign Service?

DRESS: I turned 39 in May 1985, the month I was sworn in as an FSO-2 in the economic area.

Q: An 0-2 is about the military equivalent to a major, right?.

DRESS: Fortunately the work I had been doing at Treasury easily correlated with the work I would be doing for State. That made it easy for State to figure out what grade level to bring me in at.

Q: Easier than if you had been the dean of a school or a professor or...

DRESS: ...or an engineer or a banker or whatever. State looked at my resume and said, "She has a graduate degree and she's has 15 years experience in international economic affairs so she's a good fit as a mid-level officer." I was very appreciative of being able to come in at mid-level. I occasionally had twinges of regret that I didn't have consular experience, something all junior officers get during their first couple of years. However, I would not have joined the Foreign Service at age 39 if I had had to go back to the beginning and start over at the bottom.

Q: And it would have been a waste of your time. I thought the program was designed to bring people who were not in the government into the government and to get women in. What you were doing was if you are looking at the overall thing robbing Peter to pay

Paul. You were taking a mid-career woman from the Department of Treasury and putting her into the Department of State so there was no plus gain to getting more women into government mid-level positions.

DRESS: That may be, but State was interested in improving its own minority ratios, not any one else's.

Q: Absolutely.

DRESS: I for one am grateful for State's mid-level entry program for women and other minorities, because without it I wouldn't be a retired Foreign Service officer today, I'd be a retired civil servant and we wouldn't be having this discussion. The mid-level entry program was and is controversial. Our union, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), opposes bringing it back as a recruitment tool. A lot of Foreign Service officers did not like it. In 1985, on my way to Zaire, I stopped in Paris to consult with the economic section at the embassy. During a chat about the French interest in Zaire, the guy I was talking to, Jack Aubert, told me straight out that he didn't think I was a real Foreign Service Officer because I had come in via the mid-level entry program. You can imagine how that made me feel.

Q: Today is the 17th of September 2009 with Alice A. Dress. This is an oral history done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. It's 1985 and you are off to Zaire.

DRESS: Yes, I'm off to Zaire for my first Foreign Service assignment.

Q: Zaire was called Zaire in those days, is it back to the Congo now?

DRESS: It's the Democratic Republic of Congo today. When I was there Mobutu Sese Seko was president, an autocrat who instituted what he saw as an authentic African society, stripped of European artifice. He went off to China in the early 1970s, was impressed with what he saw, and came back and changed the name of the river and the country from Congo to Zaire. He forbade the use of Christian first names and the use of French courtesy titles like Monsieur and Madame. Men were addressed as "citoyen" or citizen. Western clothing was banned and men wore the "abacost," which looked rather like the Mao jackets the Chinese wore.

Q: What was your job?

DRESS: Actually it was a very good match with what I had been doing at Treasury. I was the finance and development officer in the Embassy in Kinshasa and the deputy director in the economic section.

This was my first Foreign Service assignment but I was very well prepared substantively thanks to thorough consultations before going out to Africa. I met with Zaire experts at Treasury, State, Commerce, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and

Export Import Bank who gave me the background on U.S. economic interests in Zaire. I went up to New York City to consult with Citibank, Bankers Trust, Morgan Guaranty, Conti Grain (a Belgian grain conglomerate headquartered in NYC), and Maurice Tempelman, the Belgian-American diamond trader who dated Jackie Kennedy at one time. The picture they gave me of Zaire in the mid 1980s was of a poor but resource-rich, badly managed country that had accumulated massive external debts in the boom years of the 1960s and early 1970s - debts that Zaire couldn't service when copper prices plunged in 1974. Banks and investors stopped doing business with Zaire and it wasn't until Mobutu agreed to resume paying Zaire's foreign debt and undertake economic austerity programs supervised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank that economic activity picked up again.

Q: Okay well let's put it in a little perspective. What was the situation in Zaire in 1985 when you got there?

DRESS: Since independence in 1960, many Americans have served in Zaire. In the 1980s Embassy Kinshasa was a big mission - in addition to the usual embassy sections, there was a large military assistance group, a large CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) presence, a large USAID (Agency for International Development) mission and the Peace Corps. As a result, there are many officers from a number of U.S. agencies who share the experience of having served in Zaire. Although we all served in Zaire, our individual experiences were very different because so much was going on and so much changed from year to year. Before I arrived, in the early 1980s conditions were very difficult. Westerners were victims of crime and the police were stopping everyone at roadblocks and extorting money, even from diplomats.

During the brief time I was there from 1985-1988, things were going well. Zaire was borrowing from the World Bank and the IMF, foreign investment was flowing in, and Zaire's external debt was being rescheduled. Most foreigners were only interested in getting a slice of Zaire's mineral wealth - copper, cobalt, and diamonds. Private businessmen -- French, Belgians, Greeks and English -- invested in the local economy and produced things to sell, such as beer, soap, bread and cement. Lebanese were traders. It was a reasonably prosperous, stable time. The Soviets and the Chinese were also present and active; the Chinese build sports stadiums, something they did all over Africa in those days.

The economic section focused on commercial and economic relations between Zaire and the United States. As the finance and development officer, I tracked Zaire's compliance with the World Bank program and the IMF's structural adjustment program. I worked closely with the World Bank resident representative William Grau and the IMF resident representative Regis Blin. The fact that these institutions had officials stationed in Kinshasa full-time shows how intense the international community's interest was in Zaire in those days.

Q: Why was there this attention?

DRESS: If you look at a map of Africa, Zaire is right in the middle of the continent and shares borders with Angola, the Congo Brazzaville, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Zambia. The United States was interested in Zaire for political and economic reasons. The Cold War was being waged in Africa and one of the reasons we had such a large CIA presence in Zaire was because Mobutu was helping us oppose the Cuban presence in Angola. It was a wealthy country, with substantial foreign debts, some of which were owed to the U.S. Government and U.S. banks. Zaire had borrowed a lot of money to build the Inga-Shaba Electrical Transmission line that ran 1,700 kilometers all the way across the country from the Inga hydroelectric dam near Kinshasa to the Kolwezi copper mining center in Shaba (Katanga) Province. A number of other countries were interested in Zaire and had diplomatic and business presences there -- the Belgians, of course, the French, the Chinese, even the Israelis. The international community and the international financial institutions were engaged in trying to help Zaire develop and help Mobutu do the right thing for the country.

Everyone was focused on Zaire's incredible mineral resources -- the diamonds, the copper, the cobalt and rare minerals. The donor community tried to channel revenue from mineral sales into government coffers while Mobutu and his cronies were busy lining their pockets. At one point the Swiss were actually managing the customs service to try to keep what we call euphemistically called "leakages" to a minimum. The IMF had people sitting in the central bank rifling through officials' desks looking for invoices to try to figure out what was going on. It was a very active, very interesting period. I met often with the international organizational representatives and other diplomats to share information about what Mobutu was up to and any statistics we could get our hands on about export earnings, debt payments, etc. I always enjoyed going to meetings at the central bank or finance ministry with my boss, Joe Saloom. I learned so much from him. He was a terrific Foreign Service officer - very bright, energetic, a good linguist and a good economist. Joe was the best possible first boss I could have had in the Foreign Service. He was the one who showed me how to be a good economic officer. He took us on factory visits so we got first-hand experience of how private companies did business. At every dinner or reception he attended he invariably picked up useful information. He was indefatigable!

I've got lots of stories about Joe but let me share just one. When you arrived in Zaire back then it was always in the middle of the night and you had to run an obstacle course just to get into the terminal. I recall my arrival vividly. I got off the plane after a long flight from Paris, carrying a very unhappy Burmese cat named Oscar, walked across the tarmac and pushed my way past airport guards into the terminal. Everything was dilapidated and there was no signage. I couldn't figure out what to do or where to go. I was asking myself why I had given up my comfortable life in Washington and my familiar work at Treasury. I know Oscar was wondering the same thing. That's when I spotted my embassy sponsor and my new boss Joe Saloom, who had come out to greet me. I was so impressed that he came out in the middle of the night to welcome me, something he didn't have to do. That made a very great first impression of him and of the Foreign Service at its best.

Anyway, one of the advantages of being posted to a developing country is that you get to talk to ministers and deputy ministers. Joe and I would go to the Banque du Zaire (the central bank) and talk to the governor or to the finance ministry and talk to the minister about the issues of the day. It was a lot of fun. Adjusting to living and working in Zaire was difficult but the job was always just really, really fascinating.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

DRESS: I worked for two ambassadors. The first was Brandon Grove, who is right out of central casting in terms of looking ambassadorial. He was tall, imposing and patrician. His Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) was Dan Simpson, who volunteered to serve in Beirut and was replaced by Mark Bass. Ambassador William Harrop replaced Brandon Grove in 1988.

Q: I've interviewed Bill too. This was a challenging assignment. How did you find it?

DRESS: I know you've heard a lot of stories about Zaire under Mobutu. People describe it as a kleptocracy, which of course it was. Mobutu maintained power by giving everybody a turn at the trough. People would move into power, steal their share of the national wealth and then move out again. He would rotate people through and he co-opted a lot of his opposition that way. We knew he was a crook but he was useful in Angola. It was the old "he's a SOB but he's our SOB." And we tried to keep him from ruining his country. The conventional wisdom was that he was holding the country together. I didn't believe that at the time (it sounded too much like the Vietnam domino theory) but subsequent events seem to have proved me wrong. Living and working in Kinshasa was difficult primarily because of the isolation. The Belgians had created some infrastructure but after independence everything, including the road system, just started falling apart. You could drive in Kinshasa and if you were foolish enough to risk death-by-truck you could drive to Matadi, the port city, but beyond that there were no paved roads. The only way to get across country was the Zaire River or flying.

Q: Copper was the big thing at the time, wasn't it?

DRESS: Zaire had a wealth of resources in the ground, but public sector revenues depended upon what the world price was for specific commodities at the time - cobalt, copper, and diamonds.

Q: I've heard that the infrastructure for mining particularly was breaking down or wasn't being maintained very well. Was this your impression?

DRESS: The mining sector was in better shape than any other infrastructure in the country because it was the money earner. So they kept it operating. I'm not saying that it was state of the art. I'm not saying they were putting a lot of new money into it, but when I went out to Kolwezi to visit the mining and smelting operations I saw ore being mined and processed. While some of the equipment looked pretty old, other equipment -- like enormous trucks with tires as tall as this room -- looked state of the art.

Q: We are talking about 12 feet.

DRESS: Yes. Obviously trucks like that cost a lot of money.

Q: How stood the oil exploration when you were there?

DRESS: One of the U.S. oil majors, Chevron I think, flew me and Melanie Smeallie, our commercial officer, down to the port city Matadi and then out to an enormous barge, anchored offshore in an area where the company was doing exploratory drilling. It was interesting to see the operation and talk to people, but it wasn't terribly exciting because they weren't finding much oil.

Q: Looking at the map I see and counted Zaire's got ten bordering neighbors which is not always a good thing in any place and, of course, the African boundaries are all very problematic because of the tribal situation and all that. Was there sort of a back and beyond from your point of view of things happening up in the Sudanese-Central African border or something? Or didn't you really know what was going on?

DRESS: Your question is prescient, given what happened to Zaire after Mobutu's death. It wasn't Cold War communism that tore the country apart but a homegrown African affliction - tribalism/ethnic strife. In the late 1980s a major focus for the U.S. foreign policy establishment, in particular the CIA, was what Zaire's southern neighbor Angola. The U.S. relationship with Mobutu was shaped in large part by efforts to secure his cooperation in countering Cuban influence in Angola. Because of those Cold War interests, there was a large Agency presence in Embassy Kinshasa and a number of young Agency officers learned their tradecraft in Zaire.

Q: Yeah. Normally I don't talk about agency activities because of sensitivity but Zaire is a unique case where it was known as an Agency-dominated country.

DRESS: Speaking of the Agency, one of the first people I met in Kinshasa was the famous Larry Devlin.

Q: Oh yes.

DRESS: - - who had been the CIA station chief in the 1960s.

Q: And he's written a book about it.

DRESS: He's written a book about it. He was the one who was ordered to assassinate Mobutu. When I met him, he was long retired from public service and was representing Maurice Tempelman's interests in Zaire.

Q: The diamond person and a friend of Jackie Kennedy's.

DRESS: Yes. During consultations before I went out to Zaire, I went up to New York and met with Maurice Tempelsman. At the time, I didn't realize how famous he was. Anyway Larry Devlin and his wife Mary invited the economic section to lunch -- Joe Saloom, me, Bob Whitehead, Hampton Smith and Melanie Smeallie. The Devlins had a house a little ways out of Kinshasa up on a hill. Larry was full of stories of Zaire from 25 years earlier; he had seen the country change and knew Mobutu well. In the old days, he had met with Mobutu fairly frequently so he gave us a fascinating glimpse of history. I never did meet Mobutu, which is probably just as well. I remember hearing that President Mobutu would summon Ambassador Grove up to Gbadolite, Mobutu's ancestral home way up north on the border with the Central African Republic, and harangue him because things weren't going the way he wanted. At the time, Mobutu wanted his creditors, both foreign governments and international bankers, to give him generous repayment terms on his foreign debt. Mobutu would tell Ambassador Grove: "Well, after all the things I've done for you Americans, I expect you to speak on my behalf in these international meetings and get me the best deal that you possibly can in terms of generous debt relief." We took a financial rather than a political approach to debt relief and offered repayment terms on the basis of what we thought Zaire could repay. Unlike the French, who for commercial or political advantage would forgive debt or give very generous terms of relief. Of course, we also had Congress to satisfy so we had to be pretty hard nosed about the thing.

Q: Were we watching an economy that because of the corruption and the lack of investment was slowly sinking them? What were we looking at at the time you were there?

DRESS: Well as I said, this was a moment in time when things were going pretty well. Now if you look at the long-term trend it's downward all the way from 1960 to the present day. It's a clear trend downward, but over that period of time there were plateaus, pauses, and precipitous drops. I just happened to be there at a time when things were not going that badly.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Zairian officials?

DRESS: The nice thing about economic work is you generally deal with a better class of people -- and you get invited to lunch. This has been true throughout my whole career. My counterparts were invariably well-educated, cosmopolitan, sophisticated people. It doesn't mean they weren't crooks, but if they were, they were very nice, very pleasant crooks. The Zairois (French for Zairians) liked Americans and were generally very warm and friendly. We did not have the colonial/imperial baggage that the Belgians had. There was very much a love-hate relationship between the Zairois and the Belgians. We had good access and official encounters were generally pleasant and informative. Having good access and having people wanting to talk to you and share information certainly makes your job an awful lot easier.

Q: When you went to the Ministry of Finance were there books and figures and that sort of things?

DRESS: I don't recall ever seeing any data published by the government of Zaire. What we knew about government finances or the macro economic situation was gleaned from various sources -- from government ministers, the IMF, the World Bank, foreign investors, etc.

Conditions were very basic. To the extent that a visit to the central bank, for example, involved making one's way through the chickens and goats grazing in front of the building. The phone system worked only occasionally and never during the rainy season. Even if you could get a call through to a government office, no one answered the phone. The economic section's local employee Mudibu would go out with a car and driver to make appointments for us. It usually took several days if not longer for him to set things up. Another interesting feature of doing business with the government involved the gatekeepers, who acted like concierges. So when Joe Saloom and I would show up at the central bank we would say hello to the guys at the reception desk and they would escort us to the elevator, ride with us upstairs and usher us into the governor's office. They were always very nice to us because at Christmas time we would take them bottles of Johnny Walker whiskey. They were always thrilled to see us and whisked us right through the front door into the elevator and up to the head guy's office.

Q: This is one of these not completely untold stories of diplomatic life and that is Christmas gifts. It's expected, it works and it oils the machinery very nicely and at no great expense.

DRESS: If you wanted to do some soul searching, you could say we were participating in the corruption of a corrupt society. But I don't think that's accurate; it was really more a matter of observing local custom. You served in Italy and you know that the Italians are very big about gift giving at Christmas. That's where I learned to give gifts to the people that provide services, like the mail carrier or the office cleaner.

Q: I know around Christmas time I often find myself in Washington interviewing people in law offices messengers are coming in with big gift baskets of cookies or fruit or jams.

DRESS: Businesses do it too.

Q: It's to the same people, it's not really to the top, and fair enough it's the people...

DRESS: The facilitators, the lower level people who aren't paid very well and who don't have a lot of status, but who can help you or hurt you. I thought it was a very smart thing to do.

Q: Yeah.

DRESS: I saw the benefit of it in action. I had ordered a Peugeot 505 from Paris, an Africanized Peugeot, before I left Washington. The car was shipped down to the port city of Matadi where it sat waiting for custom's clearance for months. I knew the car was in country, but I couldn't get my hands on it. Hamilton Smith, one of my colleagues in the

economic section, had the same problem so we joined forces and went to the customs office in the Finance Ministry to see the official in charge of the paperwork. Hamilton had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Zaire, so he talked about what a wonderful country Zaire was and about how hospitable the people were. I gave the man a bottle of whiskey and then having softened him up I casually said, "By the way we've been waiting for the paper work to get our cars released." And he said, "Oh, I'll take care of that." He thumbed through the huge stack of documents on his desk, pulled out our papers and signed them. And that was that. And yes, I felt a twinge of guilt about what I as doing, but hey, I got my car.

Q: We have an interview with a man who is an administrative officer in Africa and talking about how things are difficult there. I asked how did you get things done? Oh we bribed them. I mean you'd call a bribe a gift but it's the way things are done. Also when I was in Vietnam I realized civil servants were hardly paid at all so what you were doing, I mean the people who were dealing with this were paying for service. If you had to have them do something and the people, the government said okay you are here and the people who need something and the people will pay for it. In a way it is a form of paying. In other wards, if I didn't need the service I didn't have to pay it and if I needed the service I paid it. One can say economically there's a certain amount of sense there.

DRESS: Yes.

Q: How did you find social life? Did you feel welcome? Here you were a mid-grade officer and all and coming in on this program. Did you feel a little bit that you were ignored?

DRESS: Not at all. I felt absolutely no different from anybody else at the embassy. Before leaving Treasury, I talked to some of my Foreign Service colleagues about life in the Foreign Service. I remember saying to Lorelei Peters: "Look, I'm really concerned about going off to some small post in Africa as a single woman and ending up really lonely." She said, "Don't worry about it. The small posts are often the best. The embassy community is very cohesive and there is a lot of community activity. People bend over backwards to make sure no one is left out." Even though Embassy Kinshasa was a large post for Sub-Saharan Africa, life was very much as Ambassador Peters had described. There were all sorts of community events going on and people were warm and friendly. Everyone in the economic section was terrific. So in those terms, it was good. That doesn't mean that there weren't many weekends when there was absolutely nothing to do, and no place to go, especially if you were single.

Q: No, it can be very difficult. Of course, you couldn't travel which if you were in Paris can be a very difficult post for people but at least you can get the hell out of there. I mean you can wander around Paris.

DRESS: Another aspect of life in Kinshasa was the profound isolation. Communications were primitive. When Mobutu didn't pay the bills for the satellite hook up, you couldn't make an international phone call. We would have to call through our embassy in

Brazzaville across the river to get a phone line out. So we weren't calling home or doing business with the State Department by phone. We used a weekly O-I (official-informal) cable to take care of routine communications with the Zaire desk in the African Bureau. Now, of course, people rely on email or cell phones. We didn't have email, fax machines, or dependable phones. Everybody in the embassy had a Motorola radio, like a walkie-talkie, to keep in touch. The radio operator, a local employee at the embassy, was code named "Beehive."

Q: It was an emergency net.

DRESS: Yes, and we were supposed to use it only for emergencies. But because it was the only reliable communication option we had, people would call up "Beehive" and ask him to get the word out that the bridge game (for example) had been cancelled. Television wasn't available for at-home viewing; you had to go to the Kinshasa Hilton to watch CNN.

Q: Did you ever get to or have any connection with I would think South Africa would be financially a counterpart of where you wanted to find out what was happening at least within Africa.

DRESS: The only thing I ever knew about South Africa was that was where the commissary got its vegetables. Some Americans went to South Africa for rest and recreation, especially the consulate folks in Goma. During the two and a half years I was in Zaire, I went on home leave to the States once and to Paris twice on business to attend Paris Club debt rescheduling meetings on Zaire. Travel inside Zaire was difficult, as I've said. We tried to avoid using the national carrier Air Zaire, for safety as well as health reasons. There were awful jokes about Air Zaire, which ex pats (the expatriate community) described as a flying toilet. Pardon my language. But you couldn't always avoid it. I joined Michael and Joanne Cotter for a trip to eastern Zaire to see the mountain gorillas.

Q: I interviewed Mike.

DRESS: He was the head of the political section and she worked for the U.S. Information Service (USIS). We flew out to Goma to see the mountain gorillas, which was very exciting. That whole area is volcanic. The soil is black and basaltic; the hills conical in shape, steep and bright green. We had to trek up into the hills to get to the gorilla habitat and once there had to be careful not to agitate them. Coming back we didn't think we were going to make it because of the mob scene at the airport. Westerners stand in line and wait their turn; African's don't. While we were in the terminal waiting for the plane to taxi up to the gate, people started pressing against the doors. When the doors opened, there was a stampede to the plane and a free for all to board and grab a seat. There was no reserved seating and the flight was oversold. It was like a rugby scrimmage -- downright dangerous. I never wanted to have a similar experience.

Q: Well in 1988 was it about when you left?

DRESS: The assignment was for two years but since I had come in November I was off cycle. I looked at the bid list for winter of 1987 but there really wasn't anything available, so I extended for six months to get on summer cycle. Kinshasa was not a place you wanted to stay in any longer than necessary, but in this case I had no real choice.

Q: What did you want to do and what happened?

DRESS: I was not keen to stay in Africa but I had bid on Dakar and George Moose, who was getting ready to go out as ambassador, called me and said, "I really would like you to take the job as head of the econ section in Dakar." Looking at my various options I decided to go where I was clearly wanted. Dakar was a nice post but much smaller than Kinshasa, which I didn't realize at the time.

Q: Well it used to be the real center, this is where we sort of ran our African program up until the '60s when all these countries broke down, became independent. But you were there in Dakar from when to when?

DRESS: Three years from the summer of 1988 until the summer of 1991.

Q: What was your job?

DRESS: I headed the economic section, but it was a small office. In Zaire we had the econ counselor, the deputy (me), two junior FSOs, a contract commercial officer and several local employees. In Dakar there was just me, a junior FSO, a locally hired secretary (the spouse of an American embassy employee) and two FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) in the commercial office. As head of section, I needed to be concerned with both economic and personnel issues. The ambassador was George Moose; my first DCM was Jennifer Ward, and my second was Prudence Bushnell.

Q: I've interviewed Pru.

DRESS: She was a great person to work for; management was her forte. Excuse me while I return for a moment to Zaire. One of the things I forgot to mention was the horror of HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus infection/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), a deadly disease hitting the local population very hard. The acronym in French was SIDA.

Q: Which particularly in those days was absolutely deadly.

DRESS: Yes. It probably originated in that part of Africa as a result of human contact with infected primates. The CDC had a research...

Q: The CDC is the Center for...

DRESS: The Centers for Disease Control had a research center in Kinshasa. This was 1985-6 when we were just waking up to what a serious disease HIV/AIDS was. One of my next-door neighbors Dr. Francis "Skip" Jones was one of the CDC researchers. (I became good friends with him and his wife Brenda.) HIV/AIDS was causing problems in the local population. There were a lot of funerals, especially among the educated elites. The Zairois called it the "slim disease."

Although francophone like Zaire, Senegal was very different. It was predominantly Muslim, democratic and had a heavy French influence. The Senegalese were more physically attractive and stylish than the Zairois. The Senegalese were taller, handsomer with a wonderful sense of style. For formal wear the men wore long, magnificent robes called "grand boubou" and the women would tie up their hair in fancy scarves. Zaire was kind of a wild west, but Senegal, having been so closely associated with France for so long, was much quieter.

Q: Who was the president when you were there?

DRESS: Abdou Diouf and had been for a number of years.

Q: Was it a fairly stable sort of political situation?

DRESS: It strikes me as funny talking about it now, but at that time the only opposition figure was Abdoulaye Wade whom I thought of as an old man. But in 2000 he won the presidential election, which really surprised me because I didn't think he could have lasted that long. Senegal has enjoyed, compared to its neighbors, years of stability.

Q: What were American interests there from your perspective at the time?

DRESS: I don't think that they were particularly vital and the size of the post reflected that. We had commercial and political interests. The location of Dakar is strategic. Anybody going in and out of Africa ended up stopping in Dakar. It is the furthest point west on the continent.

Q: It was a very important point during World War II for ferrying planes going down to Brazil and then across to Dakar on their way to the desert war in North Africa or just on the way on to India.

DRESS: Pan Am (Pan American World Airlines) flew through Dakar on its way to and from New York, so we kept an eye on commercial aviation. Reynolds Aluminum had a bauxite mining operation in Senegal. By the way, bauxite is pretty unimpressive looking; it's just the black spots in sand. The mining operation was just sucking up huge gobs of sand, extracting bauxite and spitting the sand out. It was surface mining unlike the deep copper mines in Zaire.

Q: You were running across all the reporting. Did you feel you were in competition or could you cooperate with the French or were the French sort of...?

DRESS: For the French, Senegal was their backyard. Lannon Walker, the U.S. ambassador who preceded Ambassador Moose, spent two years trying to get the Senegalese to buy American wheat to make French bread. As far as the French were concerned you couldn't make good French bread with U.S. wheat because it was too soft. You had to use French wheat to make French bread. But through an amazing amount of effort he pried the market open a crack for some American wheat. At the time it seemed to be a big deal, although looking back now it seems small potatoes -- not that diplomatic work is all about negotiating nuclear disarmament treaties. Most of the time it really is about taking small, incremental steps to promote the national interest.

Q: Sometimes you set up these goals and say what the hell I'm going to get this done.

DRESS: Even in those days officers had work requirements. The Ambassador was able to check that off as an accomplishment. Subsequently, I got to listen to arguments from local flour millers and French people about how American wheat really wasn't suitable for making French bread. For all I know that may be true. I do know that the French bread in Dakar was excellent as was the French cuisine. Being on the ocean, fish dishes were outstanding.

Q: Was the Senegalese economy something that you could report on? Was it well documented?

DRESS: We got our good numbers from the World Bank and the IMF. When officials from those institutions came to town to monitor economic developments, they would stop by the embassy. The ambassador would brief them on the political situation and they would return the favor by sharing their latest take on the economy.

Q: How about George Moose as an ambassador? I ran across George when he was a vice council in Da Nang under Terry McNamara and I was consul general in Saigon.

DRESS: He was a good ambassador. He knew the country and the people; his French was good. I really didn't have much contact with him, however; I worked mostly with the DCMs.

Q: The DCM was who?

DRESS: I started my tour there under Jennifer Ward. Prudence Bushnell was DCM when I left post. Oddly enough both entered the Foreign Service like I did, through the mid-level entry program, and both had very successful careers.

Q: Dealing with officialdom was this a useful exercise or not? Did you get much from them?

DRESS: It's inevitable that one tends to compare posts. Even the Senegalese officials I dealt with were competent and well educated, unlike in Zaire where only a few officials

at the top were educated. In Zaire we used to complain because lower level officials weren't available or weren't competent or slept at their desks. But looking back, I think it was more likely that they weren't getting paid so had little incentive to show up for work or were ill with malaria.

Q: In the Belgian Congo maybe three people were high school graduates or something. I mean it varies but in Senegal they had deputies in the French national assembly.

DRESS: Yes, the human resource bases of Senegal and Zaire were very different.

Q: What was the role of the French embassy and all?

DRESS: With both a diplomatic and military presence, the French had the place pretty much locked up. We were just kind of an after thought and they ran rings around us.

Q: A chasse gardé or something like that?

DRESS: Yes, it was a private hunting preserve for the French. In Zaire relations in the broader diplomatic and expat (foreign) community were warmer and more cordial, if for no other reason than we were so isolated and there were so few social alternatives. But in Dakar the foreign community was much wider as were the opportunities for travel and tourism.

Q: How did you find social life there?

DRESS: As I was saying life in Dakar was less cohesive and more cosmopolitan than in Kinshasa, which meant that while there was more to do, you had to work at it harder. In those days there was no community liaison officer (CLO) whose job it was to support mission morale by organizing events.

Q: Were there things such as organized trips or clubs or anything like that?

DRESS: I recall three or four carloads of us driving up to St. Louis for a long weekend. Settled by the French, the city was the capital of French West Africa at one time. With its colonial buildings, St. Louis had a faded charm. Another organized trip I recall was to an island several hours south of Dakar where a French couple had a camp site; after arriving on a boat, we overnights, enjoyed dinner in the open sea air and visited some nearby villages the next day. Another outing closer to Dakar was when some of us from the embassy went to see traditional Senegalese wrestling (in French lutte traditionnelle). It was a great show. The wrestlers were big guys, covered with juju (magic) charms. To warm up for a match, they spent a lot of time posturing, chanting and boasting -- playing to the crowd and trying to intimidate their opponent. The build up was lengthy; the actual bout was a pretty quick take down.

Q: Was there any residue of the African-American movement in the United States? I think it was Stokely Carmichael who went to that area and I was wondering if there were any of those left?

DRESS: My colleagues in the consular section told me about helping the children of American Blacks who had been sent to Senegal to study with a marabout (Muslim religious leader). Occasionally problems would crop up when the kids got fed up and wanted to go home. They would run to the consular section and ask for help. It was also a place of pilgrimage for Black Americans because of the Il de Goree, the island of Goree, about a mile from the port of Dakar.

Q: Goree plays big in the slave trade annuals.

DRESS: Although few slaves actually passed through Goree (as compared to St. Louis or the Gambia), there was a house there (maison des esclaves - slave house) that had been turned into a museum. You could see where slaves were kept and the door leading out to the ocean where they were boarded onto ships. Goree was a lovely little island; many of the buildings dated from colonial times. They were painted lovely soft pinks and yellows and covered with purple and scarlet bougainvillea. It was a UNESCO world heritage site and a tourist attraction.

Q: Did you get any high level visits?

DRESS: I don't recall any high level visits to Zaire but in Dakar a CODEL (congressional delegation) came through, again only because it was a stopping point for those going in and out of Africa. Claude Pepper was the ranking member of the rather elderly delegation.

Q: Oh yes, Claude Pepper was from Florida who was in his 90s or that.

DRESS: This was my first experience with a VIP visit. Fortunately, the DCM was experienced and organized us for the care and feeding of the CODEL. That was the only high-level visit we had during the three years I was there -- another sign that Senegal was not a major interest for the State Department or even the African Bureau.

Q: How did you feel about your job? You were having a broader sweep in a smaller playpen.

DRESS: Coming out of Zaire, I thought I had mastered the set of skills I needed to handle a tour in Senegal with ease. If life were only that predictable. The substance was easy enough to learn, but I was faced with difficult management and personnel issues - things I did not have to deal with in Zaire. Shortly before I arrived in Dakar, the economic section moved from the AID building across town to the chancery. I arrived to find the office packed up in boxes and I was alone. There was no secretary and no junior FSO. I had to set everything up myself from the furniture to the files. The two FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) in the commercial office were busy unpacking from their move and anyway

they couldn't help me in the classified area of the chancery where the economic section was located. That's when I realized that management training only gets you just so far; it's experience that counts and I didn't have a lot in the management area.

Q: Yeah.

DRESS: It took months to get the section staffed and up and running. Before going out to post, the folks at State told me they wanted more substantive reporting and until the junior officer was on board, I was the only economic reporting officer at post. In a way, Dakar was a more difficult assignment than Kinshasa not because of substantive issues or living conditions but because of the management challenges -- and I didn't get any guidance from the front office. I don't recall if that's because I didn't think to ask for help or because the front office wasn't supportive.

Q: How did you feel about the Foreign Service when you were getting close to the end of your time in Dakar?

DRESS: After two assignments, both of which were great adventures, I had no second thoughts or reservations about my change of career. Even though I was scared when I went out to Kinshasa, after the initial cultural shock wore off, I never had any doubts that the Foreign Service was where I wanted to be.

Q: Things were changing and I see you had both Jennifer Ward and Pru Bushnell. Did you feel that this was a profession for a woman that you could move up ahead at this point or were you even thinking in those terms?

DRESS: I wasn't especially concerned about being female in the Foreign Service. As you pointed out, I worked with two senior women in Dakar. In June 1991, shortly before I left post, a woman ambassador arrived, Katherine Shirley. She was part of a tandem couple but her husband was assigned to another post.

Q: Her husband, Jock Shirley who had been for year's public affairs officer in Rome, was I think in Asia somewhere but I'm not sure.

DRESS: Anyway, I mention her because at that time we had a woman ambassador, a woman DCM and a woman economic counselor. I had the privilege of participating in her credentials presentation ceremony. Ambassador Shirley took the DCM, the political and economic counselors and the head of the Peace Corps to the presidential palace when she presented her credentials to the President Abdou Diouf. I even got to shake his hand. He was a very impressive figure, six and a half feet tall, slender, patrician looking, wearing a gorgeous boubou. That was a memorable experience.

Q: Well then you left Dakar when?

DRESS: Late in the summer of 1991.

Q: You were in a Muslim country did that play any part of our thinking or anything else? Or was it just part of the culture?

DRESS: Islam was so Africanized in Senegal that it was a kinder, gentler Islam. There wasn't a mosque on every corner and I don't remember hearing a call to prayer, but then I lived downtown on the Place de l'Independence. But Islam played an important role in Senegal and none were more important than the Mouride Brotherhood, founded in Touba by a Sufi mystic. The Muslim calendar is lunar and imams declared the start of high holy days like Eid al Fitr at the sighting of the new moon. But because of the rivalry between two of the most important religious leaders, we often ended up with double holidays because the imams couldn't agree on when the new moon was visible. Since the government also treated Christmas and Easter as holidays and Americans got July 4 and other U.S. holidays off, the embassy ended up with too many holidays. In order to work the required minimum number of hours per a year, the American staff had to come in to work without our local employees.

Q: Was there any concern with Libya messing around or not in Senegal?

DRESS: Not that I was aware. The only political unrest at the time was a break away movement in the Casamance, a region south of the Gambia. Senegal also had problems with its northern neighbor Mauritania while I was there. A lot of small shopkeepers in Dakar were Mauritanian and the Senegalese resented them for being sharp operators. There was a flare up and the Senegalese started burning Mauritanian shops. A lot of Mauritanians were left homeless, fled to the Mauritanian embassy for safety and then left the country.

Q: Okay, well then you left there...?

DRESS: I left Dakar summer of 1991, having been overseas five and a half years, and returned to Washington. I spent the next two years in the regional affairs office of the European Bureau (EUR/RPE) working on issues relating to the EU monetary union and the OECD. 1991 was the year the EU signed the Maastricht Treaty that set up the common currency. At the time, I pointed out to the EUR front office that by giving up the ability to devalue their currencies the EU member countries were tying their hands. It might have been good politics but it was bad economics.

Q: That was pretty big stuff wasn't it?

DRESS: Well it was fairly specialized. As I indicated before, I think the greatest culture shock was always going back to Washington. And learning the State Department bureaucracy, becoming a cog in an enormous machine, wasn't fun or easy.

Q: Absolutely.

DRESS: Treasury and the Federal Reserve had a strong interest in the OECD as it related to capital movements and balance of payments adjustments. They had the lead on the

substance but the instructions to the U.S. Mission to the OECD were issued by State and I coordinated those cables. Joyce Rabens was the director of the office. I don't know if you've come across Joyce. She was also part of a tandem couple. Her husband had a high level job in the bureau of administration. At the end of that two-year assignment, I was promoted to FS-1 and State offered me a year at the National War College (NWC) at Ft. McNair. I was torn because I had received an offer of a very good job as deputy director of the Office of Development Assistance in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. I talked to some colleagues whose advice I trusted. They said, "Look, go for the National War College assignment because it's something special. It may take you out of the career path for a little while but after all you just got a promotion so in the long run it'll be a good thing for you." I chose to go the War College and I am glad I did. It was a very interesting year.

Q: You were doing that from when to when?

DRESS: I was at the National War College for ten months from August 1994 to June 1994.

Q: How did you find it? This was a new world wasn't it for you? Or had you picked up a lot of the military lingo?

DRESS: It was a great experience. It got me out of the bureaucratic rat race and gave me time and opportunity to refresh my mind with new ideas and new experiences. It was going back to graduate school but as an adult with a lot of real world experience to draw on. I enjoyed the exposure to the military culture. A number of the Air Force officers were just back from the Gulf War and briefed us on the war planning, from grand strategy to logistics, that into the operations. It was a very good professional program and some of the Foreign Service people in my class went on to ambassadorships - John Jones, Doug Hartwick and Pat Butenis, for example.

Perhaps the best feature of the National War College was the FSOs had the opportunity to work with bright, talented military officers who in turn had the opportunity to interact with excellent FSO. That exposure went a long way to dispel stereotypes and preconceived notions on both sides.

Q: Did you have any particular trips that you recall?

DRESS: Everybody at the War College takes area studies to prepare for the group trips in the spring before graduation. The Soviet Union had collapsed in 1991 -- a momentous historical event for someone who grew up during the Cold War. I wanted to learn as much as I could about it and signed up for the trip to Russia. A group of us visited Almaty in Kazakhstan and Moscow and St. Petersburg in Russia. We met with local political and military officials in both countries, experienced surly service in Russian restaurants, saw the Russian circus, and admired the onion-domed churches in Red Square. When we were in Red Square, I vividly recall one of the Air Force officers, who flew a B-2 stealth bomber in the Persian Gulf War, saying, "I went out for a run this

morning and ran through here. You know I never thought I'd see Red Square from the ground. I always thought I'd see it from the air." In a professional capacity as it were.

Q: Well I think this is probably a good place to stop. What did you do after you left?

DRESS: I would like to take a minute here to say a few more words about the National War College. Every autumn, the whole school takes a day trip to Gettysburg to walk the battlefield. Following in the footsteps of Pickett's Charge was very emotional. The course I enjoyed the most was one on the Civil War, taught by an Army colonel. We visited different local battlefields on the weekends -- Wilderness, Fredericksburg, Antietam.

Q: My grandfather was wounded in Gettysburg.

DRESS: Your grandfather!

Q: Yep, he was a late child of a late child.

DRESS: That is amazing. I have an uncle many times removed who served at Gettysburg and died from his wounds in the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864.

Q: My grandfather actually was with a German-American regiment and was in Chancellorsville and got the hell beaten out of him. Actually he was wounded and captured at Gettysburg but when Lee retreated he didn't take the prisoners who were wounded.

DRESS: Our ancestors were fighting on different sides. Yours were Union but mine were Confederate.

Q: Yours were in the War of Southern Independence as opposed to the War of ...

DRESS: War of Northern Aggression?

Q: War of Rebellion.

DRESS: Or as some Southern ladies used to call it "the recent unpleasantness."

Q: Yes, yes, I lived in Annapolis and I remember, this was in the '40s, when they talked about the war it wasn't World War II which was raging it was The WAH. Okay, we will pick this up next time when you left the War College and where did you go?

DRESS: In the summer of 1994, I returned to EUR.

Q: Okay, today is the 23rd of September 2009 with Alice Dress and we are in the summer of 1994.

DRESS: Yes, that is when I started my assignment as deputy director in the Office of Western European Affairs in the European Bureau.

Q: How long did you do that?

DRESS: That was a two-year assignment.

Q: What was our impression of the European bureau?

DRESS: Holbrooke was assistant secretary...

Q: This is Dick Holbrook.

DRESS: Yes, Dick Holbrooke, and he was busy negotiating the Dayton Accords. Yugoslavia had fallen apart and officers in EUR were resigning because the Administration hesitated to designate the massacre of Muslims by Christians as genocide.

Q: It was genocide.

DRESS: Muslims in the Bosnian war certainly thought it was genocide. Holbrooke was negotiating the Dayton Accords and he was meeting with Milosevic, the president of Serbia. In fact, his deputy assistant secretary Robert Frasure and two other men traveling with Holbrook were killed in a vehicle accident in 1995.

Q: Yes, it rolled off a cliff outside of Sarajevo.

DRESS: The Office of Western European Affairs (EUR/WE) covered relations with France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Malta, Andorra and Monaco -- a fun group of countries. It was a good opportunity for me to learn about the operations of a country desk, which is a meat and potatoes part of what State Department does and to get some more management experience. During my two years in EUR/WE we supported two head-of-state visits to the Clinton White House.

Q: Which ones were these?

DRESS: Oscar Scalfaro, the president of Italy and Jacques Chirac, the president of France.

Q: It is ceremonial.

DRESS: Yes, head-of-state visits are largely ceremonial but were fun to organize, especially the Italian one. When we put together suggestion for the White House state dinner we included all the famous and glamorous Italian Americans we could think of. The other State visit was Chirac. We little worker bees got invited to the White House after the state dinners, so we were able to hover on the edges, listen to the entertainment (Roberta Peters singing) and see the famous people (actors Mike Douglas and Nicholas

Cage). I recall going through the receiving line and shaking hands with President Clinton and President Chirac. It was fun.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of courted because deputy director of an office usually controls assignments? This is considered plumb. So you are sitting on the crown jewels in a way.

DRESS: Well, I got some phone calls from people interested in European assignments overseas, but it was the embassies that had the final say on who was going to work there not EUR/WE. We had some personnel problems of our own in the office. The new French desk officer only stayed a month before deciding to take a job in the Russian office. I thought it odd that people would get what to many was a plum an assignment in EUR/WE and then bail out for something "better." But maybe Western Europe was too tame. Fortunately, the office director John Lewis was an experienced manager and quickly moved personnel already in the office to fill vacancies rather than recruiting from outside.

Q: Well you did this for two years. Did you want to get yourself inserted into European affairs or did you want to get out and try a different world?

DRESS: I had hoped to go overseas again in 1996, but none of my bids worked out. Fortunately, I was able to negotiate a one-year assignment as the deputy director in the regional affairs office in the African Bureau that allowed me to keep looking for an overseas post.

Q: How did you find it, was it a different world?

DRESS: No, AF was just another bureau with a different clientele, lots of little countries, some of which were important and some of which weren't, and different issues. One of the main issues I dealt with, that was new to me, was female circumcision. That is what the Africans preferred to call it and what we called it when we were being politically correct. But it was really female genital mutilation.

Q: On that subject what were we doing about it?

DRESS: We were trying to support indigenous organizations in Africa educating women and girls about how unhealthy the practice was. In State the undersecretary for global affairs had the lead on the issue and staff who worked exclusively on women's issues and health issues. AF had a strong interest because of the prevalence of the practice in sub-Saharan countries.

Q: So we are moving up to what, 1997?

DRESS: Yes. I was bidding on overseas assignments and the Bureau of South Asian Affairs got in touch to ask me to me bid on the economic counselor position in New Delhi. I hadn't even thought about because it was a Senior Foreign Service position, one

grade higher than my current grade. The Bureau said I would be their candidate, so I went ahead and bid on it, but as you know for a stretch assignment you have to be willing to wait until the bitter end. Instead of getting your assignment in December you have to hang on until March or April, which is nerve wracking as you watch all your options disappearing. But I stuck it out; I got the assignment and went out to New Delhi in the summer of 1997. Under a Department directive to reduce staff, the departing ambassador Frank Wisner had eliminated the science adviser position and combined the science office with the economic section. So in addition to the very large, important economic portfolio I was also responsible for the science portfolio, an area where I had no background. Washington consultations on the issues weren't sufficient preparation, either.

Q: How was the state of relations between the United States and India at the time?

DRESS: Under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and during the Cold War, bilateral relations with India were very bad, very strained. Prime Minister Gandhi was also a leading force in the non-aligned movement and India opposed us in the UN system. The Indians were much closer to the Soviets than to the United States. The Indian economy was an autarky and stagnated under Gandhi socialism and from being deliberately cut off from relations with the global economy. In 1991 then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh pushed through financial liberalization measures. So by the time I got there the economy had started to open. It was a very long, fitful process of opening up to foreign investment, reducing restrictions on imports and privatizing vast unproductive government-owned enterprises. U.S. policy aimed at encouraging the liberalization and the privatization and making sure that American business had access to the Indian market.

Q: India had such a huge civil service of people who basically, my impression is they sat at a desk with a mound of papers in front of them and did very little except not approve...

DRESS: Not approve things. In the embassy, we all had horror stories about how difficult it was to deal with the Indian babu or bureaucrat. It was difficult to get in to see government officials and painfully difficult to get them to do anything helpful. I was always awestruck when I walked into an official's office and saw the enormous piles of files on every surface.

Q: They were literally 18 inches high.

DRESS: When you raised an issue with an Indian official, he invariably wanted to "consult the file." That was always said in a portentous manner. A minion would bring in an enormous file, visual proof that the bureaucracy moved glacially, that issues were not resolved but just accreted paper. It wasn't just mythology about how the babus ran the country, it was the truth.

My three years in New Delhi were very active, very challenging. Dick Celeste, a Clinton political appointee, was the ambassador. When he was governor of Illinois, he visited India a number of times on trade missions, so he knew people and had a strong interest in the country. He was very energetic and a surprisingly good manager. I've been lucky that

the political ambassadors I have worked for, apart from Governor Volpe in Rome, have all been competent, knowledgeable and energetic.

Ambassador Celeste believed in teamwork and team building. One of the first things he did when he arrived at post was to assemble the country team at his residence to draft a mission statement. (The country team by the way is composed of heads of sections and agencies who regularly attend the ambassador's staff meetings.) Until he introduced the concept to us, I didn't even know what a mission statement was. He had it printed up and laminated and we carried it around in our wallets. I bet if I looked carefully enough at home now I would find a copy. He also took the country team out of town for mission performance planning exercises each year. As a team, we would define what U.S. interests were in India and how we planned to achieve them during the coming year.

He made a campaign-like promise that he would visit every state in India during his ambassadorship. Once a politician, always a politician, I suppose. He fulfilled that pledge even though the Indian government restricted travel to some of the states in the northeast because of the separatist terrorist activity. I was fortunate enough to accompany him on his visit to Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland in the northeast. That is a region distinct from the rest of India, ethnically, religiously and linguistically. They are closer in all respects to South East Asia than to South Asia and the predominant religion is Christian. It was in Nagaland the British stopped the Japanese advance into India in 1944. Another distinction for Nagaland was its Presbyterian terrorist groups.

Ambassador Celeste was especially interested in improving bilateral scientific cooperation with India. I negotiated, under his direction, a cooperative agreement with the Indians to set up a bilateral science council to promote cooperation, an agreement Secretary of State Madeleine Albright signed during President Clinton's visit in 2000.

Q: On the scientific side one is always impressed you go to any of our schools or universities that particularly deal in scientific things and the Indian names are always at the top of the list. Obviously they're a people who really have a propensity towards science but was this being translated in India at the time?

DRESS: The government had an active space program, the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). I visited the ISRO headquarters in Bangalore and saw some of the communications satellites they were working on. Bangalore was also the center of the information technology boom created by Indian IT entrepreneurs. Indian companies did a lot of back office business for American companies -- processing insurance claims and manning call centers. India has excellent technical schools and turns out a lot of engineers and computer specialists, all of whom speak English. That makes India an attractive place for U.S. firms to invest and do business.

Q: Had the Indians worked out their problems with the bureaucracy and attitude in dealing with this?

DRESS: No. Actually, the private sector was growing in spite of the dead hand of bureaucracy, which is a legacy of the British Raj and dates back to colonial times.

Q: Of course too in a country the size of India and all the bureaucracy represents a tremendous number of jobs and the more you dig in and make it...

DRESS: In spite of the 1991 reforms, the government continued to be a drag on the economy. For example, the quotas or preferences extended to the disadvantaged groups - the scheduled tribes and scheduled classes -- for government jobs and university admission have a perverse brain-drain effect. A lot of middle class kids can't get into Indian universities so they study overseas and stay overseas to work.

Q: Sort of looking down the pike did you see India as becoming a major scientific and production power?

DRESS: In 1997 it was clear that India was an emerging technological powerhouse, which was why Ambassador Celeste was so keen to get that cooperative science agreement in place. There was no looking into the future about that; the future had arrived.

Q: What about the agreement what did this mean? What were we after then?

DRESS: It was a bilateral framework agreement to facilitate scientific exchange and cooperation and studies.

Returning to the Indian economy, one of the major problems on the macroeconomic front was that India was liberalizing too slowly. The annual rate of population increase outpaced the annual increase in GDP and there was no improvement in per capita income. India had a large and growing middle class that made it a very attractive market for U.S. business but India also had 300 million desperately poor people. Economists calculated that GDP growth needed to exceed 6% per year for people's daily lives to improve and for more of the poor to climb into the middle class. Another important economic factor was the monsoon rains. A good monsoon meant good economic growth. It wasn't until almost ten years after I left that India was able to achieve a growth rate in excess of population growth. For the last couple years they've gotten up to nine percent, which is impressive, given that there are still significant barriers to trade and investment. Unfortunately, now the monsoon rains are less favorable and reforms are stalled. Thirty years ago the world feared that India couldn't feed itself. With the 1960s green revolution and years of good monsoon rains famine is not a concern.

Q: Were you as economic counselor sort of monitoring what was going on in China and comparing and contrasting China with India because they seem to be the two stars?

DRESS: The Indians were preoccupied with China from a security standpoint, having engaged in armed skirmishes with the Chinese over the years. From an economic standpoint they felt that they were always unfairly compared to the China. Potential

American investors would say to them, “Well the Chinese are doing this and that and the Chinese economy is growing at a fantastic rate. Here you are a democracy and it’s much harder to do business in India and you are growing much more slowly.” The Indians were aware that they were competing with China. This was underscored when the Indian population hit the one billion mark, catching up with China.

The biggest political event during my three years in India was their nuclear test in 1998.

Q: Were we prepared for this?

DRESS: As far as I know, we were caught by surprise. After the test, the Indians told us that they had given us a head up and pointed to language in a speech by the prime minister. But frankly, only with hindsight could we have interpreted the remarks as advance notice that they planned to test a nuclear device.

Q: How did you find did the various major political parties, there is the Congress Party and then there is the...

DRESS: When I arrived in India, the BJP, a Hindu nationalist party, was in power. It was a BJP-led government that conducted the 1998 nuclear test.

Q: Did you find that the BJP and the Congress Party were both as interested in particularly economic relations with the United States or was the BJP, for example, more nationalistic?

DRESS: The BJP was definitely more nationalistic and many of the BJP ministers that we called on were polite but distant. Just a minor example of the BJP's anti-Western, anti-American attitude -- one of the BJP ministers refused to allow Coca Cola to be served in his ministry. But then again the Congress Party under Indira Gandhi hadn't been all that friendly to the United States either so I'm not sure there was that much to choose from between the two parties in that regard.

Embassy New Delhi was huge with many USG agencies represented, even the Library of Congress. The defense attaché did not have an easy job because the Indians were reluctant to engage in military-to-military relations. We didn't have an APO (military post office) because the Indian government wouldn't allow it and we had to rely on the much slower diplomatic pouch for our mail. The Indian government also required their officials to report contacts with American official. We were still viewed with distrust, an attitude carried over from the Cold War days.

Q: I would think that dealing with the Indians and the little I've had to do with it, not much, but I would think to do this on a daily basis would be just plain exhausting or was it so challenging that it was fun?

DRESS: The work was challenging, but I enjoyed it. Living in India was a colorful adventure, but sometimes overwhelming. The sheer press of humanity was wearing. New

Delhi wasn't as densely populated as Mumbai (Bombay) or Kolkata (Calcutta) but it was still wall-to-wall people.

Q: Did you find yourself in a role of American businesses who were established having their phone centers and all that coming to you continually trying to work out tangles and problems or not?

DRESS: Most of the big U.S. companies operating in India were sophisticated enough and well connected enough that they didn't need our help, but they would stop in and chat with the ambassador or DCM to get their take on the political situation. India had an energy shortage; it lacked sufficient power production capacity. In 1993 Enron, the Houston-based energy company, signed a multimillion-dollar contract to build a power plant in the state of Maharashtra. At that time, Enron was very big, very powerful and - -

Q: Cutting edge.

DRESS: Yes, cutting edge. They may have been the "smartest guys in the room," but they ran into trouble with their Dabhol power project in India. The local power board decided the power the plant produced cost too much. In 1996 a newly elected Indian government decided the whole project was too expensive and stopped payments to Enron. High-level Enron officials visited India frequently trying to get their money; they came to the embassy to ask for the ambassador's help with the central government.

Q: One is dealing with these really big economic developments in India but did you find yourself every once in a while being able to go out into the countryside and get a real dose of reality of...

DRESS: Well, there was an awful lot of "reality," of the real India to be seen in New Delhi every day. The drive to and from work was always colorful thanks to smoke-spewing three wheelers, beggars on every corner, cows in the median strips, and the occasional horse from a wedding procession or elephant walking down the street. And a trip to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not without its excitement because of the monkeys that invaded the offices and hallways. Of course given the size of India and its regional differences, it was necessary to travel outside of the capital. I visited the U.S. consulates in Mumbai, Calcutta (renamed Kolkata) and Chennai. I also took business trips to Bangalore in Karnataka, Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh and Jaipur in Rajasthan. As a tourist my first trip was to Agra in Uttar Pradesh to see the Taj Mahal. That was an eye opener. The poverty and squalor of Agra contrasted with the serene beauty of Mumtaz Mahal's marble tomb. With other members of the embassy community, I visited the Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan to see tigers. The Indian conservationists were pessimistic about the survival of the Indian tiger due to poaching and human encroachment on tiger habitat. Tigers are incredibly beautiful and majestic. Their loss would be tragic. I had the great pleasure of touring the state of Gujarat around Ahmedabad and the Gulf of Kutch to view Indian textile handicrafts -- batiks, wood block prints, silk saris, and embroidery-embellished hand-loomed cottons. All beautiful, artistic work. Oh and let's not forget the Pushkar camel fair in Rajasthan.

In contrast to the African posts I served at, India was very important to U.S. interests. The size of the embassy and the number of high-level visits we hosted were proof of that. Just to name a few VIP visitors during the 1997-2000 whose visits the economic section helped support - Department of Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, Congressman Dick Gephardt and delegation, Senator John Kerry, Enron VP Rebecca Mark, GE CEO Jack Welch, and Citibank President Sandy Weill.

I was fortunate to work with wonderful folks in the combined economic and science operation - Necia Quast, Mary Townsend, Brian Aggeler, Aruna Amirthanayagam, Tanya Bodde and Marti Doggett.

In March 2000, President Clinton came for a state visit. As anyone who has worked on a presidential visit knows it was a huge production. All of the personnel at embassy and three consulates were involved in the visit.

Q: How did it go?

DRESS: It went well. There were the usual stresses and strains and toes stepped on, embassy people being driven insane by the presidential support staff. The President had a good visit and all the events went off as planned, so it was successful.

Q: When you left there how did you feel about India?

DRESS: After living and working there for three years, I came to appreciate how talented and hard working the Indian people are and what an incredible variety of cultures, religions and art India has. And the shopping was outstanding.

Q: Well then where did you go? You left there when?

DRESS: I left New Delhi in the summer of 2000 for Saudi Arabia. You know the advice that you get from day one when you join the Foreign Service -- don't bid on a job unless you are willing to take it?

Q: This is sort of the bazaar of the souk mentality in the bidding; you've got to know what you are doing.

DRESS: You've got to know what you are doing because you can really mess up. Anyway, having been warned about this for years, I must have either blanked or something because I put economic counselor Riyadh on my bid list along with the DCM positions I really wanted. The Riyadh job was a Senior FS position. And guess what? I was the only bidder on Riyadh.

Q: Why?

DRESS: Why was I the only bidder? Because Riyadh was an extreme hardship post and although the job was a Senior FS position, the economic section was actually fairly small. But I couldn't get out of it; they wouldn't let me go. In fact, Nancy Johnson, the deputy director in Office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs in NEA informed me, with a hint of apology in her voice, "You bid on it. It's yours."

Q: I would think from an economic point of view this would be, using a Foreign Service term, a real challenge but also a high profile challenge.

DRESS: I really enjoy economic work and all of my overseas posts have been interesting. I especially liked working in an embassy because it's a small operation with less bureaucracy compared to the Treasury or State Departments here in Washington. But I must say that my years in Saudi Arabia were the hardest of my career. The working conditions were tough. After dealing with the Indian bureaucracy you would have thought that the Saudis couldn't have been that much more difficult but they were. The U.S.-Saudi relationship is longstanding and reasonably close. But the Bedouin culture is closed and secretive; strangers are kept outside the tent and only a few people at the top can make decisions. So talking to anybody below the King and his royal brothers doesn't really get you anywhere. There was also an access problem. It was difficult to get in to see people and once you did it was very hard to find anyone who would do anything but refer the issue up the line to someone at the top who could make a decision. So it took forever to move an issue forward. When people asked if it was hard working in Saudi Arabia because I was a woman, I always said, "No, my male colleagues had the same difficulties." Professionally being a woman was not a handicap for me.

Q: Well as an American you are an honorary man. I mean this had been pretty much the standard. Most places time has passed and there are other fish to fry.

DRESS: Yes. As far as professional contacts were concerned, most of the Saudi men who were my age or a little older and in positions of power were U.S. educated. A whole slew of Saudis went to the States in the 1960s, learned English, got PhDs, came back and moved into positions of power. That shared experience, that common ground gave my embassy colleagues and me an advantage. But otherwise, being a woman in Saudi Arabia was difficult and unpleasant.

Q: You couldn't drive could you or could you?

DRESS: No, I couldn't drive. And frankly, I didn't want to given how fast and how badly the Saudis drove. The roads were really dangerous. But the real problem was that a woman couldn't go out and do anything without the risk of being harassed. Saudi women are not supposed to leave home, go anywhere or do anything unless they have a male relative (a "mahram" in Arabic) with them. Men and women who are not related by blood are strictly segregated in public. Restaurants, even fast food restaurants, had different sections for men on one side and for men and their families on the other. Saudi Arabia has this wonderful institution called the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice or the religious police ("mutaween" in Arabic). The mutaween made

sure that all businesses closed for prayer, that men went to the mosque and that women were modestly dressed. Since prayers were called five times a day you had to plan your life around them, which wasn't easy because the time for prayers varied slightly every day. On weekends, which were Thursday and Friday, you had to time your shopping and your errands around prayer times to avoid getting locked in or locked out of stores. During the workweek you had to plan your appointments so they wouldn't conflict with prayer call. Sometimes during a long meeting that ran into prayer time, Saudis would excuse themselves, go off to pray and return to continue the meeting. I carried a prayer schedule in my wallet all the time, as did other members of the embassy community. I also carried a card that said, in Arabic, something along the lines of: "I am a diplomat. I do not have to wear an abaya or attend prayer and you can't arrest me."

Q: What were you doing? Did you have a petroleum attaché?

DRESS: The economic section in Riyadh was much smaller than the combined economic-science office in New Delhi. Fortunately, my job performance in New Delhi got me my promotion to Senior Foreign Service. In addition to the head of section, we had an officer who followed the all-important petroleum sector and two first-tour junior officers, one of who rotated after one year to the consular section. I spent a lot of time nurturing and training the junior officers. Fortunately, I had the experience and the time to do it, but I'm surprised when I think that I had never supervised junior officers before. You would have thought a large section like New Delhi would have first-tour junior officers but it didn't. Maybe that was just the way Riyadh was staffed; first-tour officers couldn't say no when they were assigned there.

The folks in Riyadh were great to work with -- Greg Winstead, Nick Hilgert, Dick Murphy and the FSN Dalia Elsoudani in the economic section, Matt Tueller the political counselor and David Rundell in the commercial section -- to name a few.

Q: As economic officer did you find...to me it seems to be the problem of practically every oil producing country is it became such a curse. Actually it doesn't require many people to work, which are usually foreign workers who suck the oil out wherever it is whether it is in Venezuela, Nigeria, Indonesia or Saudi Arabia.

DRESS: I don't think Saudi Arabia suffered as much from the so-called oil curse that ruined countries like Nigeria. Yes, there is corruption in Saudi Arabia and the royal family feels entitled to a large chunk of the nation's oil wealth. Nonetheless, the al Sauds (the Saudi Royal family descended from King Abdulaziz bin Saud) have been reasonably good managers; at least they haven't bankrupted the country. Over the years the government has invested in infrastructure -- schools, hospitals, roads.

When I briefed visitors to the Embassy on the Saudi economy one of the challenges I stressed was the "youth bulge." Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries have very young, very rapidly growing populations. The Saudi economy has a very narrow resource base; they produce oil and grow dates. The economy even when it grows rapidly as a result of high oil prices does not generate enough jobs. Young people leave school and

can't find work. They don't have the skills that the private sector wants. Also, in 2000 there weren't a whole lot of opportunities for domestic investment so people with money have no place to put it. So most of the oil wealth was invested overseas. This changed gradually as the Saudi stock market developed. We were always concerned that the lack of opportunity for Saudi youth would generate social and political unrest. Now King Abdullah is undertaking modest reforms to try to head off unrest and respond to demands for reform.

A few months after I arrived in Riyadh, the bombing of the USS Cole happened in Yemen.

Q: This is the destroyer.

DRESS: Yes. The USS Cole, an American destroyer, was hulled in the port of Aden in October of 2000. State ordered the embassy to go to zero burn, which means we had to shred all our classified files. I practically cried. I had only been at post a couple of months and was still reading in. Shredding all of that institutional knowledge was a very painful experience and something I regretted the whole time I was at post. I asked the desk at State to check their files and they were able to replace a few but not all of the documents.

Q: Oh God.

DRESS: Back then we didn't have an electronic filing system that could act as back up. If that happened today, I could go retrieve cables electronically from the Central Foreign Policy Records. Anyway the next big event was the September 11 attack in 2001.

Q: How did that hit you all there? Sort of take me through the day and all.

DRESS: We felt shock and horror. The news came toward the end of our workday. We went into emergency mode at the embassy. We were concerned about everybody's security. The first priority was to make sure all personnel were safe and to determine where everybody was. In the short-term aftermath, we hunkered down in case there were follow on attacks.

Q: How soon and how did you hear that the significant Saudi citizen participation in this attack?

DRESS: As reports of who the hijackers were came out, it became clear that many were Saudis and that their visas for the most part had been issued in the Kingdom. That was a shock to those of us who weren't aware of Al Qaeda or Islamic terrorism. In fact, prior to September 11, most of us who didn't work in intelligence weren't aware of the threat Osama bin Laden and his friends posed. To illustrate the lack of information sharing between intelligence and law enforcement agencies and the rest of the USG, I should point out that in 2000 the Embassy had revamped and streamlined the visa application process in Saudi Arabia. When Saudis went to the United States, they came home when

they were supposed to. They were not visa "overstayers." So we made it easier and more convenient for them to apply for and receive visas. After September 11, that all changed of course. The September 11 Commission people visited Saudi Arabia to interview embassy personnel in Riyadh and Jeddah to determine how the hijackers had gotten visas. The Saudi reaction to September 11 was interesting. Many flat out refused to believe Saudis were involved or believed that Israel was behind the whole thing.

Immediately after September 11, 2001 I got heavily involved in supporting U.S. efforts to combat terrorist financing. Treasury developed lists of names of suspected terrorists and terrorist organizations and State sent them out with instructions to embassies worldwide to ask host governments to block their bank accounts. There were some initial difficulties in developing channels of communication with the Saudi authorities. The first time I took a list of names to the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA), the central bank, they told me to communicate through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs via diplomatic note. The Saudi financial authorities were used to dealing with their counterparts at the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank and the U.S. Treasury in restricted, confidential channels. They did not trust diplomats from the embassy to deal with sensitive banking issues. Overall, the Saudis were sympathetic and willing to be helpful but as far as they were concerned it was our problem. They insisted that they knew where all of their dangerous people were, so our lists of names were not of much interest to them. They assured us that they didn't need the information because they were on top of their domestic security situation. In all fairness, the early lists were not very useful; they listed generic Arabic names without a date of birth, driver's license number or other identifying information, which made it impossible to pin point the real culprit. And secondly, most terrorists weren't using the formal banking system anyway.

In May 2003, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula bombed a housing compound in Riyadh killing Muslims, including some Saudis. That is when the Saudi government woke up and realized that they had a domestic terrorism problem after all. Finally they had to admit to themselves and to us that they didn't know who all the bad guys were and where they were. So when I went returned to Riyadh in August 2003, dealing with the government on terrorist financing issues was totally different. The Saudis were cooperating with our law enforcement and intelligence agencies on counter terrorism cooperation and the embassy was playing a key role.

One of my major responsibilities was supporting visits by high-level U.S. officials who visited Saudi Arabia to confer with the Saudis on combating terrorist financing. A good deal of effort went into trying to keep the charitable contributions made by religious Saudis from being misused to support terrorist activities. During my three years in Saudi Arabia, I was the control officer for Richard Newcomb, the head of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), Treasury Secretary Snow and Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neil. I also supported several visits to Riyadh and Jeddah of Frances Townsend, who served as President Bush's Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism. Cofer Black, State Department's Special Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT), usually accompanied her. I went with them to their meetings with Saudi officials, including then Crown Prince Abdullah.

Q: When you started off on this thing did you get involved with honey?

DRESS: I seem to recall that the early lists Treasury sent us of specially designated entities contained dozens of Somali honey stores. At the time I was totally baffled and only later learned that the honey stores transferred money outside the formal banking sector for clients. I don't know what story you heard about it.

Q: There were articles about al Qaeda being very much into the honey trade, sort a network of informal lending of money to people who were close relatives or something like that; they don't go through regular banks.

DRESS: In the Gulf, that informal system of money transfer is called "hawala." Most of the labor force in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states was from Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. They all sent money home and most of them used informal channels rather than the commercial banking system. The hawala system was something Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control was always concerned and investigated on trips to the Gulf.

If I could just put in a word here to note that the economic section in Embassy Riyadh was interested in a number of other issues in addition to oil and terrorist financing. For example, we spent a fair amount of time trying to get the Saudis to remove trade barriers, specifically their ban on genetically modified organisms (GMO), which blocked imports of U.S. agricultural products. Certainly the most important economic issue was encouraging Saudi reforms that would permit their entry into the World Trade Organization. We argued that the reforms that would qualify Saudi Arabia for WTO membership would also benefit the Saudis by helping to diversify the economy away from oil and stimulating economic growth. And, it goes without saying, that opening the Saudi economy to trade and investment would benefit the United States. A stronger, more prosperous Saudi Arabia was in our interests, given the key role Saudi Arabia played as a stabilizing force in world petroleum markets.

Q: After 9/11 those of us here in Washington, particularly by profession I was a consular officer, we felt that the head of consular affairs, Mary Ryan, was unjustly singled out. She was the only one who lost her job because of 9/11 and she was just following basically the dictates of the Department. Was there a lot of pressure on the embassy and particularly on the consular section because they had issued the visas?

DRESS: Yes, there was a lot of unhappiness on the part of a lot of people in Washington, because 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudis and the consular sections in Riyadh or Jeddah had issued most of their U.S. visas.

Q: Perfectly legitimate visas.

DRESS: Yes, the consular officers who issued the visas followed procedures, procedures that were overhauled after September 11. Several of the consular officers involved were

summoned back to Washington and ended up going up on the Hill to answer questions about the consular operation. It was very stressful for all concerned. Among the changes put in place was the integration of Homeland Security officers into the consular operation at the embassy. Another change was to require fingerprinting of all visa applicants.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there or ambassadors?

DRESS: There was no ambassador at post when I arrived in August 2000. Senior FSO Chuck Brayshaw served as Charge' d'Affaires (CDA) for a year. After he left, DCM Margaret Scobey was CDA until Ambassador Robert Jordan arrived in October 2001. Jordan was a lawyer with Bake Botts, the Dallas, Texas law firm of James Baker. James Oberwetter, Senior VP for Public Affairs for Hunt Oil and Gas of Dallas succeeded Jordan in October 2004. Both men were very competent and good to work with. Ambassador Oberwetter's first Fourth of July reception had a Texas theme -- country music, bales of hay, dancing on the tennis courts, BBQ, and those that had them wore blue jeans, cowboy boots, and cowboy hats. It was a refreshing change from the usual national day reception.

Speaking of "theme" parties -- DCM Margaret Scobey hosted several women-only events, which was an excellent way to make contact with Saudi women. The most memorable, at least for me, was the one featuring a Patsy Cline imitator. Saudi women arrived covered head to toe in abayas and when they verified there were no men on the premises, they disrobed revealing their dressy evening attire. We sat around the DCM's pool socializing and listening the Patsy Cline look-alike sing about sweet dreams and heartaches. She was actually very good.

Q: Was it difficult being a single woman in Saudi Arabia at the embassy and all? Because sometimes this kind of place is family oriented because there isn't a whole lot else to do.

DRESS: Yes, you are right. In New Delhi the embassy community was more social, people did things together and there were more people to select from in terms of making friends. Saudi Arabia was more difficult because the embassy community was much smaller and very family-oriented. So really my life in Riyadh revolved around my job.

Q: Well you left there when?

DRESS: I left Riyadh in August 2002 and joined the Board of Examiners in Washington for a year testing candidates for admission to the Foreign Service. When I was job-hunting the following spring I told DCM Margaret Scobey that I wasn't having much luck finding a job I wanted. So she said, "Why don't you come back? I've just lost my economic counselor." John Ford, who was working in Manama, Bahrain was supposed transfer to Riyadh but volunteered for Iraq. I decided to return to Riyadh for a just 12 months. So, I just packed up the cats, turned off the phone, locked the door of my condo and headed to the airport.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the Board of Examiners. How did you find it?

DRESS: I enjoyed it because I met a lot of different kinds of people, not only young people right out of school but people in other jobs who wanted to change career paths. It was also fun because some of us revised portions of the exam material, doing our best to create real situations candidates would encounter in the Foreign Service. We used to say to one another was that we were just as glad that we didn't have to take the exam now because we weren't sure we could pass it. It was a tough exam but effective and fair. The group exercise was very revealing in showing how effectively people worked together (or didn't). I initially I thought the tests might allow for too much subjectivity on the part of the examiners but as I learned the process I was impressed by how objective and uniform the results were. The exam parameters were measurable and observable. And overall, I think the process ended up selecting good people for the Foreign Service.

Q: Well then after Saudi Arabia what?

DRESS: My third year in Saudi Arabia was really tough. Following the May 2003 bombing in Riyadh by Al Qaeda, spouses and children were sent home and staff was reduced. We were on lock down for months at a time, restricted to the diplomatic quarter except for business. I was acting DCM in July and August of 2004 when Al Qaeda kidnapped three Americans and beheaded one of them. The FBI sent out an investigation team. We were dealing with the Saudi security services, we were dealing with distraught family members back in Washington, and we had to lock down the embassy and tell people they couldn't go off the diplomatic compound so it was extremely stressful and difficult. When I left post, I was very tired and very stressed. And that's how I started my final FS assignment, which was in the Office of the Special Advisor for Counter Terrorism (S/CT). I worked there for a year, which was punctuated by some stress-related health problems. In September 2005, I retired as planned.

Q: Can you talk about your job in S/CT? What were you doing?

DRESS: My work in S/CT wasn't very exciting. I spent most of my time that year editing the annual country report on terrorism, which was a major project for the office.

Q: Well you hear things about people being stressed and you were locked down. You know this happens. You feel these things aren't jokes.

DRESS: My last year in Riyadh was my first experience at an "unaccompanied" post. Things were difficult enough before the drawdown, what with the isolation and security threats. Boy, there is nothing sadder than an unaccompanied post in a country where there is no place to go and nothing to do but work 24 hours seven days a week. Officers were without their spouses and children. We provided what moral support to one another we could, but it was a very difficult year. Today there are support groups for separated family members in the States and there is counseling for officers coming out of high-stress posts because of the toll Iraq and Afghanistan is taking on the Foreign Service. But

when I came out of Saudi Arabia in the summer of 2004 those services weren't in place and frankly my colleagues and I could have used them.

Q: One wonders I wasn't overly affected but I spent eighteen months unaccompanied in Saigon and you feel this.

DRESS: One definitely feels the stress and isolation. When you are overseas the job is 24-7. But the presence of children and spouses at post and the fact that your married colleagues have that comfort keeps everyone's morale up. When you are living in an artificial, restricted environment where security concerns are paramount, it's difficult to stay balanced.

Q: Okay, well before we leave off I would like to ask looking back on your career what did you like what didn't you like? Treasury as well as State.

DRESS: The Foreign Service had a lot of upsides -- overall the experience was great. The work was always interesting. The people I worked with were great. I loved traveling and meeting people from other cultures, seeing how they live, experiencing their art. That was all terrific. There were two downsides, however, bidding and moving. Bidding was awful. Everyone hates it. As you mentioned there's the formal process and then there's the informal process. So every few years when you change jobs, you have to update your resume, send it to prospective bosses, follow up with phone calls, and go in for interviews. In effect you are constantly job hunting. Moving every couple of years was also tough; the hardest move was in and out of Washington. Moving from post to post overseas wasn't as difficult. The downside of civil service work was the boredom of doing the same thing all the time with the same people, which is why I switched mid career to Foreign Service.

Q: This is why I was in Foreign Service almost my entire career. I found it very difficult to think of anybody being a civil servant. You do the same thing but for some people they enjoy it.

DRESS: What you gain from that is that you become the expert, the authority on "x" subject. You spend years developing that expertise and then everybody has to come to you on that subject because you know where all the bodies are buried. Fortunately, that appeals to some people.

Q: Let's talk about your impression of being a woman working in both Treasury and Foreign Service over all because things have moved faster and faster. One could make the argument that women are almost controlling the State Department now. Well there are female secretaries of State plus others in other areas but what were your experiences?

DRESS: In 1969 I was one of the first professional women in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for International Affairs at Treasury. When I joined State in 1985, there were some older women in upper management and a whole lot of younger women in the junior

and mid level ranks. So even at State I was somewhat on the leading edge. It took me longer to get promotions than a lot of my male colleagues. That may have been me but I think it was in part because of the system. Being female, I didn't meet the expectations of the predominant (i.e., male) culture. At least, that's my view.

Q: You're saying there weren't many senior women above you when you came in. Were you part of or the development of female mentoring system or...?

DRESS: I wish I'd had a mentor, but I didn't. I would talk to people that I knew to get advice on how to plan my career and what to do but no, I never had a high-level mentor to advise me, recommend me and bring along. Those women who did rose much more rapidly and climbed farther up the career ladder.

Q: Well what are you up to now?

DRESS: As I said earlier, I retired from the Foreign Service in September 2005 with 36 years of government service. I am having a wonderful time. I am traveling, fixing up my condo in Adams Morgan, taking classes at the Smithsonian, designing and sewing quilts, going to the theater and the opera, spending time with family and working part time at the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) office at the Department of State.

Q: In what particular area are you working?

DRESS: I review for release documents from the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs, South and Central and Asian Affairs and African Affairs. I have even come across cables that I wrote while serving in New Delhi and in Riyadh. Essentially, in reviewing documents to determine what can be released in response to requests under FOIA, I excise language that would reveal sources or sensitive information that needs to be withheld to protect national security or privacy interests.

Before we conclude the interview, I would like to share some observations on how office technology changed during my 36 years in the federal government. I learned to type in high school but wasn't very proficient. During my time at Treasury, I wrote in long hand on legal yellow pads and gave the drafts to a secretary, who typed on then state of the art IBM Selectrics (electric typewriters). Changes or corrections were made via "cut and paste" or white out if there wasn't time to retype a memo. I recall one of my Treasury colleagues showing me how to meet a short deadline. He had less than an hour to get a memo to our boss regarding an EXIM Bank Board meeting. He dictated the memo to our boss's secretary, who took it down in shorthand and typed it in final. He proofed it, took it to our boss and got approval for a Treasury position for the meeting. By the early 1980s Treasury had basic word processors from Wang Laboratories and secretaries and younger economists used them. When I first saw them, my reaction was negative. I didn't want to be stuck doing my own typing. That was a hold over from the not-too-distant days when a woman didn't want to admit she typed for fear she would be relegated to clerical work. But by 1986 I owned a Macintosh computer at home and at work I made the transition from composing on paper to composing at the keyboard. Looking back I think it's much

more efficient and faster for all but the most senior officers to type their own work. Secretaries no longer exist except in the front office and support staff is called something else, like administrative assistants or office managers. Whatever they are called, they certainly don't take short hand. And it's almost impossible to find a typewriter in an office anymore. Things have changed enormously.

Q: A tremendous change and it's hard to go back. I luckily never had to go through it but people who worked for the top offices of the State Department the Secretariat and other places where they had to produce absolutely perfect final documents so things would be typed and retyped. This was early in times of carbon appears and all this until they were absolutely perfect and margins were just right and all. Now, of course, the computer takes care of that. I'm not sure the contents are any better but at least its far less labor intensive.

DRESS: The drawback of word processing is that now everyone along the clearance chain makes changes. It's almost a disease in the Foreign Service, the way we edit one another's work because technology allows it.

My first experience with cables and airgrams was at the U.S. Embassy in Rome in the early 1970s. The texts were typed out by a secretary and then retyped and encrypted by a communications clerk in the central communications center. The drafter omitted all the definite and indefinite articles and used as few words as possible to save typing time.

Q: They were written in "cablese."

DRESS: Yes, the peculiar terse form of written English used was called "cablese."

Q: Then they had what they called the airgram, which was a written report that was sent by surface mail. So often it gave you much more background and often more meat was in them.

DRESS: I don't precisely recall when the airgram became obsolete and all reporting was done via cable.

Q: I don't either but it was probably in the '70s I suspect.

DRESS: Well, I think they were in use until the 1980s because when I was in Senegal in the late 1980s we were still using airgrams to report on mineral production. It's amazing to think they lasted that long.

Q: We are still talking about Treasury, was there a lot of cable traffic or what?

DRESS: When I was there Treasury had it's own communications center so it could send messages directly to its overseas attaches and receive messages from them. For example, cables from the Treasury Attaché in Rome would be sent out via the embassy

communications center directly to the Treasury Department. I don't believe that is the case any longer.

Just to finish up my comments on technology, I want to talk about when faxes and cell phones made their appearance. In 1986 in Zaire, there was no modern communication technology to speak of. We had no reliable phones, no television, and no email. We were extremely isolated and relied almost exclusively on cables to communicate with Washington and mail via APO (the military postal service) to communicate with friends and relatives. It wasn't until I got to Dakar in 1988 that I worked in an economic-commercial office with a fax. I didn't use a cell phone for work until 1997 when I was in India. By that time, I was relying heavily on email and fortunately the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi was fully wired. Of course, since power in India was so unreliable we had our own back up generators so when the computers went down it was only very briefly. In any event, most Foreign Service Officers today are "wired" and always in touch

The Internet had even more of a transformative effect on Foreign Service work. For example, when I was in Zaire, if I needed to understand something about an economic or financial issue, the only resources I had were my graduate school economic textbooks and the expertise of the local IMF and World Bank officials. Access to the Internet would have made my job so much easier. When I was in Saudi Arabia in 2004 google was a resource, which helped me with professional issues such as GMO (genetically modified organisms) but it was only toward the end of my career that it was a readily available resource.

I suppose instead of talking about technology I should make some observations about foreign policy. But frankly, I don't think foreign policy or the practice of diplomacy have changed much since the days of Gilgamesh. Human nature and basic national interests haven't changed in any fundamental sense. It's all rather cyclical. Technology on the other hand moves in a straight line so it's easier to track the progression and note changes.

Q: Okay, well I guess we will finish here.

End of interview