

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

MARY NELL BRYANT

*Interviewed by: Charles Stewart Kennedy
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Q: Today is August 6, 2009. This is an interview with Mary Nell Bryant. I am doing this on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), and I am Charles Stewart Kennedy. Do you call yourself Mary Nell, or...?

BRYANT: Mary Nell.

Q: Okay. Mary Nell, let's talk about when and where you were born.

BRYANT: Miami, Florida in 1952. I was born and raised there.

Q: Let's talk a bit on your father's side; then we will come to your mother's side. Where did Mr. Bryant come from, and what do you know about that side of the family?

BRYANT: My father, Calvin Schofield Bryant, was born on a United Fruit plantation in Tela, Honduras, on the Caribbean coast. His father was Calvin Oak Bryant of Lakeland, Florida; his mother Nellie Schofield of Corozal, Belize, which is a seaside town now considered a great expat relocation destination. The Nell in my name comes from my paternal grandmother. My father's first years were spent growing up on the United Fruit compound in Tela.

Q: What do you know, say, at the grandfather level and the grandmother level? What do you know about that? What they were up to and...?

BRYANT: My grandmother was born and raised in Corozal, one of 16 children of Ernest Augustus Henry Schofield and Petronita Novella. (Ten of the children lived to adulthood: Rosita, Dora, Ines, Mito, Tavo, Tom, Ernesto, Ida, Nellie Armitage and Judy.) Ernest Augustus Schofield came from London in 1879 at age 19 to work in his father's lumber and shipping business. My great-grandmother, Petronita Novella, was the daughter of a sugar factory owner in Corozal. As the family story goes, Petronita was the granddaughter of a Spanish aristocrat who moved to Bacalar, Mexico, from Spain via the Canary Islands. Fleeing a Mayan Indian uprising in Bacalar, which is in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, the family moved to Corozal.

The Schofields were a prominent family in Belize, with a large 26-room house that was destroyed by a hurricane in the 1950s. To school his children, Ernesto brought in a tutor from England. When his own children were through with school, Mr. Schofield had him

stay on to open a local school in Corozal, one of the earliest educational institutions in Belize. My aunt tells me that many of the people of Corozal, either having worked for or been schooled by the Schofields, then took the last name of Schofield. A quick Internet search does show Schofields in Bacalar and Corozal, so that may have to be a retirement project for me, not to mention a winter escape.

The Bryant family also came from London, probably about the time of the American Revolution, first settling in Boston. My great grandfather, George Lawton Bryant II, settled in Florida, where he ran a store in Lakeland, and homesteaded 160 acres outside of Avon Park in 1909, later called Palmetto Creek Farm. He and his family cleared the land, first living in a tent, then a log cabin, and finally a big house. After getting title to the land in 1915, they cut a right of way from the farm to Avon Park. This track became Highway 64 E, or Avon Pines Road.

The Bryants started to grow celery as their primary crop, and the farm became such a showcase that people from the area came out on Sundays for tours. It was the showplace of Highlands County. (This according to the *Avon Park Sun* newspaper, June 18, 1986.)

So from this agricultural background, my grandfather, Calvin Oak Bryant, who was born in 1897, followed his older brother to Tela, Honduras, to work for what became, for many, particularly in politics, the controversial United Fruit Company. He married my grandmother, Nellie Armitage Schofield in Belize in 1921. Hence the ties between Florida farming, United Fruit, and Corozal, Belize.

When my father and his siblings were about four or five, my grandmother told my grandfather that she wanted her kids schooled in the United States, and they moved the family, to Avon Park, Florida, and the family farm. She herself only attended school through the first year of high school, and wanted more for her kids. Calvin Oak, my grandfather, returned after some time to Honduras, where he remained the rest of his life, remarrying a Honduran woman and having a second family.

Ironically, it was through my first assignment as a Foreign Service Officer for a regional position based in Costa Rica that I got to know Calvin Oak Bryant's second family, daughter Melba Bryant de Kattan and her family, in San Pedro Sula, Honduras—now one of the most violent cities on Earth—and the family of my grandmother's brother, Ernesto Schofield, residing in Cartago, Costa Rica.

When I traveled to Honduras on assignment, my relatives in San Pedro Sula took me to where my father was born—Tela—which at the beginning of World War I became an important sea port as the headquarters of the Tela Road Company, a United Fruit subsidiary, and the headquarters of United Fruit in Honduras. One of my relatives went there frequently as a boy, as his father was a supplier to United Fruit, stocking much of what was in what might be called their central department store. He told me many stories about the United Fruit presence in the 1920s. United Fruit built its own section of town, Tela Nueva, also known as the "American Zone," where the white managers lived quite apart from the workers, many of whom were African-descended people whose roots

where in the English-speaking Caribbean, particularly Belize and Jamaica.

You can still see the remains of many of its lovely single-family homes and yards. It reminded me of the American Panama Canal Zone, but of course on a smaller scale. On payday, the workers would hit all the bars in the old town, spend all their money, and head back to work. (This according to my cousin's recollections.) Tela had a large wooden hospital that could be accessed via railroad. When my grandmother was about to give birth to my father, she went to the hospital on a handcar on that United Fruit railroad. I got to walk the halls of the then-empty hospital and picture the arrival of my grandmother. The Bryant-Kattans also took my mother and me to Tela on a later visit, but sadly the hospital had been torn down, though you could still see the railroad tracks going up to the foundation. According to my Honduran relatives, my grandfather Bryant once killed a man in Tela, and United Fruit spirited him out of Honduras to its holdings in Costa Rica, where he could not be touched.

Q: So your father was basically raised in Florida?

BRYANT: Yes, he moved there, to Avon Park, when he was about four or five.

Q: Is there still the family farm?

BRYANT: Yes it is as far as I know. The original Bryant homesteader's daughter, Verella Bryant Kopta, inherited the farm, and sold it in 1964. However her son bought it right back. I understand that one of family is working on family history there in Avon Park, so I should look him up. That is one of those retirement projects. We know much more on my mother's side, but not so much from my father's side.

Q: What did your father do?

BRYANT: My father was an electronics engineer with the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration). In 1940, after graduating from Avon Park High School at age 18, he went to Port Arthur College in Texas to study radio broadcasting along with a good friend. From there, he decided to go to Galveston to get his Seaman's papers and his FCC (Federal Communications Commission) 3rd class radio license. In early 1941, he began working for what became a leading aviation company that was the unofficial flag carrier for the United States, Pan American Airways, as a radio operator, I believe. From there he was transferred to Atkinson Air Force Base in British Guiana as a radio operator at their air base stations. Pan Am was under contract to the U.S. military at the time. I still have a few faded pictures of him and his radios in the rather bleak-looking base. He stayed there throughout the war.

In May 1946, he enlisted in the Army as a private at Ft. McPherson, Georgia, and was assigned to the Panama Canal Department. At some point he was sent to Occupied Japan. He used to love to show off his war wound: a twisted knuckle from playing baseball in Japan.

After the war, he moved to Miami where he at first opened a TV repair shop. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to support a family, so he began working as an electronics engineer with the CAA (Civil Aeronautics Authority), then the FAA, and lastly became the airport supervisor at the Kendall-Tamiami Airport, now known as the Miami Executive Airport,.

Q: On your mother's side, what do you know about her family, going back to wherever you can?

BRYANT: I can take them back to the Mayflower ... or so the legend goes. My grandmother, my mother's mother, writes in her family history that she found Revolutionary War soldiers on both sides of her family, the Spilmans and the Fetzers.

Q: Was it a rough voyage?

BRYANT: Probably so, and not one I would want to be on. Seriously, my grandmother, Margaret Spilman Fetzer traced her roots back to Sir Henry Spelman (1561-1641), who was knighted by James I of England in the 17th century "for works on History of English Antiquities and Laws." He is best known for his *Concilia, Decreta, Leges, Constitutiones, in Re Ecclesiarum Orbis Britannici* ("Councils, Decrees, Laws, and Constitutions of the English Church"), which may have been the first systematic compilation of church documents. A member of Parliament three times—the Spilmans had lived in Norfolk since the fourteenth century—it was in his writings, rather than his actual role in parliamentary politics that he made his mark. He apparently he is buried in Westminster Abbey. My mother's brother was an economics professor at the University of Miami, and showed me some of Sir Henry's works in their library's rare book collection.

Sir Henry's third son immigrated to Virginia in 1609. Indeed in the painting in the U.S. Capitol building, "The Baptism of Pocahontas"—she being the daughter of Algonquian chief Powhatan—there is a boy identified as Henry Spilman. A Spilman home in Brandy Station, Virginia, purported to contain many family records, was burned in the Civil War.

My grandmother, Margaret Spilman Fetzer, born in 1879, was a remarkable woman. She researched and wrote a book of family history for both Spilmans and Fetzers (my grandfather) while in her 90s. Her book, *Now and Then*, was published in 1973 in McAllen, Texas (Library of Congress catalog number 72-97111). She worked on it with her niece, Elizabeth Spilman Wimberly, who is in turn the aunt of actress Sissy Spacek. Her niece came from a branch of Spilmans living around Mission, Texas, where my grandmother's brother, Thomas Holliday Spilman, settled around 1912.

She and my grandfather were both raised in Ottumwa, Iowa, and were sweethearts from age 13. They married in 1901 in Ottumwa, which is split by northern and southern halves by the Des Moines River, and settled in Chicago.

There are so many family stories, particularly because of my grandmother's book. For

example, my great-grandfather, Major Thomas P. Spilman, fought in Tennessee at the battle of...

Q: Chickamauga?

BRYANT: No, it was Fort Donaldson, but he fought later at Shiloh in 1862.

Q: That was Grant's first campaign.

BRYANT: Is that so? We have pictures of him in his uniform, and letters. He was injured quite severely. He was saved, again, as the story goes—I am a history major so I both love the stories and know they may not be totally true—by another soldier who went past on a horse and saw him, my great-grandfather, lying there staring at him. The man on the horse said, “Those eyes would have haunted me forever if I hadn't picked him up and carried him off the battlefield.” Which he did, taking him to a private home, where he was nursed back to health. It turned out to be the home of Almira Whitmore, an orphan who had worked in his mother's home. Such coincidences.

A number of years ago a cousin and I went to Fort Donaldson and looked up my great-grandfather's unit. The park ranger was able to show us exactly the movements of the unit. We walked, in much nicer circumstances, the battlefield where my great grandfather had been.

Q: It isn't under the water. Because in Mississippi....

BRYANT: Goes right through, yes, I know. But some is still above ground and we followed the path of my great-grandfather's unit down there. It was very exciting to see where he had been.

Q: Then what did he do? Recovered and went out and generated more Spilmans?

BRYANT: Yep. I know little bits of stories, but I can't put it chronologically.

Q: Do you have any idea? Just give ...

BRYANT:

After the Civil War, great-grandfather served as sheriff of Wapello County, Iowa, did some farming, and then had a career with John Morrell and Company in Ottumwa.

One story of my great-grandfather is that he caught a horse thief and was returning him to jail. Stopping for the night in some sort of guesthouse, he handcuffed himself to the thief and they went to bed. When the thief said, “How do you know that I won't kill you during the night?” my great-grandfather said, “Because you'll look funny jumping out the window with a dead man handcuffed to you.”

I have heard the story that my great-grandmother, who cooked for the prisoners when her husband was sheriff, stopped a jailbreak with an empty gun while ordering her little boys to go find the sheriff.

Q: Your grandfather on your mother's side, what was he up to?

BRYANT: He was of the Fetzer clan, of German origin. My grandmother says the first Fetzer she found in the U.S. was a Frederick Fetzer, born in Germany in 1726, who settled in Chester County, Pennsylvania, year unknown.

When my grandparents married, my great-grandfather Fetzer was an attorney and justice of the peace and also ran a small insurance business in Ottumwa.

My grandparents married in 1901, in Ottumwa, before the time everyone had electricity. Mr. Morrell was a neighbor, and ran electric lights to the Spilman house for the wedding. After the wedding, they moved to Chicago, and my grandfather Fetzer became a very prominent Chicagoan in the insurance business, now written up in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. A biography of him was also written and published by his company, W. A. Alexander & Co., in 1947. (*WAACO News*, v. 5, no. 10, September 1947. Wade Fetzer 50th Anniversary Issue.)

We sort of consider ourselves with the Fetzer clan because the story of our memories begins here. Grandpa Fetzer was the president of several insurance companies in Chicago and New York. Sadly, I knew him just briefly as he died when I was about six. My grandmother held on until the age of 97. She is the one to interview, living from 1879 to the 1970s. Her father was in the Civil War and she lived way beyond seeing a man on the moon. What an era. And she appreciated it, as she was in awe of all she had seen. Really, quite a saga.

One interesting thing about our family, I think, is that we have a large, close extended family; not what many people think of as a typical American family. It really started with my Mom. She was very sickly with asthma, so, at the recommendation of her doctor, my grandparents looked for a place out of Chicago where she could breathe better. Up they went to northern Michigan, outside of Traverse City, where the National Park Service's Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is now, Glen Lake. What is now a six-hour drive from Chicago was a two-day trip by car or buggy back in the 1920s. My grandparents built a beautiful, seven-bedroom redwood cabin up there on Glen Lake, purportedly called one of the most beautiful lakes in the world by *National Geographic*. It is now a family home that, since 1927, our extended family has gone to every summer. They come from Hawaii, California, Tennessee, Texas, Florida; you know, everybody is so spread out now. But we all grew up together as a family every summer there, so we have an unusually large and close family. We are now all on Facebook together. How times change! I'll bet my Grandmother Fetzer would be on Facebook, too.

Q: What about your mother? What was her upbringing?

BRYANT: My mother was brought up in Hinsdale, Illinois, in a family of servants, chauffeurs, cooks; very regal and quite the opposite of my father, who did not go to college or have two pennies to his name. My mother was very shy and hated all that attention. I think it was very difficult for her. But she had a lot of opportunities. She traveled through Europe in the 1920s and '30s.

I even have my grandmother's diary of a trip to Europe in 1927, when she and my grandfather and mother sailed on the S.S. Conte Biancamano, an Italian liner named in honor of Humbert I Biancamano, the founder of the Savoy, and returned on the Cunard's RMS Mauritania, known as the "Grand Old Lady of the Atlantic." Such a quaint reading! She lists the bon voyage telegrams, letters, and gifts of flowers and fruit baskets sent by friends to the ship on their departure, including a doll for my mom, who was then seven years old. My grandmother writes about the excellent medical facilities for the second- and third-class passengers, and how sweet spirited the staff were. It was so typical of her, wealthy as she was, to care about the medical care of others. She even describes the padded cell the ship had for "maniacs" who, according to her, are sometimes deported. There is much more there I need to read.

My mother's diary is of traveling with her parents through Europe in 1936, which, of course, was quite an interesting time. They traveled this time on the Cunard-White Star. What are most interesting are her descriptions of Berlin and Nuremberg, just as the finishing touches are being put on the buildings for the Olympics. She casually mentions that they went to where the Olympic flame would arrive shortly and Hitler would give a speech. They went to Woolworth's in Berlin to buy Olympic flags, buttons and posters. She writes that they saw reportedly 700,000 people march into Berlin for a people's parade. "Everything in this country," she writes, "is done in an orderly and military fashion." Oh, to have seen the future when, I believe, several of her cousins died at Pearl Harbor. Of Nuremberg she says, "It is a very quaint and interesting old town. We went out to a tremendous stadium which is used ... for Hitler to parade."

Q: Did she go to college?

BRYANT: Yes. She went first to Northwestern University ... as did my grandmother. She used to tell us of how the girls all listened to the radio as Edward VII gave up his throne, "for the woman he loved," and cried and cried. In 1941, my mom then went to Stanford (1941) for the better weather and her breathing. She and her friends that had come out from Chicago decided to go back to Northwestern because they were afraid that the Japanese were going to attack the West Coast of the U.S. And they were close; it was Hawaii. But there was that fear that the Japanese were going to attack the West Coast and so they went back to Northwestern to finish their schooling.

Q: How did your mother and father meet?

BRYANT: At a dance class, which, knowing them, is truly startling. I would think my mother too shy and my father not interested. My dad was in Miami trying to start his business. My maternal grandparents had a winter home on Miami Beach. When Chicago

was unbearable, as I know it to be, my grandparents would winter on Miami Beach. My mother had been working at a bank in Chicago. She came down for the holidays to visit her parents when, listening to the weather report in Chicago and looking out the window in Miami, she said, "I think I'll stay here." So, she got a teaching job in Miami, and became a much-loved dean of students at the Kinloch Park School. I have some lovely affectionate cartoons her students drew of and for her. I cannot believe that my dad would go to a dance class, but his best man has told me the he and his wife encouraged him to go to meet a nice girl. The rest is history.

Q: Family-wise, how did this work out? Here is a girl from a wealthy, rich family and a guy with no college and sort of a hard-working, blue collar...

BRYANT: They loved him. My grandparents were wonderful people, open, kind, and accepting. They had a lot of money, but they weren't snobs. They were great philanthropists as well. We had a very welcoming family; still do, I think.

Q: That is a wonderful environment. Let's talk about growing up. Do you have brothers and sisters?

BRYANT: I have three sisters, Peggie, Patsy and Tammy

Q: And where do you rank?

BRYANT: I'm the second.

Q: You grew up in Florida?

BRYANT: Yes, sure did.

Q: Where again?

BRYANT: Miami Shores was the community, which is just north of Miami proper on the main land.

Q: Okay, let's talk about during the 1950s growing up as a small kid; what was it like?

BRYANT: Wonderful. It was wonderful. Of course, you could play outside, year around. We had a neighborhood with a lot of kids so we had many friends right there to play with. We were often roaming on our bicycles; or we were in the backyard using palm fronds to build our own Robinson Crusoe huts and seeing how many gadgets we could create to live like a modern Robinson Crusoe. We used the big fig tree next door as a hotel, creating room service via rope pulleys through tree branches. It was a very creative upbringing because you played freely. You didn't sit in front of the computer or TV. We had a television, but going outside to play was far more fun. And of course being in Miami, you could play year around, so we played games endlessly

Q: That's one of the things ... I mean, there was a long period ... it is sort of ended now, but...

BRYANT: No locked doors.

Q: Kids were, I don't mean to use the wrong word, but almost feral. They were...

BRYANT: Feral. What a wonderful description. Yes, we were.

Q: Okay, dinner is at 6:30, be home then. Go out the door and don't bother me ... I mean, you know, because you were allowed to make your own games.

BRYANT: Oh, yes.

Q: And I find that the sort of soccer schedule is pretty appalling.

BRYANT: I used to argue with my older sister Peggie about that. Mind you, I have no children, but do have an opinion nonetheless. My sister's two girls grew up programmed to the teeth, something I saw as dreadful. She felt that was the best way to keep them safe, out of harm's way. It is a pity, but. ... Who am I to argue?

Q: I think much of it is extremely exaggerated.

BRYANT: I guess I do, too. But, I guess if you are a mom and you are responsible, you look at it differently. But we were feral; I like that description.

We had a lot of hurricanes come through Miami, and we absolutely loved hurricanes. My parents didn't, of course, but we did. We had a sturdy house. It wasn't a big house, but we knew it would survive the hurricane. We couldn't wait because, for one, you knew you would get off of school for a few days. The electricity would go out, and you would live with flashlights, bottles of water, candles. We had a little gas stove in the garage where we could cook things. It was the most exciting time in the world. As soon as the storm was clear, we'd go out on our bikes and ride around the neighborhood to check out the damage. Again, on our own, without any supervision, off we'd go and see what was going on. And it was exhilarating. We felt like true explorers.

Q: As a kid, were you much of a reader?

BRYANT: Yes, oh yes. My mother had majored in English literature, and we all grew up as readers.

Q: Do you recall any books or series of books, I mean early on, that really grabbed you?

BRYANT: Yes, and probably not what you would guess. Even as a little girl, I wanted to be an FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agent and I read everything on the FBI that I could find. I have always been a non-fiction reader, more than fiction. In our elementary

school library and in the public library, we had books on the FBI, which I read cover to cover. I read all about Dillinger and FBI labs. I found the idea of following all of these little minute clues to get the criminals so exciting, and I read everything I could get my hands on. It broke my heart that they didn't want me; you couldn't be an FBI agent as a female back then.

Q: That was J. Edgar Hoover's time.

BRYANT: Yes, and no females allowed. I was heartbroken.

Q: I mean, if you go back to that time...

BRYANT: Yes, no females allowed; and I just could not understand why. Of course I learned later, there was also a time when you could not be a single Foreign Service Officer with the State Department if you were female, so it certainly was not just the FBI.

Q: Up through elementary school, what was home life like? Did you sit around the table and talk about events, or things, or what?

BRYANT: We did. Dinner was at a regular hour, everybody was home, and we ate together. We laughed a lot. My sisters and I would tease each other a lot. I remember that when my older sister Peggie was in junior high she liked biology. When they would be dissecting animals in class, she would bring body parts home and put them on someone's dinner plate when they weren't looking. Oh how we would all laugh...except, of course, the person with the pig's toes on their plate. So it was not a formal, stuffy environment.

Q: What about the world? Were you aware of things? The Cold War was going strong. Did the world come in much to you?

BRYANT: I feel like somebody prompted these questions; told you the questions to ask me. Yes, the Cold War did intrude. It's funny to look back now, but in one of our closets my dad cut a hole in the floor so we could crawl under the house as a shelter. It could hardly have protected us from anything, but it was a great place to hide and play. We kept big metal tubs of water in another closet, just in case.

In the early 1960s my dad was responsible for a lot of the radar at the Homestead Air Force Base. In 1962, at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, he had to go check some of the radar at Homestead and my sisters and I went with him for fun (I was 11 at the time). To think of that in today's security environment! My dad said, "Oh, I'm just bringing my kids with me," while checking the radar aimed at the Cuban missiles. It was just an exciting outing with my dad.

And they let us in and we played while he worked. So the Cold war was definitely a part of growing up, but I don't recall being frightened by it.

Q: Where did your family fall politically?

BRYANT: My mother's family was at one time prominent Republicans in Chicago, and my mom called herself a Republican for many years. My father was Democrat. Ironically, though, my mother was extremely liberal and active in liberal social causes way ahead of her time. Somewhere along the line she realized that being liberal meant one voted Democratic and, as she said, "the Republican Party left me, I didn't leave it." She was before her time on that one. We teased her about being a Yankee, and she said, yes, that she was a Yankee invader in the south.

Q: One of the terms is a Rockefeller Republican.

BRYANT: I think her family was what are now called Rockefeller Republicans: socially conscious, philanthropically generous, and my mother kept moving left even further.

Q: How about religion?

BRYANT: My father was raised Catholic, but left the church. We were raised attending Miami Shores Community Church, part of the United Church of Christ, a denomination it seemed no one ever heard of until Barack Obama (also a member of the denomination). United Church of Christ is a very liberal, progressive, Protestant denomination. It is more prominent in the northeast of the United States, and was born of the Congregational Church and several smaller denominations.

Q: Was the church an important factor in your upbringing?

BRYANT: Yes. In terms of social life, in terms of activities, we always went to church, usually moaning and groaning as kids because we didn't want to get out of bed. But, yes, it was an important part. We always went on Sunday. My sisters and I belonged to the youth groups and my parents would always be sponsors. During our teenage years, the Church owned a lodge on a lake near Avon Park in Central Florida, Lake Byrd Lodge. We went to camp there for a week or two in the summer. They were wonderful, fun times. Sadly, I think the church had to sell it off, but it was a big part of our lives. We had a lot of activities and a lot of friends in our church group, several with who I am still in touch.

Q: What was your neighborhood like?

BRYANT: I would say probably, at the time, well everyone says middle-class, right? Middle-class, upper-middle class.

Q: I mean the mix, were there Hispanics, or was it white, or was it...?

BRYANT: It was white, but our schools were a mix of white, black and Hispanic.

Q: Was it quite southern?

BRYANT: It was white, but I wouldn't call it southern. Small, single family homes, one

story for the most part, with stucco, tiled roves and jalousie, or louvre, windows. Good sidewalks for bikes, roller skates, little red wagons pulling boxes of Girl Scout cookies. Elementary school was primarily white as well, but by the time I got to junior high, it was a mix of black and Latino. The junior high was also very close and we walked to school and back.

Q: Did you feel much – and still speaking up through elementary school – of the impact of the Cuban migration, or Hispanic migration, or Haitian migration?

BRYANT: No, not in elementary school. Later, yes.

Q: What was elementary school like? Where did you go?

BRYANT: I went to Miami Shores Elementary School. It was all white as was the neighborhood; it was very classical Floridian in that all the hallways were open. There was, of course, no obvious security; nobody thought of any security. It was fun. I loved it. It wasn't a large school. I was a good student in terms of academics; goofed off a little too much, probably.

Q: Any teachers you recall that stuck in your mind?

BRYANT: Yes, absolutely. Mrs. McLain was her name. She was my second grade teacher and I credit her with instilling in me my love of history.

Q: What attracted you to history?

BRYANT: Partly the teacher's enthusiasm, I would say. Probably some of the stories of my family—of relatives as western sheriffs, fighting in the Civil War, the lore of an ancestor on the Mayflower crossing, possibly a signer of the Constitution, and a father's being raised in Honduras with even more stories. There was family history there. I think it was the combination of a family with a sense of history and the inspiration of Mrs. McLain that opened up history to me.

Q: I am just wondering, how is the boy-girl mix there? I mean, the boys play together, the girls play together, or they play all together?

BRYANT: In elementary school there was a mix. It was before one particularly noticed the difference. Maybe I was an innocent, but early on I never really thought much of the difference between boys and girls. In fact, outside of my family, my longest standing friend is a boy I have known since the second grade.

Q: How big were your classes?

BRYANT: Probably 20 students, maybe more.

Q: Did you get a good education in elementary school?

BRYANT: Yes, yes, I did. Good education and inspiration.

Q: Was there much of a Jewish element there? Miami became known as a mecca, mainly for retired persons from New York, but I was wondering ...

BRYANT: Growing up? Yes, there was, but I did not know it at the time. Again, probably from the example of my grandparents on down to my parents, we did not grow up with any knowledge of prejudice, whether it was racial or economic. Housing projects were within a few blocks, and my younger sister had friends who lived there. They were as acceptable as a president of a bank. It made absolutely no difference to my parents. And the same was with Jews. In fact, I had no idea that there was anything different about Jews. I thought they were like another Protestant denomination, like Lutherans or Methodists; the same with Catholics, I just had no idea.

I always had “a” best friend” going through school, and whoever she was, she was always Jewish. In junior high, my friend said to me something about not being able to have a cheeseburger, and I said, “What do you mean you can't have a cheeseburger?” “Oh, we don't mix meat and milk.” “What are you talking about?” Then we got into a discussion. She was Jewish and they didn't do this, and they didn't do that. She told me that here was a lot of prejudice against Jews. I remember that to this day. I said, “Why? For what?” I could never get over that. I said, “You are kidding!” She said, “People don't like us because we are Jews.” “But why?” It just made absolutely no sense to me, as I had never been exposed to any mention that there was a difference. And then I learned there was prejudice against Catholics. We grew up a few doors down from a big Catholic family and, as they were all similar in age to us, we constantly played together (and in fact, are still in touch today). It was much later on that I learned that there was prejudice against Catholics. I had never heard of it.

Q: Well, I was wondering, you would have been about nine or so when Kennedy was elected. Did that play any role, interest you or not? It was an election that did get an awful lot of people interested. Did that offer you...?

BRYANT: Oh, very much so, for me. Again, I was already interested in history, which meant politics and government as well. Mostly, though, I remember the assassination. We were in a portable ...

Q: You're talking about one of those temporary schoolrooms?

BRYANT: Yes, those temporary, permanent schoolrooms. I remember a teacher coming out to say, “Turn on the radio.” We turned on the radio and we heard the news. It had a very severe impact on our class, even at the age of 11. There was absolute dead silence in the class. It was very solemn. They closed school.

My mother came and picked us up. My dad came home from work and we sat, as a family, and watched the news constantly, constantly. Even at dinner, we kept the TV news

on in the next room. My younger sister, Patsy, was in there watching and she screamed, “Somebody just shot Oswald.” We are at the table shouting, “No!” “Yes, somebody just shot Oswald,” she said. Everybody at the table went flying into the room to watch. It was a horrible, memorable moment.

Q: Speaking of the lighter side of TV, were there any programs of particular ... ?

BRYANT: *Bonanza!*

Q: A good western about a family...

BRYANT: *Bonanza* was our favorite. My sisters and I would beg to stay up late enough to see *Bonanza*. I think it was a carrot to get us to do our homework, and it worked. That was absolutely, without a doubt, our favorite.

Q: Did you get to travel much around?

BRYANT: Yes, we did. We were very fortunate that way. Again, second grade was a big year. We went on a family trip to the Bahamas. That trip started my unending travel bug that, years later, ended me up in the Foreign Service. The Bahamas was the first trip. Then in junior high we went on a trip out west to Banff and Lake Louise in Canada, and to Yellowstone National Park; pure heaven once again. We saw our first snow. And, of course, there were always our annual pilgrimages to the family home in Michigan for part of the summers.

Q: Were you much of a news buff? Were you reading, as a kid, the Miami Herald, or the local TV news, the world, or not?

BRYANT: Local news, I think. We always watched the evening news on TV. It was a family ritual. I didn't read a paper when I was young, not in elementary school. But the evening news was definitely a part of family life.

Q: From junior high on, how did you find that?

BRYANT: I attended Horace Mann Junior High School in Miami, which was walking distance to home. It was a different mix of students than elementary school. It was on the border between a public housing project and Miami Shores, where we lived. That was where we first felt the sort of economic mix of Latinos, blacks. However, I remember very little in the way of any hostilities, any “sharks and the jets” (the Puerto Rican and American gangs of the musical, *West Side Story*) kind of thing.

Q: Florida being a southern state, sort of a peculiar southern state, there were parts of Florida that were really, you might say, cracker Florida. But Miami was heavily Jewish, heavily Cuban; I mean, much more diverse. Did you get any feel for the civil rights thing when you were in junior high or high school?

BRYANT: Not in junior high; but in high school, I do have a memory that will stick with me forever. Our home was always open to everybody. It wasn't a home where you had to ask your parents if someone could come over and play. The door was open to anyone, at any time. My parents' philosophy was they would rather have us home with our friends than running around somewhere else; "you and your friends are always welcome, no need to ask;" no plastic on the living room sofa. It was a playful, open, happy place. This was true in elementary school, but even more so in junior high because we lived in walking distance. Our house was close, so after school, many kids would just gather and hang out. It was the same way in high school.

I remember running around one evening in high school with a group of friends that included one black friend. We were coming back from an ice cream parlor, Jan's, on Miami Beach, and of course, someone said afterwards, "Oh, let's just go over to Mary Nell's house." So everyone zoomed to Mary Nell's house. The black friend grabbed me at the front door and looked me in the eyes and said, "Is it okay?" And I said, "Is what okay?" Then all of a sudden, it was like a stab in my stomach, I realized what he was asking: Is it okay for a black person to go into your house? Would your parents be bothered? And I realized then, he had to worry about that all the time. It was sickening. I said, "My parents won't even notice what color you are." Sure enough, it was true; they couldn't care less. I was very fortunate to grow up in a house like that. That was the first personal experience I had with civil rights.

Then I would hear stories that my mother would tell of being a Yankee, where she would say everything was wonderful in Chicago. In recent years we would say, "Yeah, read Richard Wright and tell me everything was wonderful in Chicago."

She told stories of going to the annual football game at the Miami Orange Bowl with my dad every year. The Orange Bowl did not allow black players to play football in their stadium. According to my mom, the Big Ten had won a spot in the Orange Bowl, and they had a black player. The Orange Bowl said they wouldn't allow that player to play, and the team said, "We are not coming." The Orange Bowl bowed to pressure and gave the OK. The black player scored a touchdown, and in the end zone threw off his helmet. The man sitting next to my mother turned to her and said, "He did that on purpose." And she said, "Darn right he did!" So the racism was obviously there but, in my family and our circle, we didn't see it. (Note: the Orange Bowl's history of integration does not track with my Mother's memories exactly, but again, these are memories.)

Q: Considering your later career, how about foreign affairs, other than the Cold War? Did you find yourself, at any point, sort of becoming interested in other countries?

BRYANT: Yes, very much so. Starting I think with traveling to another country, to the city of Nassau, in the Bahamas. While it may not seem terribly exotic now, when I was in second grade, it was. I found it absolutely fascinating and wonderful, and the bug stuck. Following Nassau, we took family trips to western Canada, then to Greece, Turkey and the Greek Isles.

Q: When did you do that?

BRYANT: In high school; I graduated in 1970, so it would have been in the late 1960s. The irony of that was my dad wanted to go to Alaska and we were planning a trip to go to Alaska. Somehow we found this Greece and Turkey trip, and it was a lot cheaper than going to Alaska. We weren't headed to Greece and Turkey, we were headed to Alaska, but cost mattered, so we ended up traveling to Greece and Turkey. I was hooked after that; all I wanted to do was be overseas.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

BRYANT: Miami Edison Senior High School in Miami, south of where I grew up. It was, by then, becoming a very inner-city school. There was a strong Cuban presence. Our high school had about 1200 students, pretty much one-third black, one-third Cuban, and one-third white. It was a real mixture. Given my own Latino background, I loved it. I thought it was great having this mix because I considered myself part Spanish, through my Belizean grandmother.

Q: Did you learn Spanish?

BRYANT: We studied Spanish in school, yes. I can't say I learned it. My dad always listened to Spanish on the radio in Miami as he had spoken it growing up in Honduras.

Q: High school being more dangerous—it was inner city—did that affect you any?

BRYANT: No, because we were too young to even be aware. You are invincible at that age.

Q: I was wondering whether there were fights between the various groups.

BRYANT: Not that I recall. Except for some blacks mixing with the whites in official school groups, the groups kind of kept to themselves, more or less. But as far as animosities and fights and problems, I don't remember them.

Q: What about subjects and teachers in high school?

BRYANT: I took a lot of advance placement courses in history; it was my favorite. English literature, I despised. I always felt, "How did the teacher know what the author meant in the book?" And I always disagreed.

Q: That opened a whole world of disputation.

BRYANT: I had a wonderful physics teacher; I loved physics. I loved math, and I loved history. I think the thing that I enjoyed most was playing the piano. I was the pianist for every production the school put on, whether it was the dance club, or the drama club, school plays (usually musicals). I greatly enjoyed that, until one production. I said, "You

know, I am always the pianist. If you want to keep me, I want to be on stage for one play.” So that was the deal, and I was a dancer in *Guys and Dolls*. I was pretty proud of myself. After that, I went back to playing the piano for everything. I had had my 15 minutes of fame.

Q: Was there dating in high school? How did that work? That changes with every generation.

BRYANT: Yes, it's changed a lot.

Q: What did you do ... sort of the dating patterns?

BRYANT: The major events would be the movies, going out for ice cream, picnics on the beach. My family had a boat ... ah, that was the greatest. Not a big, fancy boat, but one that you could just run up and down the inland waterway, water skiing, pulling up to an island, having a picnic, a barbeque. A lot of times a group of friends, or dates, or boyfriends or girlfriends, would go out on the weekends on our boat. That was a major event. We went out a lot for ice cream. And in high school we went to coffee houses to listen to folk music. I know there were drug crowds in the school, but at the time I really didn't know about it.

Q: Speaking of drugs, in my era, we would go out for ice cream after the movies...

BRYANT: That's what we did.

Q: At the drug store; were there ice cream stores?

BRYANT: Oh yes, there were ice cream stores. A big event was to go to an ice cream store on Miami Beach, Jan's. If you got a big group, you would order the “kitchen sink.” It was a huge bowl of ice cream with bananas and cherries, and whipped cream, and everything you could think of. They would dare you to finish the “kitchen sink,” and if you could, you would get another one. So we would get a big group and go try to finish the “kitchen sink. We never did.

Q: How about the movies? Were you much of a movie buff?

BRYANT: Oh yes. We went to the movies a lot. Saturday afternoon kids shows at the Miami Shores Movie Theater, and big productions such as *Camelot* at the theaters on Lincoln Road on Miami Beach. Come 1962, I was a major Beatles fan; absolutely in love with John Lennon. So any Beatles movie that came out I had to see. But that was not so much a date movie, because the guy, of course, was not interested in seeing you swoon over John Lennon on the screen.

Q: Today it would be known as a “chick flick.”

BRYANT: We would go as groups of girls to see *Help!* for example, as many times as we

could. The management would clear the theatre and get everybody out so you couldn't stay to see the next show. My older sister Peggy had a friend who would go in the bathroom, stand up on the toilet and close the door so they couldn't see her. That way, she could stay all afternoon and watch the movie over and over again. I think that was about as bad as we got in my day. That was about as serious as our criminality was.

Q: What about Miami as a place to go? In the times I visited Miami, which was very infrequently, it struck me as not much of a downtown.

BRYANT: No, Miami was not. We would go to Miami Beach. We would go down to Lincoln Road, which was a pedestrian mall with lots of shops. Lincoln Road has now been revived tremendously. In the 1960s it had large movie theaters with balconies. They would show grand movies, which my family always went to see. My favorite was *Camelot*, and I think I saw that about 13 or 14 times until I could almost recite it.

I preferred going out on our boat rather than going to the beach. The times that we did go to the beach, we went to the 67th Street beach. Each high school went to a different beach, and that was Edison's. South Beach was not particularly popular. South Beach was the sleepest, quietest place you could ever imagine. It was mostly elderly Jews and other elderly people on rockers in retirement, in little unpainted buildings. You could just drive there, park, go out on the beach, and there was hardly anyone there.

Q: I remember going around there and being astounded about how it was predominately elderly Jewish New Yorkers, and how small they were. This is sort of coming out of the ghettos; an awful lot of very short people. The children would be up in the six-footers, but...

BRYANT: What I remember is that we would go there and get bagels. That was something special to do ... go to South Beach and buy bagels.

Q: You graduated from high school when?

BRYANT: In 1970.

Q: Did you have any thought of what you wanted to do, where you wanted to go, and really what the world was going to offer you?

BRYANT: I did. I thought that I would become a high school teacher, get married, and have kids.

Q: That was very standard at the time for a woman.

BRYANT: That's what one did.

Q: It was teaching. Teaching was probably the upper-class thing; otherwise, it would be secretary, or just plain wife.

BRYANT: Yes. I really had the blinders on, put on by society perhaps. That's all I saw.

Q: How about skills? Were you picking up typing and that sort of thing?

BRYANT: In order to be a secretary kind of thing? No.

Q: Just to go on, you know, you are supposed to have the skills home economics and everything.

BRYANT: We had home economics. It was a requirement in junior high. The guys took shop, and we took home economics. I loved to cook, and I used to do a lot of the cooking at home as my mother didn't like to cook. Her favorite cookbook was the *I Hate to Cook Book*.

I didn't like to sew. In junior high home economics we all had to make dresses to wear to school one day. Can you imagine how mortifying to a junior high girl that would be? How we prayed deeply that it would be cold enough that we could wear a sweater over our dress to hide it. Mine was red and white checked gingham. I will always remember it. I think I wore a sweater over it, whether it was cold enough or not. The sad thing is, I think shop and home economics are gone from school requirements.

Q: When I went to junior high in south Pasadena I had to take print shop. There I learned to set type. Talk about useless skills—to set type. You did it backwards and you had to go through a handset and all of this. But it did give you a feel for Gutenberg and his group. I learned to do that very poorly, I might add.

BRYANT: I took typing one summer in junior high. I remember my mom saying it would be great to have typing, not to be a secretary, but for my college papers. So there was never any question that I would be going to college.

Q: Where did you go?

BRYANT: I went to University of Florida because my sister Peggie was already there. Making a selection of where to go really was not important at the time. My mother wanted me to go to her alma mater, Northwestern. I said, “Ah, it is too cold. I don't want to do that.” I ended up going to the University of Chicago for grad school, so I got there anyway. But, at the time (1970), where a girl went to school was rather irrelevant. I have nieces now, and cousins, who are in this panic path of what school they are going to get into, thinking about it since the time they are ten years old. I didn't give it a second thought, “I'm going to Florida. Peggy's there and I really don't see the need to look at alternatives.”

Q: As I do these oral histories—I have done nearly a thousand—really, the school you go to isn't often that important. Because people basically teach themselves. They either got it, or they don't have it. Sometimes teachers will inspire somebody, but they can come out of the damnest schools.

BRYANT: I wish I had known there was something else, and gone to a smaller liberal arts school. I would have fit better than at Florida. But I was in an honors program and we had our own honors dorm, so it was almost like a little school within itself.

Q: Where is the University of Florida?

BRYANT: Gainesville.

Q: And where is Gainesville?

BRYANT: It's in the north, middle of the state; north of Orlando, a couple of hours.

Q: Is there much there?

BRYANT: The University.

Q: And that's it?

BRYANT: The University, certainly at that time.

Q: Okay. 1970, what was the university like?

BRYANT: It was deep into the hippie era, and into the anti-war movement, at that point. It was an interesting time. My sister is 14 months older than me, but she was two years ahead of me in college. I went up to visit her. Football was big at Florida, as it is today. I went to a football game with her in maybe 1968 or '69. She got me a date because you had to have a date, and I wore a dress, stockings and heels. The guys wore jackets and, I imagine, ties. It was probably 95 degrees out; miserable sitting in the sun watching the football game. But that was how you went to a football game. When I started as a freshman in 1970, I remember going to a football game by myself in cut-off jeans with no shoes on. So there was a pretty rapid change there, and that would be from, say, 1968 to 1970, on what was proper and not.

Q: Did you feel you were jumping off into an alien world when you got to the University of Florida, or were you sort of prepared for it?

BRYANT: I was prepared because I had visited my sister. So I felt prepared.

Q: How big was the school?

BRYANT: I want to say about 20,000 students, quite big. That is why I say I wish I had gone to a smaller school. I was glad I was in this honors program with an honors dorm that sort of set you up with a group of friends and people to hang out with.

Q: What was the honors program?

BRYANT: It was a fairly prescribed program for the first two years, where you had small, advanced classes on core subjects. You had a range of sciences, social sciences, and even PE (physical education) classes. It provided a rounded liberal arts and science program with small classes. As in a lot of universities, the introductory overview courses to core subjects would be big auditorium classes. However, in the honors program we had small, more seminar-type classes; twenty people, maybe. I think it is sad that incoming students now are so often focused on their major from day one. I don't think I ever knew my major. It became history. But in the interim, I was able to explore so much else.

Q: I am thinking you got into this because you were a good student. You liked education?

BRYANT: Yes, very much so. I could have been a perennial student. I loved it. I loved learning. Still do.

Q: In history, while you were in high school, did you move into any particular types of history or areas?

BRYANT: I was interested in American history, military history, southern history, and Black history. In college, I thought the thing that interested me most was probably Black and southern history. I didn't proceed to getting a Ph.D. (doctoral degree) because I thought, "How could I write Black history?" There was a big debate at the time: Could a white person write anything about Black history.

Q: Black history was fairly new at the time, and it was singled out by black scholars who were saying, this is ours, the same way that sort of gender history ...

BRYANT: Exactly.

Q: You know, a guy can't teach gender history. Did you feel that sort of conflict?

BRYANT: I did. I felt sort of dishonest in that, you know, how could I really appreciate, how could I really interpret Black history, if I didn't feel it.

Q: It does lead to the problem of self ... It means that this would be true—you couldn't do French history if you weren't French.

BRYANT: Exactly, I know.

Q: Or, I mean, that's a road to disaster for history.

BRYANT: Now, I think it is wrong to think that only blacks can write Black history ... and there is certainly room for whites to write Southern history. But at the time, I was caught up in the debate. I was also very interested in late 19th century history, and in the changes of the later Progressive Era.

Q: You said you were interested in military history. What were they teaching about the war? My grandfather was an officer in the Union Army from Wisconsin, was wounded at Gettysburg, and then went on to fight with Grant in Chattanooga. He then joined Mr. Sherman, and they had a jolly time marching through Georgia.

BRYANT: How dare you, how dare you!

Q: Speaking of prejudice, I was wondering from a southern university how did you find that?

BRYANT: Again, I think Florida, as you say, is not the real south. So you didn't find the "South shall rise again" attitude in studying the Civil War. I would say it was probably a much more Yankee approach. Maybe you would have found it different at Alabama, or Georgia, or Auburn, for example. We used to battle about it with my mom, teasingly. In 5th grade, my family came to Washington, in 1961, for the reenactment of First Manassas. That started my fascination with the Civil War.

Q: What about events, either in Asia or Europe? First of all, how was Vietnam treated while you were there? How did you feel about it? Were you demonstrating or anything?

BRYANT: I mostly went to class. I didn't take any big role. In fact, in 1972, my sophomore year in college, I went to Italy, to school in Florence, on a whim. Which is the way I have lived most of my life. It sounded like a good idea and turned out to be a wonderful idea. We heard about the demonstrations going on back at University of Florida, but we were off learning Italian. It is embarrassing to me now that I did not take a role in the anti-war movement.

Q: What attracted you towards Italy?

BRYANT: Chance. I was in a department store and ran into a friend of mine. She said, "Oh, you know so-and-so? She's going to Italy for a program run by Florida State University." I thought, "Hmmm, that sounds interesting." I looked into it, it did indeed look interesting, and I went. It was one of the most wonderful years of my life.

Q: Were you getting any feel for two of the strains going through sort of the liberal arts side? One was the political scientists, who were getting more and more into computerized stuff.

BRYANT: Do you know the book, *Time on the Cross*, by economists Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman? It became famous when I was in college. It caused near riots in the academic community because it was a mathematical interpretation of slavery that tried to show, through math and equations, that slavery wasn't so bad, that families were kept together, that this idea of breaking them up and selling them off was not the case. There was a rebuttal book written. That was my kind of battle; over the seminar table.

Q: There was this trend in political science, trying to quantify. And then the other one was Marxism; a significant portion of professors were basically college Marxists. Did any of these intrude on you?

BRYANT: No. As I said, for the quantification, it was the battle over the book, *Time on the Cross* that sticks in my mind. It was great fun in that it caused quite a fury, and I loved academic battles; tempests in teapots. Another seminar favorite was, “Did Roosevelt know about Pearl Harbor.”

Marxism did not sway me at all. In fact, I became entranced with Czar Nicholas II and his demise. In 1972 at the height of the Cold War, my sister Peggie, my mother and I, went to Russia for a three-week trip, closely guarded by Intourist, of course. I had some vague impression that this was the great enemy. But that image of the power of the USSR was quickly dashed. Our three-week trip was like O Henry’s *The Ransom of Red Chief*. The three of us antagonized the tour guides, asking endless questions, and laughing (or being shocked) at their ridiculous answers. It was almost comical for us.

For example: “Who are the four girls in this Faberge egg?”

“I don't know.”

“Those are Czar Nicholas' four daughters.”

“Well, maybe, but I don't know.”

“Do you really not know? Are you not supposed to know?”

Literally I would say these things, as would my mom and sister: “But you really know that, right? But you're just not supposed to tell me.”

One day we were walking along in Kiev, I believe, when two girls approached us and wanted to speak English with us. We were thrilled as we were kept at a distance from any personal contacts. We walked in a park and chatted about who knows what. Then we did what we thought was a natural thing, and invited them to our hotel for dinner. Very American. They had a look of horror, as did our guide when we asked her. We were told it would have to be approved by ... someone. The afternoon passed, and apparently approval was gotten and the girls came to dinner. So we did have a touch of what it meant to live there.

We also went to where Khrushchev was buried. We toured the whole cemetery.

Q: This was by the Kremlin Wall?

BRYANT: Yes. We were shown the graves of all kinds of musicians and writers buried there. Later, I asked, “Where is Khrushchev buried?” “Oh, remember that cemetery we toured earlier? He was buried back there.” But, of course, we weren't shown him. I thought, “This is so silly.” We were near the cemetery one other time, so the three of us snuck out from the group and ran back to the cemetery, and found Khrushchev’s grave. It was turned back to the wall, when all the others faced forward. We just howled with laughter. I am sure the Russians were very glad to get rid of us.

When we first landed, we exited the plane to soldiers with rifles. I said: "Oh, this is serious. Rifles? It's just us." By the time we got back, I thought: "This whole thing is a joke. These people ... they could never control the United States. We are not going to sit there and just swallow whatever we are told." After that, I thought it was absurd to be afraid of the USSR. Nonetheless, we did all applaud when our plane landed back in the United States.

Coincidentally, my future husband was a young Marine in the 70's, and went on some sort of exchange trip to the U.S.S.R. about the time I was there. His opinion of Soviet power was pretty much the same as mine.

Q: Okay, you go to Florence. You are in the middle of the Red Belt. How did you see these big signs "Volte Communist" (Communist Times) and all of that? Did that intrude on you at all?

BRYANT: No, not at all; absolutely not. We saw all the banners everywhere, particularly as you went further south in Italy, but no, I kind of just shrugged it off as another political party. After going to Russia, I never felt threatened at all.

Q: Did you get a feel on the Russian trip that so much is primitive there? Were you able to get out into the countryside?

BRYANT: No. We were very carefully guarded. We were always trying to sneak out and do something wrong, just because they were trying so hard to control us. We so obviously could not be controlled, and the thought of their trying to control the U.S. was absurd.

For example, when we were in Kiev, the guide didn't want us to go to church. We wanted to see an Orthodox Church service. On Saturday evening, we asked our guide for a bus to go to Church on Sunday morning ... a free time on our schedule. Ludmilla, our guide said, "Oh, I am sorry, there is no way to get a bus to go to a church." We all rolled our eyes and said, "Okay, that's fine. We'll walk." At Sunday breakfast, she said, "We have come up with a great opportunity to go on a factory tour this morning." Our whole table burst out laughing. Who are you kidding? "No, thanks, Ludmilla, we are going to walk to church." Poor Ludmilla, I don't think we realized what trouble she could get in.

Q: Did you run into campus communists, or campus student ... ? Were you sort of isolated in your honors thing that you didn't get the ... ?

BRYANT: Campus communists, radicals ... they were probably there ... just another part of the scene, though. Nothing that I took particular note of.

Q: Let's talk about the Italian thing. How did this work?

BRYANT: It was a program run by Florida State University. We lived in a little *pensione*, and walked to school across Florence. This meant we got to walk daily back and forth

across Florence, one of the most magnificent places on earth. We ate pasta every day. I studied history, archeology and Italian language. The archeology inspired me to work on a Roman dig in England several years later, on a program through Oxford University.

Q: Were you able to get much feel for the politics of Italy at the time?

BRYANT: I was not the least bit interested in the politics of Italy at the time. I was more interested in touring around Italy; again, the history, the archeology, the sights, the food. I had a wonderful Italian boyfriend who spoke no English, which was the best way to learn Italian.

Q: Absolutely.

BRYANT: He had a little Fiat Cinquecento (Fiat 500), and picked me up from school every day. I had my dictionary, and he would want me to talk. I got really fast with that dictionary when I needed a word. The language, and learning the culture, the history, and seeing the beauty of Italy and other parts of Europe were what interested me. The politics of contemporary Italy held no interest.

Q: Did you ever get down to Naples?

BRYANT: Yes, oh yes, with my roommate. We went everywhere; any chance we got, we were gone. We went to Naples, and we were looking for a place to stay cheaply, of course. You know, it had to be under \$5, probably. Somebody found us a room over the Communist Party headquarters and we thought that was kind of spooky. But we got our \$2 room, and it was fine.

Q: Did the drug scene intrude on you at all, anywhere in college, or was it around you, or ...?

BRYANT: It was around. Apparently it was around in high school. Friends of mine from high school, tell me about it. They said, "Oh, so-and-so, he was on more drugs than you can imagine." I had no knowledge of it. In college, sororities were big. I did go through sorority rush, but decided that was not for me. You went to pledge meetings, with all these rules like you couldn't cross your legs, or you had to have to staff the house phone... all these initiation rites. I thought, "I just want to study, I don't want to do this silliness." So I never joined. I am sure there was a lot more drug taking than I noticed, but I was never into it. Being out of control of my brain just didn't appeal to me.

Q: Were you, by the time you were moving up, again when you came back—you graduated school in 1974—at all interested in politics?

BRYANT: Oh, yes. 1974? Very much so!

Q: Where did you fall politically?

BRYANT: Well, by that time, I of course wanted Nixon out, o-u-t, out. I watched the Watergate hearings, gavel-to-gavel; just glued to the television. I remember I was eating my cottage cheese, sitting in front of the TV, when Alexander Butterfield mentioned the taping system. Everyone went, “What? The taping system?” That was another one of those moments that stick in your head.

Earlier, I'd been interested in politics because of the national party conventions held in Miami. I went in 1968 with my little sister, Patsy. I used to drag her along with me since I couldn't go alone to things. (I also dragged her to many a Miami Dolphins game in the 1960s; I was a huge fan and still am). On TV, we saw Nixon arrive at the airport and I said, “Hey, let's get in the car and go over to the beach and see him.” This, of course, was an era in which the national party convention still had suspense.

Q: Norman Mailer wrote a book about this.

BRYANT: So I said to Patsy, “Let's go over and watch arrivals!” We hopped in the car, and somehow on the causeway going across to the beach, our car got in where it wasn't supposed to be. We ended up driving across the causeway side-by-side with the Nixon car. We were waving and waving, everyone laughing at the mix up. Of course, now they probably would have shot us. But then it was just funny. The police came and casually waved us away after a while.

There was a taxi strike on Miami Beach, and I would go over there and ferry candidates to the convention hall from the hotels just for fun. The last night of the convention, when Nixon was going to give his acceptance speech and nominate Agnew, someone gave Patsy and me tickets to go to the convention. There were riots in Miami (again this was 1968). I said to Patsy, “This is a moment in history; we have to go.” We were supposed to be home by dark because of the situation. Patsy said, “Oh yeah, okay, call our parents and tell them we aren't going home.” I said, “Oh, no, I can't, I can't. Patsy, you call them and tell them.” So she called them and told them we weren't coming home; that, “Mary Nell says this is a moment in history and we have to go.” We went to the convention, and my parents actually saw Patsy on TV. Her ticket was for the convention floor. I was way off in the wings somewhere. When we got home, my father called out from the back room saying, “Mary Nell, keys please.” And that was all there was to it. I think they understood, too, that it was an opportunity.

Then in 1972, the Republican Convention was also in Miami, and I got a job as an usher on the candidate floor. The result was pretty much a given, then. All the attendees did was get drunk and collect buttons. Each delegation had their state button. There were two things that interested the attendees that I could see as an usher. One was to collect buttons the most popular being, “Have you seen a Virgin?” for the U.S. Virgin Islands. I was continually asked, “Do you know where to get the Virgin Island buttons?” “No, I don't.” The other question was, “Can you tell me where the Flying Elephant Lounge is?” So I was a little disillusioned by politics then. This is how we nominate our president? These guys are running around—mostly guys of course—collecting buttons and going to the Flying Elephant Lounge. That was 1972.

Q: You're moving up to 1974 when you graduated. Where were you pointed?

BRYANT: Graduate school. I wasn't ready to leave college yet. I hadn't had enough, so I went straight into a master's program for social studies education, secondary education.

Q: This was basically to get a teacher's certificate?

BRYANT: An MA (Master of Arts degree), with a teaching certificate.

Q: How long did that take?

BRYANT: Just a year.

Q: How did you find that?

BRYANT: Very boring.

Q: Was it a lot of theory?

BRYANT: Yes; and frankly, not at all challenging.

Q: It seems to be a pattern for that. Obviously there are exceptions, but this was not the most exciting.

BRYANT: No. I took the minimum courses I needed to for certification. For the rest I took graduate seminars in history, where we would sit around a table and argue whether or not FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) knew we were going to be attacked at Pearl Harbor. Profound issues like that I found more exciting.

Q: You got yours by 1975? Run through the Watergate thing ...

BRYANT: Fascinating! I was glued to anything about Watergate.

Q: I was overseas. I was in Greece at the time, and the Greeks really didn't get it.

BRYANT: I bet they didn't.

Q: In fact, almost everywhere—"So your government was doing a little bit of espionage work on the other parties; what's the big deal?"

BRYANT: Yes, I can imagine.

Q: In the same way with the Clinton debacle ...

BRYANT: Clinton, it's the same thing. Nobody knows what you are talking about. They

didn't get it. I know, I know.

Q: Well, were you looking towards teaching in Florida? Or were you really towards teaching?

BRYANT: Well, I was still looking towards teaching. In Alachua County, where I had done my student teaching, they weren't taking any more applications for teachers. Luckily for me, a temporary position opened at Buchholz High School in Gainesville, where I'd done my student teaching, and they called me to ask if I'd take the job. You bet. I called to get the application—in those days you didn't look it up on the Internet, fill it out, file it—and they said, “Well, we're not taking any applications.” I said, “I have the job, I just need the application.” I guess they also didn't have to go through a process of numerical ranking and taking the top person. I taught history, American government, and civic education.

Q: This was where?

BRYANT: Still in Gainesville.

Q: Gainesville, you were saying, is a university town and that is it, pretty much? What type of students were you getting?

BRYANT: There was a “town-and-gown” situation in Gainesville, so you ran into the town when you got out into the high school. The teachers were great. But once I got into the classroom, I learned a couple of things about myself. One, I thought I would like to teach the advanced students, the advanced-placement, college prep-type courses. I discovered I didn't like that at all. I liked teaching the exact opposite, because you could make a difference. You could see the light bulbs go on. It was a challenge to inspire. You could try to get the students interested in something and hopefully see progress, which is much more rewarding than teaching those in advanced placement. They already got it, and did not need you to advance.

Q: They are on their way.

BRYANT: Yes. So I learned that about myself. The bigger the problem, the slower the learner, the more I liked it.

Q: How long did you teach?

BRYANT: Only half a year, the second semester. The other thing I learned was that I didn't want to teach in public school. I found that it was more about keeping discipline, paperwork, records, and less about actual teaching. For example, So-and-so, a troublemaker, could be thrown out of the class if they missed three classes without an excuse. But, the teacher had to document each absence and call the parent each time or the student could not be disciplined—all record keeping. It was not for me. Meanwhile in graduate school, I had taken a course, on reference librarianship: being a reference

librarian in the days without Internet and computers, finding answers to all kinds of questions. I was right back in the FBI; I was right back in detective work.

Q: Looking for those clues.

BRYANT: Clues, finding the answers; I loved it. Just give me any question and I will find the answer. I said, "My God, where has this been all my life? This is what I want to do." By this point, I was a little more focused, and was aimed at a good job, where I could really be challenged with questions. I looked around, and the best schools at the time were the University of Chicago and Chapel Hill. After being unimpressed at an interview at Chapel Hill, I applied to Chicago. Given my mother's having being raised in Chicago, Chicago was like a second home to me. I was offered a 50-percent scholarship, so there I went. But first I took time off to backpack around the world before I ...

Q: Okay, let's talk about this. How old were you then?

BRYANT: I was probably 24 or 25, something like that, mid-20's. It's where I fell in love with Afghanistan.

Q: When I was in Greece in the early 70's, I used to deal with people who came out of Afghanistan. We visited them in jail.

BRYANT: I stayed away from the drugs.

Q: How does one sort of set about backpacking? Did you have a companion, or did you just go on your own?

BRYANT: Well, once again, it was by chance. I saw posted somewhere at University of Florida, an ad to study at Oxford University in England for a summer, a program in archeology. Having studied archeology in Italy, and loving it, I decided to go. It was fascinating; wonderful. I did some work at the university, at the beginning and end, but in the middle, I worked on a dig, living in a little pup tent with cows all around. We were digging up a Roman villa outside of St. Albans, north of London. We found umpteen layers of occupation back before Roman times into Celtic times; some Iron Age or Bronze Age remnants as we got down further and further. It was magnificent sitting there in this huge field with the cows and the crops. I thought, "This has been like this for more than 2,000 years." It was wonderful, except we were digging out clay pits and fieldstones and hauling them out in wheel barrels. It was tough work. I thought, "Maybe this isn't what I want to do." But it was a good time.

I read the *Sunday Times* while I was in England, and read a little ad that said, "We run open, flatbed trucks back and forth from London to Kathmandu at minimal cost." You could sign on to ride on this truck. I thought, wow, "That sounds terrific." I kept exploring the options, and eventually signed up and went.

Q: How did you find the flatbed truck routine?

BRYANT: Oh, it was an adventure! We went all through Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan. It was a group of primarily Europeans, all who, rather like me, just signed on. There were Swiss, Dutch, and a lot of English. I think the Brits predominated. I am still friends with one of the British women who was on the trip. We went on this open truck; camping out everywhere. At certain places where it was scary, we would post guards and rotate guards all night. We'd shop in the markets and do our own cooking. We formed into teams who took turns cooking, cleaning, or whatever. We pretty much lived off the land.

Q: Was there somebody who drove the truck who kind of knew what ...?

BRYANT: Yes, he kind of knew what he was doing. And I say that seriously. He was a bit of a wild cowboy type, which I guess is what it takes to do something like that. He wasn't any kind of expert guide. I remember I arrived in London by myself. I had a stack of Fodor's guidebooks, many that I still have—*Iran 1976; Afghanistan 1976*—and the others all laughed at me. “You can only have one little suitcase or backpack and you come with a stack of books.” So I was a big joke until we got to those countries. “Mary Nell, can I borrow your book?” “Where's the book on Afghanistan?” “Where's the book on India? ...” I think I was destined to be a librarian at that point, because I had my bookshelf. “I want the Iranian one.” The books all had vocabulary in the back. While we were camped out in the middle of nowhere and nomads and shepherds would approach us or we approach them, we would turn to the vocabulary pages and we could communicate. It was wonderful.

Q: What struck you on this trip?

BRYANT: Goodness, where would I even begin? My favorite places were Iran and Afghanistan. Absolutely loved them. I loved the people, the scenery, the history.

Q: Iran in 1976 ... three years before all hell broke loose.

BRYANT: I know. I just made it. What struck me particularly in Iran was that if you were in a city, you felt a little more tension and hostility. I was always covered and respectful; with a scarf and long sleeves. For some reason, the Swiss were less inclined to do that, causing some problems for themselves. Once you got into the countryside and among the nomads, it didn't matter what you had on; what you looked like.

Once, our truck broke down for about three days. (It broke down a lot.) So I went in a t-shirt, short skirt and top, wandering off into the Iranian hills somewhere. I came across a band of nomads surrounded by what we would call a snow fence. They were surrounded by their herds and they were boiling tea. I still have wonderful pictures of being with them. They invited me in, wanted me to sit down, and offered me tea. We used sign language. I had some of my vocabulary, but mostly sign language. The big interest of the women was not that I wasn't properly covered; they wondered if I wasn't cold with so little on. I said I was fine; I had just been washing my clothes and they were drying. And they understood, “Oh, the clothes are out on the rocks drying and that's why she has so

little on.” No problem. Then we went into Mashhad. Boy, you had to be covered there.

Q: It is a holy town.

BRYANT: Yes, and so different than being in the villages. In the little villages I had kids following me all the time. I remember sitting on a wall in a little adobe village, and the kids and I taught each other counting from one to ten, in Farsi and in English. Such openness. I was invited into mud huts— where you'd go in and there was nothing but gorgeous carpets—and invited to eat with the men. I was alone, and there was no problem, no hostility. So I find all that's going on now so tragic, because it doesn't have to be.

Q: I know. Someone I interviewed some time ago, it was on more or less that same sort of thing – (U.S. Army Colonel) Ann Wright (who had received the State Department's Award for Heroism for her work during the Sierra Leone civil war), I don't know if you ever ran across her or not.

BRYANT: The name is familiar.

Q: She resigned over the Iraq War.

BRYANT: Oh, maybe that's why I know the name.

Q: She went to Kabul and then later, on a truck more or less. Then next time she went, she was one of the people who went in to open up the post after it had been closed for so long. With all of this, did the Foreign Service come across your radar at all?

BRYANT: Absolutely! But I had this impression—I never tested it out—that I had grown up with asthma, and that I would be rejected because of that, so I didn't try. I thought I would fail the medical, so why bother. I don't have asthma anymore, and I have been in the Foreign Service. But I had some wonderful experiences I wouldn't have if I had joined the Foreign Service earlier, overseas experiences where I worked with the parliaments of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. That is truly one of the real highlights of my life; it had nothing to do with the Foreign Service.

Q: I am looking at the time. This is probably a good place to stop for this session. So you are back from your backpacking.

BRYANT: I didn't want to come back, but I had to go to school. I was going to library school in Chicago, and I had to come home.

Q: So we are back in 1976?

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: And so you are at the University of Chicago? Well, let's finish off Chicago. It was

library science?

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: What did the study consist of at that time? I am sure today it is quite different because ...

BRYANT: Today, I don't think I could pass the course. I need to go again.

Q: The computer had not come in yet, or at least it was ...

BRYANT: We had punch cards. It was the beginning of computerization, and at Chicago I remember taking a computer class using punch cards. We had to take our cards over to the computer center to run our, very basic, programs.

Q: What were you learning?

BRYANT: The University of Chicago's program was different than other schools' programs. In other schools, I believe, they taught specific skills—how to catalog, how to place orders, you know, the very technical skills of being a librarian. In Chicago, it was much more of a philosophical school. Some of my favorite courses were “The History of the Public Diffusion of Knowledge and Ideas,” and “The History of the Book.” There was a little bit about cataloging, a little bit about reference, so you at least knew what they were. But it was much more of an education around why we have libraries, and what their functions are. They did have special courses on running an academic library, and on children's literature ... and odd pair! But basically their philosophy was that you would learn the technical skills on the job.

Q: So this was basically a course of library science specific in a way? They must have had their own places where University of Chicago librarians would go and fit in well, didn't they?

BRYANT: Oh, yes. They've become directors of academic libraries. I think most of them probably went towards academic work.

Q: So, how long did you take the course?

BRYANT: I managed to drag it out to about two years. You had to write a thesis, and I chose to write on a lawsuit filed by the Justice Department against English-language publishers in 1976. The Traditional Markets Agreement, among British and American publishers, divided up territorial rights for who could publish the English language edition of a specific book in which country. The Justice Department saw this as a “restraint of trade.” It was a lawsuit to open up the publishing and book distribution industries. It was resolved by a consent decree, which created a more open market for English-language book distribution. The University of Chicago's journal, *The Library Quarterly*, wanted my paper; the school proposed that if I submitted my thesis for

publication in the journal, I wouldn't have to make it a formal thesis. Now that was a great idea, so I went ahead and had it published. ("English Language Publication and the British Traditional Market Agreement," Library Quarterly, Vol. 49. No. 4, October 1979, University of Chicago.) I did manage to drag the writing out though, because, as I said, I loved being in school.

Q: So we are up to about 1977?

BRYANT: 1978.

Q: Then where did you go?

BRYANT: I got a job at the Library of Congress; so my plot worked.

Q: Okay, so we will stop at this point. We will pick up in 1978 at the Library of Congress where this oral history will eventually be deposited.

BRYANT: Wonderful place!

Q: Today is the ninth of September, 2009. In other words, 9/9/09.

BRYANT: Oh, that's right.

Q: This is an interview with Mary Nell Bryant. Let's start where we left the last interview. You had just gone to the Library of Congress, is that right?

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: You were in the Library of Congress from when to when?

BRYANT: I was there from 1978 until 1994. The last three years of that I was detailed to a Congressional Committee working in Eastern Europe, so it was quite a different project.

Q: What were you doing when you started in 1978?

BRYANT: Well, I was incredibly fortunate. I had graduated from library school with an MA (Master of Arts degree) from the University of Chicago. At the time, the Library of Congress ran an intern program in which every year they accepted six graduates from library schools around the country and put them what they called a management-training program for about six months. The time was spent in an in-depth study of all aspects of the Library of Congress. The shock of my life was when I was chosen as one of the six. I kept thinking there must be a mistake! I got the news via Mailgram. Remember Mailgrams? I'll never forget it; we were joined by six candidates that were chosen from

within the Library.

Q: Did you find when you got to the Library of Congress with your six other librarians, were you the theorist and they all had on the nuts and bolts of the thing?

BRYANT: Oh no, they were a remarkable group. Basically, we were all in a learning mode. We would go to meetings with each division of the Library and learn about their operations. It was rather a continuation of our education. We were told that after six months they would give us a permanent job. The idea being that you would progress through the hierarchy in the Library after being given this four to six months experience.

Q: Walking through the Library of Congress cafeteria of jobs, which ones particularly appealed to you?

BRYANT: One, and one only: reference work; particularly in the Congressional Research Service (CRS). My background was all in history, and I was very interested in politics. It had never occurred to me to go to a library school until I took an elective at the University of Florida on reference work. I think I told you that when I was a little girl I had wanted to be an FBI agent, and girls weren't allowed to be FBI agents. Can you imagine? But then I discovered reference work. I said, "My goodness, this is wonderful! This is taking clues and searching out information, without the danger." I loved finding answers to questions; still do. So when I got to the Library, most all the other aspects were interesting but I wanted to do reference. You could do that either in the main reading room of the Library, or in the Congressional Research Service, which is part of the Library but operates somewhat apart in that it serves just the Congress, not the public. I ended up in Congressional Research Service doing reference.

Q: What do congressmen need to know? I mean, I would think that it would be awfully legal.

BRYANT: Oh no, not necessarily. Congressional offices would call for just about anything you can imagine; and more. Things have changed somewhat with the Internet in that those in Congress don't ask as many small questions as they used to. A lot of CRS work is policy analysis, policy alternatives, analyzing or proposing legislative alternatives, taking historical looks at a particular policy, suggesting policy options. Beyond that, Congressmen want facts and figures to supplement their speeches or their remarks with regard to a bill or issue.

Congress, and hence CRS does a lot of constituent work now, as they did then. Constituents would call in for information on anything in the world, knowing that the Library of Congress was right there. My specialties during the time, two major ones, were Central America policy and history in general. Central American policy in the 1980s meant the Salvadoran civil war, the Nicaraguan-Contra affair, the Boland Amendment, and so on. I remember I used to laugh because one of the most popular questions at the time was, "How far is Nicaragua from the United States?"

Q: President Reagan was talking about Nicaragua ...

BRYANT: The communists are at our doorstep? That was exactly it. I used to know the distance because I was asked it so often. Or they would ask for background information on incidents such as the killing of the American Maryknoll nuns in El Salvador; the massacre at El Mozote; the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero; the U.S. mining of Nicaraguan harbors, or various characters in play in Central America. There were so many: Daniel Ortega, the Sandinistas, the Contras, Commandante Zero (Edén Pastora), Roberto D'Aubuisson ...

Q: ... from El Salvador

BRYANT: That's right. A leader of the Salvadoran death squads of the time suspected of orchestrating the assassination of Archbishop (Óscar) Romero and countless others. There were so many players at the time and Congressmen constantly wanted background information to sort them out.

Q: So many things are happening, and they are called upon all the time. Now, one question: Can you tell me what the name of William Tecumseh Sherman's horse was?

BRYANT: I could find it for you.

Q: Well, I often wondered because I think, and I may be wrong, Grant's horse is Cincinnati and Lee's, of course, was Traveller, and ...

BRYANT: That's the kind of question you could call CRS for. And it would come to me.

Q: How would you go at this?

BRYANT: In the time that I was working there, I would look up biographies of Sherman. One of the greatest joys of my life as an employee of the Library of Congress was having free reign of the stacks. I would go to the section in the stacks that had Civil War books or his biography, and I would sit down on the floor in the stacks and start pulling books and flipping through them.

I remember doing just that sort of thing many times for Senator (Daniel Patrick) Moynihan (Democrat from New York). Senator Moynihan always liked to bring in historical models to whatever he was going to talk about. I still remember his asking about information on the decline of the whale oil industry as different fuels began to take the place of whale oil. There is a story pertinent today. I thought, "The whale oil industry? How does he know this?" But, sure enough, I found wonderful things in the library. Another time, he wanted to know who accompanied Teddy Roosevelt on a one-day horseback ride from the White House to Manassas, Virginia—Roosevelt wanted to show that it could be done in one day. I can't remember what point Moynihan was trying to make, but I sat in the stacks and flipped through books until I got the answer.

Q: Part of the whale oil loss is connected to Teddy Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt's uncle was the prime purchaser for the Confederate Navy in England, and he helped the Confederates buy several of the raiders. The raiders got loose in the North Pacific, where we were doing much of our whaling, and essentially destroyed the American whaling fleet. Just about at that time, oil was coming out of Pennsylvania and all of that. So, there is your Roosevelt oil connection; how's that?

BRYANT: That's pretty good! I'm glad the senator didn't ask me that. I would have had to call you. There was a lot of interesting work. It was great fun. One of the other topics that I covered was the Nazis. You might ask, "Why does CRS need a Nazi expert?" Various bills would come before Congress, and Congressmen would say, "I am going to get an example of how the Nazis did this, or didn't do this, as my ultimate argument to show the evil/good of this policy." It became comical after a while because I would get these questions for which the Nazi argument could be made either way, i.e. "Can you tell how the Nazis forced this, or didn't allow it?" An obvious one was abortions—the Nazis both forced abortions and prohibited abortions, depending on who the person was. I toyed with answering only the question I was asked—"Give evidence that the Nazis forced abortion"—but, in true CRS fashion, I warned the requestors that Nazis both forced and prohibited abortions. Take your pick.

The other day when I saw someone at a town meeting on health insurance, a woman stood up with a picture of Obama drawn up like Hitler, because he was going to force health insurance. I said, "Oh my goodness, it hasn't changed. They still follow that example as the ultimate." But she wasn't a congressman.

Q: Did you ever find yourself playing both sides of the court? I mean, a bill was coming up and you would get the Democratic and Republican sides saying, "Give me the facts. I want to oppose or support this bill."

BRYANT: CRS prided itself in providing balanced information that, in a certain respect, makes a lot of their reports boring to read because there is no passion in them. But they would give the facts on this side, and the facts on that side. It was up to the congressman or senator to use and highlight the sections they wanted. We stayed above the political fray, and that's why *CRS Reports* and CRS work are so respected and always have been.

My boss in CRS was of one political party and I was of another. So, particularly as we wormed our way through the issues of the Salvadoran civil war and the Iran-Contra Affair, we figured that by the time I answered the question and he approved it, it had to come out somewhere in the middle; so we were okay.

There was only one time I was very disappointed in CRS: when they let a Congressman dictate what CRS handed out on a subject. One congressman ordered what specific materials to be handed out with regard to the issue of the Armenian massacre in Turkey in World War I, and we did his bidding.

Q: This is the third reel that is still around. There is a booklet published by the

BRYANT: For question that came in on the topic, we could only send this packet that was approved by—and I can't remember the name—this congressman. I railed against it, saying, “This is against our principles.” And I was told to be quiet, of course.

Q: This is still around. The Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi (Democrat from California) is from a heavily Armenian district. The Armenians in Glendale are particularly powerful; Armenian Americans.

BRYANT: I don't recall the Congressman's name, but it was a man, and definitely not Nancy Pelosi.

Q: As a matter of fact, I remember talking to the police in Los Angeles as I was doing a book on the American Consular Service. They were saying that they used to park an old black and white police car near the Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles to make it look like he had a police guard because they couldn't give it to him full-time. The Armenian national army, or something, had actually killed a consular officer in Santa Barbara. A booklet was published—I saw a copy of it not too long ago—of consular reports of Armenian massacres. I mean massacre of Armenians by Turks, from our consulates in Turkey in 1916 or so.

BRYANT: I hear that today there may be some softening.

Q: Well, Armenia and Turkey are getting along. It's just immigrants in the United States, I am sure this is true elsewhere, but they are 110 percent more nationalistic than the people who actually live in these countries. They go and they carry the residue of a past generation with them, like so many of the Irish Americans. They are still fighting battles that their families have ...

BRYANT: What about Cuban Americans? The younger generation is changing.

Q: It really is. Teddy Roosevelt characterized them as hyphenated Americans.

BRYANT: Of course, we still do. I wanted to tell you of some of the more absurd questions we were asked at CRS. In addition to the serious questions, congressional staff asked questions; some from constituents, some from themselves. They were insane. I kept a list of these questions that I found particularly amusing; that was part of what made it fun working there. We had questions such as, “Was Beethoven black?” I got that one. Now how do you prove he wasn't, when you think about it? Another one was a man who wanted to know where he could buy a gas mask. He was going to give it to his wife as a present. In another, Abraham Lincoln appeared to a constituent in a dream, and told this man to write the definitive biography of Lincoln's life. Because such a biography had not yet been written, he asked if we could please send everything we had. The poor Congressional staffers; I could just imagine. They would just send these requests over to us and say, “You deal with this.” One woman said she heard the government was going to plant a chip in her head with all her information so that she could be followed

everywhere. I remember that now because, in the early 1980s, late '70s, that seemed so bizarre. Where did she get an idea like that? And, of course, we are putting RFRD (radio frequency identification device) chips in everything; although not in us, yet. But she doesn't seem so far afield now.

Q: People came to me as vice consul in Germany, for example, and saying, "The Rockefellers are sending transmissions to me and it's playing in my head." I said, "Some people say if you wear an aluminum hat, that will stop it." They thought it was a good idea, and off they went. I felt this was a fairly standard answer.

BRYANT: Good answer! We would get a lot of those questions. In Congress, service to your constituents is very important.

Q: I imagine you get things like, "This is my first year in college, and I have to write an essay on Gerard Manley Hopkins. Would you please do it for me?"

BRYANT: Those were the hardest, especially from a staff person or the congressman's child. I say congressman because most of them were men at the time. Those were the hardest ones because we felt we shouldn't assist with that. But our management would usually say, "Just provide limited information." We would get questions, you know, that the congressman's wife was going to a masquerade ball, so could we provide pictures of such-and-such a costume. One Congressional wife wanted to know if it was safe to use contraceptive gel under an electric blanket. We were always told, "They pay your salary; just do it." But we were never backed up on the absurd. The obvious abuses of the system were there, but I guess our management always felt they were small enough not to make waves.

Q: Well, it gave you giggles.

BRYANT: Yes. Sometimes they were very annoying because they would put deadlines on them of, "in one hour I need this." That was particularly infuriating when you knew it wasn't important and you were already juggling other deadlines. Of course, you could not always tell. I have a list of some of the questions such as: Which famous painters throughout history used cadmium-based paints? It was for a protest against a recycling bill that would ban cadmium in paints. Or, "What were the weather conditions in Annapolis, Maryland for September 1781;" "Did ancient Sparta ever build walls of "Provide examples of news stories which discriminate against Vietnam veterans," "Provide historical examples of private groups in the U.S. supporting rebel forces in other countries;" "Verify that in 1905 the infant mortality rate in Britain was as high as in Calcutta;" "Provide quotes from leaders of the American Revolution that parallel statements made by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua;" or, "How can you quickly get a four-year-old Soviet child to the U.S. for emergency medical care?" You never knew what would come up next.

Q: I would imagine the basic job would be, say on a health care bill, there would be questions about what has been done in other countries and all. I mean, there must be a

tremendous amount of research on any bill, civil rights bill, anything you can think of.

BRYANT: Well, I'll tell you the truth, there was never much asking about what's done in other countries. Our Congress would look more to historic precedence of our own, and not very much in comparison to other countries. I guess that is American arrogance. Historic precedence in the U.S. was more of the issue, I would say. When I worked on behalf of our Congress in Eastern Europe, developing their parliaments after the fall of the Soviet Union; even those countries were constantly looking for American models, which did not necessarily fit.

Q: I would think that there would be an affinity, or maybe a rivalry, between the Library of Congress and the National Archives.

BRYANT: More of an affinity, I would think, as they play very different roles. Because I did a lot of history work and answered limited genealogy questions for constituents, I used to go to free classes over at the Archives quite a bit to learn about their collections. Mostly we would refer constituents. The Archives has a wonderful book, *Guide to the National Archives in the United States*, describing the contents of each of their collections. If you were to get a request for records of particular units in a certain war, for example, you could get the general information from the Archives collection from this reference book, and then refer the person. That is another great institution, even more so now that so much is available online.

Q: How about the White House? Did they use your services?

BRYANT: Very little directly, I assume. The President's office has its own library. I don't know what they do for research and analysis work. Of course, the White House does have the entire executive branch. If they wanted to use CRS, I think they went through a senator or congressman. They would call Senator So-and-so's office and say, "Get me this from CRS."

Q: I wrote a history of the consular service and I think it would have been nice to go up to somebody like you and say, "Okay, I am writing this book on the consular service." The Archives were where most of my records were, but at the same time, I'd go to you and say, "Could you tell me how to approach this?"

BRYANT: Oh, absolutely. There are reference librarians on staff in the Library of Congress who would help you. The Library has, in addition to its main reading room, many specialized reading rooms dealing with geographical area studies, with science and technology, with genealogy, etc., and they all have specialists. They would be happy to assist you.

I remember once Senator (Charles "Mac") Mathias wanted to do some work on ...

Q: Of Maryland.

BRYANT: Yes, (Republican) of Maryland. He wanted to do some research on his genealogy, so I was called by our front office, "Would you take Senator Mathias around and help him find what he needs?" We had a wonderful day looking up information on his family roots. Genealogy is a function of the Main Library more than of CRS. In CRS, we do the actual research for the Congressmen. The Library's role is more of guiding a person to the resources they can use themselves.

I also once helped the father of Al Gore, Albert Gore, Sr., a (Democratic) senator also. It must have been in 1988, when Gore (Junior) was running for the Democratic nomination for president. The front office called me and said, "Mary Nell, the senior Al Gore would like some help with information from the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, can you help him?" Sure! I met him in the Main reading room and talked about what he was looking for. I knew the collection and topic well enough, so off we went, looking for points from the debates on the Constitution to fit his speech. It's funny; when you are a librarian people tell you all kinds of things. You are sort of a nonentity, I think.

Q: Sort of a neutral body.

BRYANT: A neutral body; that's a nicer way to put it. But I enjoy it because I heard so many things from such a variety of people. He said, "I am doing this for a speech for my son; he is running for president." As if I wouldn't know. He said: "He is running for president and I said I would give a couple of speeches for him. You know, we all sat down as a family before he made his decision and talked about the pros and cons of doing this as a family. He really felt, and we agreed with him, that he owed it to his ideals of public service and policy goals he wanted to accomplish, to make a run for it." It was a very, very touching story. And here he is, just sitting telling this librarian the inside story of how he had come to that decision. He wanted it to be in concert with his family, knowing what a burden it would be on them. I found that fascinating.

One Saturday, when I was working the desk in the Congressional Reading Room, then Congressman Newt Gingrich came in wearing jeans and a flannel shirt. We started chatting, and he said that one of the greatest things about being a congressman was having access to the Library of Congress. Years later, in 1998, I was dressing for a Marine Corps birthday ball in Palm Springs, where Rick was the guest of honor. He called to me in the shower that Gingrich had resigned. I wouldn't believe him... I thought he was just trying to get me out of the shower!

Q: You pass out information on one side of an issue; I mean, obviously you were trying to make the information neutral. But did you find yourself ever run up against people who challenged the hell out of ...?

BRYANT: Oh yes! Yes, we did. Not that often. Staff knew our approach was balanced, and they were free to use what parts suited their argument. For me, the few times there were problems it was usually over Central America issues because there were such divisions there, particularly in Nicaragua. No matter what I sent, sometimes people would get mad and complain to the front office. To me it was offensive that I would then be

called on the carpet to prove myself, to show I had sent balanced materials. I would have to reconstruct the packet of information I had sent, and have it reviewed at a higher level. I always won. Such a waste of time, and insult to my work, especially given that anything I sent always went via review to begin with.

Q: You could be called on something to you balanced. I mean, I could see someone calling and saying, "Okay, we are doing a study of Auschwitz and I'd like ..."

BRYANT: Oh, you'd like the good and the bad? Luckily, I was never asked that. Much of what we did was provide existing written information and *CRS Reports*. *CRS Reports* went through a tight review process, so you were safe with them. Often it would be a matter of supplementing the *Reports* time wise. We would try to balance summary articles from different publications. For example, articles from both the *Washington Times* and the *Washington Post*, or materials from opposing think tanks.

Q: Okay, let's take the Washington Times, the Washington Post. The Washington Post is generally a liberal magazine. The Washington Times essentially portrays itself as a right-wing counterpart to the left-wing Post.

BRYANT: Right. So I would include articles from both.

Q: Okay, but would you identify the Post as left-wing or liberal and the Times as right wing? Or would you just leave it, and let the people interpret and know the source?

BRYANT: I didn't attempt to characterize the nature of a publication. People working on the Hill knew.

Q: Well, you know, you talk about the Latin American thing and one person I interviewed was Tony (Anthony C.E.) Quainton, who was our ambassador to Nicaragua at one point. Maryknoll nuns came to see him and they were, of course, strong supporters of the Sandinistas. The head nun said, "Mr. Ambassador, can we pray?" What's he going to say? A bunch of nuns came in and they all held hands, including Tony and they prayed... Also, there was a class of people, those who supported the Sandinistas in the U.S. Called the Sandalistas. The Sandalistas were essentially American left-wingers, many of them young people wearing sandals. They were vehement on trying to find good things about Nicaragua. I am saying, in Nicaragua you can say, "Well, you know the Sandinistas are better than Somoza, but they had their own ..."

BRYANT: Their own problems?

Q: Yes.

BRYANT: (Sandinista leader) Daniel Ortega was not the best in the world, either. One of the funny things is that soon after I joined the Foreign Service, my first assignment was a regional one, based in Costa Rica and covering Central America, Columbia and Ecuador. I remember going to El Salvador for the first time around 1995 or 1996 and seeing the

Embassy that we built there.

Q: A fortress.

BRYANT: A huge fortress in this little country, built because it was going to be the “stopping point” of communism. It was huge. By the time I got there, the wars were over, and the American Government couldn't get enough people to fill the Embassy and its out buildings. They had a hard time paying their power bills. The Foreign Service agencies decided to base all regional positions in El Salvador, just to have bodies to put into this monstrosity that they'd built. It was very comical.

Q: How did you find the bureaucracy of the Library of Congress? I am familiar with the Office of the Historian at the State Department, which is somewhat comparable. They had a horrible time, still do; scandals more because of personalities than anything else. It is sort of academia, which is not noted for its really friendly ...

BRYANT: Again, I was rather cocooned in CRS. But I must say that the rest of the Library could be quite jealous of CRS, feeling that CRS had access to more and better resources. I remember once going to the Hispanic Reading Room looking for a book and being told, “You are from CRS, you are the ones who would have it, not us. You get all the money.”

Of course there are such incidents, but beyond that, I think the Library of Congress is just one of the most wonderful institutions on earth. At times, there are fights and animosities among one group and another of course. However, I think, in the long run, the Library does wonderful things; it generates some great initiatives. It's a terrific place. In my time, they had about 5,000 employees and, of course, when the budget comes, they're going to have battles as to *who gets what*.

Q: During the time you were there, up through 1994, you say you started with punch cards. What about the computerization?

BRYANT: I was at the LC at rather the dawn of computerization. The Library of Congress was a leader, truly a leader, but of course, not without hiccups. I remember that when they completed computerizing the card catalog, the Library asked people to report any discrepancies or mistakes, or any missing material. After a while they said, “Please don't send in any more reports; we can't keep up with it.” In any attempt to retrospectively convert so many records, there are going to be problems. I benefited greatly, because a lot of the records of the Nuremberg trials and the Nazis, though on the shelves, somehow didn't make it into the computer. Hence, whenever I needed to look for an answer to a Nazi question, I almost had my own private collection because no one knew the books were there.

The automation was very interesting. At one point, as I recall, the plan was to just dispose of the card catalog, the beautiful card catalog that had circled the Main Reading Room. As I remember the stories, people literally chained themselves to the card catalog so the

Library couldn't get rid of it. The card catalog added a lot to history really, particularly the older records: They had handwritten notations and other information that was not computerized. The computer and the card catalog each have their place. A compromise was finally reached, and the card catalog was put in the book stacks outside of the Main reading room. It was open to the public. I don't know where it is now; I haven't been in there in a while...

It was a long time until computer searching was accepted. People had to be trained, and then trust what they found. Just as any new technology. I remember it was about the same time that Congress was trying to automate the *Congressional Record*, putting bills online, congressional reports, legislative databases, all of that. The House of Representatives developed their database; the Senate developed their database; the Library of Congress developed their database, and they all three fought as to whose database was going to be paramount—again, a turf battle. Ultimately, the Library of Congress won out. It is their database that is used, and it has been constantly updated and revised. At the time, a bigger challenge technologically was putting the *Code of Federal Regulations* and the *Federal Register* online. Computerizing large amounts of data was difficult. Moving from micro fiche to a CD was a victory.

Q: You left before the Internet really took hold, didn't you?

BRYANT: For the most part, yes. We had online databases to search, such as *Lexis-Nexis* (a commercial database of news and legal information), but the Internet as we know it now did not exist.

I remember that in the big room where the CRS reference librarians had their desks (it looked much like a big newspaper room) we had what looked like a corner phone booth. Only it was the access to the *Lexis-Nexis* database. To use it, you sat in the booth, and connected through a dial up/modem connection. I must say that it was often used as a place to take a nap... I won't name the usual suspects.

Q: That, I assume, has changed things considerably.

BRYANT: Yes, oh yes, most definitely. We used to do a lot of photocopying to provide information to congressional offices. We then hand delivered that information in manila envelopes via scheduled deliveries by clerks who would make the rounds of the House and Senate office buildings. Now, most of that can be done via Internet and email. Requests are made, and most of the material can be gathered and packaged and sent out on by email.

Q: Just yesterday, I wanted to know when a certain movie star died. I tickled the keys and I got it immediately. I could probably find the name of General Sherman's horse.

BRYANT: You probably could; you're right. There are fewer of that sort of questions now, as people can find so much on the Internet. There have been several reorganizations of CRS in response to changing resources, and changes in the complexity of questions.

There might be fewer questions, but they are more complex and often require the use of resources such as specialized commercial databases not available to Congressional offices.

Q: During the time you were with the Library of Congress, were there any episodes or cases or situations that particularly seared your soul that you recall?

BRYANT: There was one that I was very proud of. It seemed that in CRS every time Congress would say, "We are cutting your budget," our management would say, "That's fine; we can do twice as much with less money." No backbone. (American historian) Daniel Boorstin was the 12th Librarian of Congress at the time, and Congress said, "We are going to cut your budget." Dr. Boorstin said, "Okay, fine. I'm going to cut evening and weekend hours..." This of course caused a great hue and cry, "You are becoming an elitist institution. The working man can't go to the library." Just the reaction Dr. Boorstin wanted, I assume. He got his money back. And I thought, "That's the way you fight them. You don't roll over and play dead, and say kick me again." It was wonderful. That was sometime in the 1980s.

Q: How did you end up getting into the Foreign Service?

BRYANT: I entered the Foreign Service via another major chapter of my life, working for the House Special Task Force on Eastern European Parliamentary Development, created by Democratic Congressman Martin Frost (of Texas). It was known as the Frost Task Force, and began in 1990. I still feel that this is the chapter of my working life of which I am most proud, and where I feel I truly made a lasting, positive difference in the international field.

Q: 1989 was the year that the Iron Curtain sort of collapsed, and the various satellite states sort of got on their own, and out from under the Soviet tutelage.

BRYANT: Out from Soviet tutelage is putting the situation lightly. Here you had all of Eastern Europe, and the Baltics, suddenly free, but with no established government or institutional structures to move into the vacuum. It all happened so fast. Can you imagine? After the celebration stops, what do you do?

I so admired Congressman Frost for his vision ... and action. He saw the need for strengthening, or really creating, serious functioning parliamentary institutions in these countries in order to establish, develop and maintain democracy. With no fanfare, he convinced the Speaker of the House to form a bipartisan committee for Eastern European parliamentary development, and found funding and chose staff of the Library of Congress to implement the program. We were given three areas of work: library and research services; computerization, and training. Initially, the program covered Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. It was soon expanded to cover the Baltic countries—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia—and later Albania, Bulgaria and Romania.

Little did I know when I got a phone call from my boss at the time, asking if I were free

over Labor Day weekend (1990), what was in store. I said I had plans to be out of town, but what did she have in mind? "Would you go to Eastern Europe on a fact finding mission?" she asked. Are you kidding? Of course I would go. And so it began. I spent the next three plus years, working in six countries in Eastern Europe and the three Baltic countries, developing the information capabilities of their parliaments.

In retrospect, it is amazing what a small team we had, to take on such a huge mission. Initially, the Frost Task Force staff went to Hungary and Czechoslovakia. I was there to develop library and research services, the others looking at computers and training. Our specific role was to meet with parliamentarians to discuss their needs and see how we could assist. The challenge was to help transform parliaments that had been nothing more than rubber-stamp institutions, meeting once a year to approve the Soviet platform, into fully-functioning legislative bodies. They knew they wanted to follow a Western model, but were operating in an information vacuum. The then-Chancellor of the Lithuania (and former member of the Soviet Olympic basketball team), Algimantas Pavilionis, said to me, "It is kind of like creating a suit for a man who hasn't been born yet. All the institutions, economic system, the legal system, the electoral system, the education system, you know, how do you do that?" Well, we were certainly going to help. Some of the countries had democratic roots to look back too, but not all and so much damage was done in between.

How very, very bleak it was, in terms of resources, materials and know-how. You know there was not even a hotel to stay in in Prague, when we first visited. We were housed in someone's home far outside of the city and took a train in and out. I'll always remember being stranded in town late one evening, and walking across the Charles Bridge in the moonlight, with only a musician playing the *Moldau*, the symphonic poem, on what? A violin, probably? Oh yes, a taxi finally took me back to the house ... 1990 Prague and Budapest were empty, quiet cities at night ... so different than today.

Back to what we found at the parliaments. ... As the sole librarian of the group, I was amazed to hear over and over again from the Members of Parliament when asked about their needs as legislators, they named library development as a top priority. They saw open access to information as key to their future, and libraries as their access point. I remember later, during the 1992 Olympics, a Soviet (yes Soviet) athlete's being asked to give a defining statement about himself. To my utter astonishment, his answer was a total non sequitur, something to the effect that, "The problem with my country is a lack of real information." So it was in Eastern Europe in 1990. A Hungarian librarian told me the country's legislators had bandages over their eye, solving problems in the dark.

On our first visit, we found that a 1946 *Americana* and a 1957 *Britannica* comprised the Czechoslovakian parliament's collection of Western encyclopedias. A new *Britannica* would have cost more than their library's entire annual operating budget (and yes, we still used hard copy books then!). Photocopiers and fax machines were for the most part forbidden in libraries, or anywhere for that matter ... dangerous disseminators of information! The Czech Library Association had long been banned as being subversive.

In the Czech Parliamentary Library, we were taken to the room of the banned books! Truly astounding. Among them was, if you can believe it, the *World Almanac*? Why? The facts it gave were contrary to those given by the Soviets.

I thought of Ludmilla, my family's Intourist guide in the Soviet Union in 1972. One of her stories was that the U.S.S.R. did not need grain from the U.S. They were quite self-sufficient. They bought grain from the U.S. only to help feed their satellite states. (This was the great grain sale from the U.S. to the U.S.S.R. just publicized that year). She really believed it. Oh, that she could have entered the banned books room!

The Members of Parliament almost worshipped the idea of having current books of useful subjects. Later, in Lithuania, the head researcher told me she all but made the MPs (Members of Parliament) kneel before the books before she checked them out.

Over the years, I have remained friends with several of the parliamentary librarians I worked with in the early 1990s, and have visited their modern libraries of today. What they have accomplished is beyond astonishing to me. They certainly took the ball and ran.

Q: Let's take a look at this whole library research center. I mean, people who don't know where they have been are kind of blind, aren't they? But let's say, the British, the French and, at that time, the West Germans, what did they have?

BRYANT: I am most familiar with the British because their House of Commons Library functions in much the same way as CRS. In fact, later on in my work with the Task Force, I escorted a group of Eastern European librarians to London for orientations seminars at the Commons Library.

Q: Were they connected to the British Library?

BRYANT: No.

Q: The British Library would seem to be the equivalent to our Library of Congress.

BRYANT: No, not at all, really. The British Library is a legal deposit for United Kingdom publications, plus additional collections chosen by subject.

Q: And they collect all the books, on one side. But the service to the Parliament ...

BRYANT: Parliament is totally separate as it is in most countries. Exceptions are in Hungary, where the two types of libraries are together, and in Estonia, which ended up with sort of a hybrid situation.

Q: These countries (Eastern Europe and the Baltics) there was a central library wasn't there?

BRYANT: Yes, in most. But, there was almost no money for books. The libraries were some of the dingiest places you have ever seen. In addition to collecting materials published in their own countries, a major role of national libraries is to exchange materials with other countries. The Eastern Europe and the Baltics had neither funds nor materials to really exchange. Everything was old. Automation was in full swing in the West by then but in Eastern Europe, there were no computers in the libraries. I was amazed to see how tightly any current, contemporary information was controlled.

Q: Was there any move on the part of any of these small states, particularly with the computer age coming along, to have what amounts to a joint library, or joint information center?

BRYANT: No. In fact, the Polish Parliament (the Sejm and the upper house, the Senat) insisted on having separate facilities for their versions of a House and Senate. We couldn't talk them into combining. We weren't there to dictate; we were there to give ideas and offer what help we could. After all, our Congress went through similar growing pains when they computerized, and they still have a House library and a Senate library, in addition to the Library of Congress.

The quickest action we could take was to supply the parliamentary libraries with new books. For that, I raided the Library of Congress exchange collection (books made available to other national libraries on an exchange basis) to select titles I thought would be useful.

In our first meeting with the Members of Congress on the committee, we provided each Member with a binder of information on what we had accomplished and what we were planning. Included was a list of the books I had sent. The dagger looks I got from all, when one congressman, perusing the list, bluntly asked, "Why are we sending a biography of Frank Zappa to Prague?" All eyes were on me as I answered, "Because President Havel has named Frank Zappa as his cultural advisor to the West." That was the end of the questions on books.

I then developed a bibliography of books for the parliamentary libraries from which they could choose, which was made into a Committee Print by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. I guess it is an antique by now. You might ask why we provided primarily English-language materials. What they wanted were English-language materials, because anything in Russian was of no interest. They wanted things on how to run a pluralist society; a market economy, an open government. These were not topics about which there was a lot published in Russian.

I also made an attempt to get European Union materials as potential models. You'd asked about looking for models and that was one of the main questions. Interestingly enough, they still wanted the model from the U.S., as opposed to Western Europe, because we were what they wanted to be. Often I would say, "You know, the U.S. model doesn't work because there is not a match." Many of the issues that they were developing new law for are, in the United States, state laws, not federal laws. So if they were dealing with

criminal law, family law, that kind of thing, it's much more appropriate to focus at the state level. We ended up, in fact, working with several state legislatures that had similar sizes and structures.

In fact, I took a group of librarians to the conference of the National Association of State Legislatures in San Diego, California in 1993. I went with about six people from different countries in Eastern Europe so they could meet with their counterparts at the state level and visit local libraries. We had quite an exchange going back and forth in terms of training and learning. Rick had just moved back to Camp Pendleton, near San Diego, and a highlight for several of the Polish librarians was to ride around in his Jeep Wrangler, pretending they were in World War II...that and seeing the Pacific Ocean, a marvel they never thought they'd see.

Fascinating, fascinating time, to see how dampened initiative had been; how showing any initiative was feared; how creativity was squashed. You had to work not just the technical issues of how do you order books, how do you organize them, how do you make a catalog; but you had to work on getting over the fear of showing initiative. You had to equally work with Members of Parliament to explain to them that if they are going to be decision makers they needed to have information and should be empowered to ask for it. A Lithuanian told me that under the Soviets, the idea of service was to offer no service, something I certainly experience in my own travels to the U.S.S.R.

Someone in Estonia told me that, according to the Soviet government, one of the most dangerous machines in Estonia was the fax machine (tele copier). It was the most carefully-guarded machine, because with it, you could distribute information. The fact that we were giving them fax machines made their jaws drop.

The Czechoslovakian parliament put together a committee of Members of Parliament to work with us. I had the biggest argument with them about putting a photocopier in the library. We were buying it; I wasn't asking them to buy it. They just could not understand why anybody would want a copier in a library. What possible use could there be? The idea of having a copier in public that people could use freely to copy what they wanted to, material that wasn't cleared by somebody else, was another amazing concept to them. So I give such credit to the Members of Parliament and to their staffs who overcame not just the material hurdles but the psychological hurdles they had to work through to become really democratic, progressive institutions in which the librarians took the first step. We as librarians anticipate information needs, put together information, send it to the committees, to the members; a totally different mentality in ways of operation. And I will tell you, we found some fabulous people. Many of them are still there in the libraries, doing a terrific job.

Q: Well, it was basically fertile ground, but it took a change in attitude.

BRYANT: In attitude, yes; you couldn't just dump the books there and expect them to know what to do with them. So training was a big part of the program, that and personnel exchanges. We began to train people in searching for information, people who had had no

access to it before, and were, in fact, prohibited from having basic information. We had to train the parliamentarians to look for it, to ask for it, expect it.

Q: Did you find yourself up in this sort of a generational thing, you know, sort of people my age saying, "Well, we never did it that way," as opposed to the young people who are sort of jumping on the computer age?

BRYANT: No, I didn't find that. They were all so hungry for information and valued access to information that had been denied them for so long. It was Mr. Pavilionis, the Chancellor of Parliament in Lithuania, who said the only way that he survived was by envisioning that he was living in a circus; and if you couldn't look at everything as being a circus and being funny, you would kill yourself. The Frost Task Force was considered so important to the country, that once, when spending was slowed down as only our Congress can do, I was literally assaulted by a Lithuanian TV crew as I left a dinner in Vilnius. Reporters shoved microphones in my face with cameras rolling, asking why the program was being stopped. I carefully explained that the program was not being stopped.

Everybody was so starved for something new, honest, different, that there was not a generation gap at the time. In fact, I remember that in Albania, one of my favorite places on earth, in 1993 when I first went there, they had nothing in the way of basic resources. I mean they had nothing, you just cannot imagine. The new speaker of the parliament, Pjetër Arbënor (1992-97) had been a political prisoner for 26 years. Released in 1989 at the age of 54, he continued to fight the Albanian communist regime, and at its fall, was elected to parliament. When we first met him, he said he kept asking about how good a photocopier was. He barely knew what one was. We kept saying, "What do you mean, how good? We need to know what you want to use it for, to answer your question." He brought out this pile of blue books; they look like the blue books you used for college exams. They were his diaries of his 26 years in prison, written in the tiniest, tiniest, tiniest print because they would only give him so much paper. I am amazed they gave him any at all. He said, "This is 26 years of my life, and the ink is beginning to fade. Can you fix that?" We said, "We will fix that one way or another, count on it." I had to go out in the hallway and cry; I said, "Excuse me, please." We got him the copier. He said writing was his only way to keep his sanity. Even without resources, the parliament did have a librarian. I worked with together with her (to this day we are in touch) to put together a library collection for the Albanian Parliament. Then I found inexpensive software that's the type you prepare a bibliography with, to make a simple catalog. I put it on a laptop, and told the Speaker about it. He wanted to see it. And he was fascinated. He could type in a word and find all their books on a specific this subject. Magic.

No, there was no generation gap.

Q: I would have thought that you would have been under either your own personal injunction or official injunction, being careful not to condemn the Soviet system, so leave that alone. So you weren't trying to say, "Oh wasn't this awful," but just sort of do your own thing and say, "This is the way you could do it," but avoid over criticism of the

Soviet system.

BRYANT: Oh, we didn't have to criticize the Soviet system; they did that. Who were we to criticize the Soviet system? They lived it. That's an interesting point, because when it came to discussing the Soviet system, people told me so many, many stories. I'll give you just a few examples, but there are many more.

An older Hungarian librarian told me of the horrors of the female members of his family when the Soviet troops entered Budapest in 1945. How they covered their faces with soot and hid in basements to avoid rape ... some successful, some not.

A Czech librarian, who has remained a friend through the years, told me that the Soviets told them that Americans injected bananas with poison. Why? The Soviets could not supply bananas, so it was best to just say we injected them with poison! She had had a chance to escape with her husband to Canada, but at the last minute, she could not leave her home. They survived by what she called internal emigration, i.e. immigrating to their small circle of friends who could be trusted. I still have a several of her personal letters from 1993 (yes, handwritten), where she talks about the slow withdrawal of Russian troops and the "terrible destruction" they were leaving behind.

I worked in Lithuania when the Russians literally turned off the gas supply to the Baltics. It was only late fall, but was way below freezing ... and there was no heat. Perhaps this was 1993? I remember snow blowing into my hotel room in Vilnius. I met with the American ambassador, who told me to please keep my coat on. How could the Russians still have such a stranglehold? But they did. While I was working in Vilnius, with down coat and fur lined boots, the library staff kept wanting to take me to see some historic sites in the city. I kept refusing, saying there was so much work to be done. Finally, I realized that they wanted to show me things they were proud of; positive reflections of pre-Soviet Lithuania. It was a good lesson. They did not just want to receive but to give. And I learned that the car we rode in had heat! One of the librarians in Latvia took me to her family's cottage in the countryside where they had a wood-burning stove so that I could thaw out.

The Russians had cleverly created a transportation system that put the Baltic capitals at the end of spokes with Moscow at the center. This made traveling from one Baltic country to another difficult. The parliaments would drive me from one country to another to hand me off. Once, entering Riga, Latvia, our car was shot at. The librarian accompanying me told me to get down on the floor and keep quiet. She covered me with a blanket. After a heated discussion with whomever it was that was shooting, we were allowed into the city and I was turned over to the Latvian parliament.

I do have to interrupt with a funny story. I was being hosted by the Latvian ambassador to Estonia for an hour or so during one of these handovers when the ambassador told me that they had "whores" in the building. After once asking him to repeat, and still not understanding, I decided to just go with the flow. When he asked if I wanted to go see them, I gulped, smiled and said, "Certainly." He was saying "choirs." We toured the

building housing rehearsal rooms and pianos. No whores.

Back to the impact of the Soviets ... One of the librarians in Estonia, again still a friend, told me how the KGB (Soviet Committee for State Security) tried to co-opt her into spying for them during the Olympics when the sailing events were to be held in Estonia. One of the most horrific stories I ever heard, but just one of many.

Q: What essentially was going on?

BRYANT: Even having never been outside of Estonia, she spoke beautiful English. Because she spoke such beautiful English, the KGB wanted her to spy for them. The absurdity was that they wanted her to walk around the docks where the people were visiting sailboats, and just listen and report back anything that she heard. As if she would hear anything of significance. They threatened her with taking away all medications from her parents, both of whom had serious illnesses, and all kinds of other threats. She wouldn't do it, and she didn't. She said they just had her on a stool, twirling a gun the whole time and saying: "Now, don't you want to do this? Don't you want to do this? We'll give you this; we'll give you that. We'll take away this, we'll take away that." Finally, they let her go. She just ran into the bathroom and threw up. But they didn't bother her again.

So, again, being a librarian, people tell you stories; and I heard lots of them, lots of them. Being a librarian under the Soviets was a highly suspicious profession...too much potential for accessing independent information. Such terrific people. I would say many of the people I worked with in the parliamentary libraries are still there. Some are active members of the International Federation of Library Associations, which has a subgroup of parliamentary libraries. Quite a success story; wonderful people with so much energy, creativity, strength and resilience.

Q: Was the European Union developing its own central library?

BRYANT: Yes, they actually had a central library as early as the late 1950s. There are two primary locations, Luxembourg and Brussels. The Council of Europe was also opening information centers in the various countries. We were invited to Luxembourg for a seminar with European Commission Library; at one point. I really tried to develop cooperation with the EU, but it was a hard sell. The EU had databases by that time; actually, mostly CD ROMS of EU legislation, and I made sure everybody received them. But at least in those early days, what I call "my countries" only wanted American models, American samples, American "how-to's."

Q: So much of the development in the early computer things was coming out of the United States. All these things were being developed. What was the Foreign Service connection during this?

BRYANT: Very little that I was aware of, really The staff director, Kristi Walseth, who worked for Congressman Frost, managed any contacts with the State Department. She would get country clearance whenever any of us were going overseas to work, and I had

an official U.S. government passport from State, but I pretty much operated independently. The program was designed to be from institution to institution, the U.S. Congress to the Eastern Europe and Baltic parliaments. I was just told I could go, get my ticket, and go. I would be met by the parliament and taken care of by the parliament, and rarely ever even saw an Embassy. Once or twice I met with an ambassador, but I probably met with more presidents of countries than I met with ambassadors. I met with the president of Bulgaria, Zhelyu Zhelev (1992-97), (in my overcoat again ... no heat) and I met in Albania with Sali Berisha, the cardiologist and politician who served as president from 1992 to 1997 and prime minister from 2005 to 2013. We had very little to do with the embassies or with the State Department. I imagine that Martin Frost's office kept contact with the State Department, and in fact, most of our funding came via USAID (United States Agency for International Development). I was down at the working level with parliamentary staff, and had my hands full with that.

The staff director was superb. In retrospect, I even more appreciate how much she did at the management level while letting those of us at the working level operate. She was a one-person dynamo who managed Task Force operations along with her job representing Mr. Frost on the House Rules Committee.

I went on several CODELs (Congressional delegations; overseas travel by Members of Congress) with our Members of Congress, traveling to Sofia, Budapest, Prague, Tirana ... which were organized by our Embassies, and we interacted then, but only slightly. Funny, I thought they liked having us come!

Q: You mentioned Albania was so much fun, why?

BRYANT: I can't say it was that much fun. It was fascinating, and I loved it. I loved the people, because they had been under such a repressive regime for so long and had little of anything; very, very poor. There was not a decent hotel. I usually stayed at the Hotel Daide (I am not at all sure of the spelling) where there was only occasional power and occasional water. Once, my room had a clock radio in it ... that had no plug! It was just a decoration. There was extreme poverty. Yet, I had never seen people who smiled so much; friendly, nice, and generous. I thought, "How did they do this after such oppression?" They have a very Mediterranean sort of personality, which I loved. There was just a very warm, relaxed atmosphere that I didn't expect and admired.

Albania was also the biggest challenge, because of the poverty and history of extreme oppression. It was fairly chaotic, and I thrive in chaos. I could go with the flow when meetings changed, schedules shifted. They had a bureaucracy that was so absurd at times. For example, the parliament building housed parts of several other government entities, which were located between the parliament and its library. I had to struggle to get the Albanians to make sure that there would be direct access to the library from the parliamentary offices when I came with the CODEL. Here we created this lovely library, and it was obvious that you could not get to it from the main parliamentary offices. I ran up against such obstacles trying to accomplish something that seemed so obvious. "Oh, no, we can't get the doors open," or, "We can't get a passage through the building as it

belongs to three other government entities." I held my breath when we I arrived with the CODEL. Access achieved. Success.

Arriving with the CODEL, there was no place to stay, as I have said, and somehow it was arranged for the congressmen to stay in Enver Hoxha's house (Hoxha being the fallen dictator of Albania who, as the first communist chief of state, ruled for 40 years after World War II). We had a U.S. Marine escort who played the guitar and everyone sat around and sang, there in Hoxha's house. I thought, "What a world this is! What a world this is!"

I met wonderful people that I still keep in contact with, one with the library and one with the Soros Foundation. In fact, I went back to Albania after joining the Foreign Service, several times, to do some work for the Embassy in developing their information resources. It has been a real pleasure to see the progress of Albania; it is unrecognizable now. I marvel at the progress that they've made; how far they have come.

Q: In a place like Albania, Albanian is a unique language, and...

BRYANT: In fact, I spoke Italian at the time. That was generally their second language, so we worked in Italian.

Q: I would have thought that they wouldn't have had many books.

BRYANT: They didn't.

Q: And probably none, except ones that have been printed by the official printing house of Enver Hoxha. Not exactly his memoirs.

BRYANT: There wasn't much published yet, so I ended up buying a lot of books in Italian. Most people at that time, again, knew Italian as a second language. Being so close to Italy they could get Italian radio. Though illegal to listen to it, they could hide with their radios and listen to news from Italy. I think Albania used to belong to Italy, actually.

Q: While you were with the Library of Congress, did you get involved at all in our book-buying program? I have many stories of people who served in the Soviet Union in the height of the Cold War, who would go bouncing off to small towns, go to the bookstores, and buy out books.

BRYANT: Not very much. That was a separate operation. We were quite focused on assisting the parliaments. Those collecting books were gathering materials for the Library of Congress, either from national libraries, or, as you say, from wherever they could find them. I did help some of the national libraries further develop their contacts with the Library of Congress.

Q: Okay, let's move to the Foreign Service. You had taken the exam long time ago, hadn't you?

BRYANT: No.

Q: You had never taken it?

BRYANT: I never had. I had asthma as a child, and I just sort of assumed that they wouldn't take me; that I would fail the medical. Then I ended up at the Library of Congress. I was very happy with what I was doing, so I just kind of banished the thought. Then I ran into an Information Resources Officer (IRO) somewhere in Eastern Europe, and I didn't even know such a position exists. (An IRO is a Foreign Service Officer who is a librarian, which is what I became). He said, "Why don't you come join us?" I said, "Oh no, I am happy with what I am doing." "Well, why don't you come join us?" I thought about it, and I thought, "Well, you know, the Frost Task Force will eventually end; and I love this work. Why not?" So I started the procedure and took the exam and my orals. They kept saying, "It is going to be years before they call you. You can finish up your work with the Task Force." Well, it wasn't years until they called me; it seemed almost immediately, and I was quite distressed.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions on the orals?

BRYANT: The only one I recall was a complicated question for a duty officer: You are the duty officer and an American basketball team—this was more or less it—lands in the country in the middle of the night. They are told their visas aren't any good, and they are not going to be admitted. What would you do? And I thought, "I haven't a clue what in the world I would do." My answer was: I assumed I would have guidelines and know the people in the Embassy who would know what to do. I would call and find the appropriate person to handle the situation. I thought, "Oh well, I have flunked that one." They came back later and told me that that was the perfect answer; that they didn't want someone who would jump in and solve everything themselves if they didn't know what they were doing. So, I remember that one because I thought, "Oh, I blew that one big time."

Q: Did you have any anxiety or distress of mind about going into the Foreign Service?

BRYANT: Absolutely none. I wanted to. I thought, "My goodness, knowing how much I loved my work in the Task Force and knowing the work of USIA (United States Information Agency)—I was going into USIA, I was not going into State—I said, "This is just manna from heaven for me." About this time, I had started dating the man who is now my husband. We thought the relationship had potential, but it was unclear. I said, "Now what am I supposed to do? I have just been I accepted." Rick took my acceptance and threw it in the mailbox and said, "You go for it, and we will deal with this later." I was ecstatic to join. It was heaven for me, because I had always loved studying other cultures and histories; and USIA was the place for me.

They only hard part was leaving my work with the Frost Task Force. I was told not to worry about that because it would be sometime between application and acceptance. There wasn't. I was heartbroken to leave. When I told of my departure, the Polish

parliament Chancellery head Wojciech Sawicki, organized a going away party for me in Warsaw. A conference was the cover up. There were parliamentary librarians from Poland, of course, Hungary, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania. ... How kind can one be? I cried and cried. Luckily, there were several excellent CRS librarians who had begun working with the Task Force, so I left it in great hands.

Q: When did you enter USIA?

BRYANT: 1994.

Q: I assume you took a basic officers course?

BRYANT: Yes. It was interesting. They decided that year to combine USIA and State as one course. It was really excellent. It was complex, because at times we'd be split up and at other times, we would cover topics together. It was really great, because we each got to know the other side. It was such a success, and we gave it such rave reviews, that they never did it again. They said it was too hard. But, then, about five years down the road or so, we became one agency anyway.

Q: How did it work? Were you hired and they said you would be a librarian? Is that going to be your field?

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: You were hired basically as a specialist.

BRYANT: Yes, absolutely.

Q: What did the librarian career path look like at the time?

BRYANT: Well, I'll tell you. It was great for me. There are about 26 of us, I think. We had the same regulations, promotion-wise, as a generalist, the same rules for ticking out, and so on. Because of my age when I joined, I would have to retire before they could get rid of me. So I never worried about promotions. I was far more interested in the work I was doing.

Q: How old were you when you came in?

BRYANT: Forty-two. So, by then, they were stuck with me.

Q: What were you going to do marriage-wise?

BRYANT: We didn't know. Rick (then a Marine Colonel) was transferred to California about the time I was accepted and was going to be moving to Costa Rica. He kept saying he was going to retire. Actually, San Diego to Costa Rica wasn't too bad a commute, so we just let it ride. There were many times we ended up together almost by chance, even

in Central America. IRO positions are regional positions, so I traveled throughout Central America and his work coincidentally brought him to Central America as well.

Q: IRO means what in practice?

BRYANT: For Information Resources Officers nearly all of our positions are regional, so in any given assignment, you are based in one place, but travel to five or ten other countries. You work with the Embassy in developing information resources for Embassy staff, and develop ways to provide information primarily about the U.S. to the general public of that country. You are also a consultant and adviser to those countries' libraries and their library community; being a speaker, a trainer. Because my background was American history and government, I did a lot of lecturing on U.S. elections and the legislative process. They used me as sort of a free speaker on U.S. government topics. I did that just about everywhere I served.

Q: Did you get married when ...?

BRYANT: USIA closed the position in Costa Rica and I moved to Brazil. They said, "We are just going to move you to Brazil." "Okay, fine." About that time we decided to get married.

Q: And your husband was doing what?

BRYANT: He was a Marine Colonel. We were married here in Washington in November, 1996. I moved back to D.C. from Brazil, and he got a position in D.C. as well. We sort of played it by ear, you know, one step at a time, from there on.

Q: Today is the sixth of October 2009, with Mary Nell Bryant. Let's start. You came into the Foreign Service.

BRYANT: I came into the Foreign Service in 1994. I had been working at the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress, on loan to the House Special Task Force on Eastern European Parliamentary Development. I had been working in Eastern Europe and the Baltics, developing parliamentary infrastructures for about three years.

Q: Things were really hot in those days.

BRYANT: Yes. It was fascinating; a fascinating, wonderful time where one could make a change in the world and really see the change. I have been back to a number of the countries I worked in early on to visit the parliaments, to see how they were functioning, and how they had expanded what we began. I am very proud of it and of them.

Q: I may be repeating ourselves: Was there a structure, for the most part, under the

Soviet system that you could work on? Or do they go back to pre-Soviet structures? Or were they creating new structures?

BRYANT: New structures; some of the countries had had a history of democratic government prior to the Soviets, but it varied by country.

Q: Poland had a Sejm, or whatever you call it.

BRYANT: Right, and a Senate. They have a two-chamber legislature just like ours, and they did not want to work together when we went to help develop modern services, resources, acquisitions and training. No way were they going to combine services. I just had to chuckle because that's just like our Congress. So who could blame them? Most everywhere else ended up with centralized library information and research structures and capabilities. Of course, under the Soviets the parliament was basically a rubber stamp institution, primarily meeting one day a year to raise their hands, and go home. There was no need for them to have any kind of independent information for decision-making, policy making, and policy development. In fact, such information was forbidden and tightly controlled. And suddenly when they were on their own, and there was a huge need. For example, in the Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia then, they had a library that probably hadn't had a new book in years. It had no copier machine, nothing modern, no databases, no information services as our Congressional Research Service would provide. They had a wonderful room that they let me go into with all the banned books. They kept watch over banned books.

Q: Sort of like the Vatican.

BRYANT: I saw some amazing things. Banned books included the *World Almanac*, because it gave facts and figures that were not in accord with what the Soviet Union said. Now the Czechs have a fabulous library and research service. It's a huge change, a huge change.

Q: I guess we'd better move on. You came in to the Foreign Service when?

BRYANT: In 1994. That is when I left the Frost Task Force.

Q: Did you come in with a class?

BRYANT: I came in with a class in the fall of 1994. I cannot tell you the number. It was an unusual class. We were still USIA. It was decided to have a joint class of what was JOT (Junior Officer Training) for USIA, and State's A-100 class, which is their officer training. They decided to try to combine the courses, instead of keeping them two totally separate entities. We thought it was terrific because we got to know each other, what we were doing, that we weren't the boogeyman. We learned a little bit of each other's processes. We had some joint sessions, and then we would go off into separate sessions, obviously for things specific to our agencies. It was a really nice way to demystify the other side.

Q: It really makes tremendous sense.

BRYANT: That is why they never did it again. That is what we all felt. We gave it great reviews. Our understanding was that it was felt that it was just too much trouble; that it was too hard to coordinate the different pieces. That was a real shame, because I think it might have helped smooth things a little bit in 1999.

Q: Now it is held together anyway. You have been around the government a long time; what were you getting? Was there a different spirit, attitude? What were you getting out of this gathering together?

BRYANT: In the class? Well, I had been in the government a long time, and already lived here in Washington, and so I didn't bond as much with my class as I might have otherwise. Those who had just been accepted and had moved here naturally bonded more. You know the stories, sometimes with two days' notice—"Oh, surprise! We want you here in two days." So they bonded together with their happy hours and after-hour's events, and sharing their miseries and their adjustments. I had my own life outside, so it wasn't as ...

Q: Were you married at the time?

BRYANT: No. But I was dating my now husband.

Q: You had what is known as a "significant other."

BRYANT: I had a significant other and many friends, so I wasn't as involved mentally in the class.

Q: Also, mentally, did you find that there was an age difference in outlook? Or did that come across, or was not really a factor?

BRYANT: I don't think it really was that much of an age difference. There were other people closer to my age, and older, so it was not an issue. We also had women who were accepted following the (Alison) Palmer class action lawsuit on the discrimination of the State Department against women.

Q: So that didn't play out particularly?

BRYANT: Age really didn't make a difference. It was interesting to hear the attitude of some of the younger people towards the Foreign Service: "Well, we will see how it is, do a couple of tours, and then maybe leave." I am just theorizing, but thinking that in earlier years, people came in with the idea that it would be their whole career. Perhaps this change has to do with an increase in international jobs elsewhere.

Q: Oh, yes. I know certainly, when I came in. Of course the thing is, it is just a little bit

like saying, "Well, I'll try sniffing this cocaine. I will try it for a little, but I can quit anytime." The brutal fact is, that next to, I think it is Google, Disney and Microsoft, the Foreign Service has the highest retention rate, and it has been true all along.

BRYANT: And there have been no changes in that?

Q: There have been no particular changes in it. I wouldn't be doing this oral history business of over almost 25 years now of talking to people who have been in this service, if they weren't interesting people doing interesting things. Can you imagine interviewing for 25 years successful insurance agents, or millionaire investors, or something like that?

BRYANT: But I was surprised that some said, "Giving this a try," particularly with people who were married and were not both in the Foreign Service.

Q: Because there is where things really have changed.

BRYANT: I know several who did make a deal, you know, "We will try this for a couple of years; if it serves the non-FSOs' needs, fine. If not, we are leaving." And they left.

Q: That is probably the most significant difference. I came in in the 1950s when you couldn't be a married female. Even with the males, it was expected that women would be housewives, or more than that, much more than that, they'd be diplomatic wives. It was a very powerful team. So, I mean, you went in as a couple, as a career. And since really about the 1980s or so, it has changed remarkably.

BRYANT: Well, I married into the Marine Corps, so I know a bit about that side, too.

Q: When did you get married?

BRYANT: I got married in 1996.

Q: While we are at that, can you give us a little background of your husband?

BRYANT: Yes. My husband is Richard Lawrence (Rick) Kelly from Pittsburgh. He graduated from Penn State in 1970. He didn't know what to do with himself at that point; he didn't have specific career goals. So he signed up with the Marines as a private infantryman in 1970. I guess once he was in for a little while, they happened to notice he had been to college and said, "What are you doing as an enlisted guy? We'll put you through officer school."

I guess it took, because he became an officer and retired after 35 years as a three-star Lt. General, Deputy Commandant of the Marine Corps for Logistics.

Q: What was his branch in the Marines?

BRYANT: He was in logistics.

Q: I am sure he had a long, active career.

BRYANT: Oh, yes, quite so. Just before graduating from Penn State in 1970, Rick received his draft notice. He always wanted to join the Marines so he enlisted, went to Parris Island for recruit training, and—as I mentioned—became an infantryman. One year later, he completed OCS and was commissioned. After follow-on training, he became an infantry officer. As did many of his contemporaries, Rick struggled with his career decision. But after receiving his MBA (on his own) and later attending career-level school, he was given the opportunity to do a non-infantry tour in supply. Following that tour, Rick changed his specialty to logistics and decided to do the full twenty-year career in the Marines. Thirty-five years later, he retired as a three-star Lieutenant General (Lt-Gen). Quite an honor, as there are so few.

Q: Well, my brother was a Naval Academy graduate. He is dead now. He was class of 1940 at the Naval Academy, married, and so I knew his crowd very well. Military wives are really a breed apart.

BRYANT: Rick had spent most of his career single. In doing so, he didn't have to participate in many of the family, officer, and later senior officer social activities. Better put, he could pretty much pick and choose what events he attended, with whom he associated, and where he lived. Rick never lived on the bases; rather, he lived in the local communities, like Cardiff-by-the-Sea, California. He really cherished his privacy and anonymity.

Q: I would think, particularly coming in as you did when you'd already obtained real rank and all that ...

BRYANT: Having my own career did not make me popular.

Q: I am sure it probably didn't sit well; I mean, you were moving into a real clan.

BRYANT: When he was promoted to Brigadier General and after we married, we were assigned to Camp Pendleton, California, and later to Washington, DC. In California, we had to live on base, which was quite a departure for Rick and, despite his fulfilling work, it was somewhat suffocating for him and me. That said, we did have a nice home in a private setting that was full of nature and wildlife.

But on a personal level, I was deeply troubled by the contradiction of how much I was accepted by so many on one hand (Rick's Marines and Sailors, the enlisted wives, some of the senior officers themselves,) and not accepted, appreciated, by many (but not all) on the other – the senior officers wives. I believe it was centered mainly on the fact that I came to the Marine Corps late, that I didn't fit the mold, that I had a career equivalent to a senior Marine officer, and that I was away a lot due to my work. A few were hostile; a few were passive aggressive; some were pleasant and polite but with subtleties. A few were nice. When I asked one wife what I had done wrong, she said that it wasn't me who

was disliked, it was that they saw my kind of life as a threat to their kind of life, and it was probably true. But like the Marines, I, too, had important work to which I was committed and I did it.

Q: Those were sort of the good old days. When you graduated from high school, if you were a woman, you would be a nurse, a teacher, a secretary, or a housewife.

BRYANT: Having a career, beyond that was pretty unheard of. I didn't fit. I didn't play or fit the role of an officer's wife. My husband put me under no pressure to do so. He said, "I married you because of who you are." He was proud of me as I was of him. In fact, at his private farewell dinner of three-star generals and spouses, when asked to give his farewell remarks after 35 years of service, he looked at me and said, "I think I'll have Mary Nell do that." And I did. It was a shock to me, and to all the others, I am sure.

Q: I am sure he had seen it in spades.

BRYANT: Yes, he certainly had. We were assigned to Washington two years later. We lived in a small condominium in Arlington, which was perfect for us. We both had important, exhaustive work and didn't need any overhead. Despite the military presence in D.C., Rick could pretty much box off his work from our home life.

At one point—maybe when he was promoted to Lieutenant General—a vacancy occurred at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. and base quarters became available. Rick was the target; he resisted moving into the Barracks vigorously and prevailed. (Despite the name, Marine Barracks, the homes there are in fact lovely.) It would have been very unhappy for both of us. From time to time, we had to go to obligatory social events. There were some nice ones, particularly hosting the evening parade at Marine Barracks, Washington. But most were a mild form of torture. It is hard to say who disliked the events more ... I think it was Rick. The subordination of the senior officer wives to whatever lower-ranking roles they identified with continued. The discussions at socials and dinners rarely if ever included meaningful or even interesting content, with the exception of Marine Corps work content. Men grouped with men; women with women. We both tried to invade the other camp with little success.

By contrast, we saw quite the opposite during an official visit to Israel (Rick's ... I accompanied.) At a dinner with the hosting Israeli generals and their wives, the discussions were open, free, and full of content with no restrictions. The wives were full partners. How refreshing.

I know I can speak for Rick, but we were both very happy when he finished his service. There was such a contradiction between how well the Marines treated each other, how they advanced minorities, and how women were valued; and how the senior officer/wives culture seemed to be stuck in the 1950s a la Ward and June Cleaver (in *Leave It To Beaver*). I was highly supportive of the former, and chose not to be part of the latter. In Rick's words even to this day—"they didn't treat my wife very well". Mind you, there were several generals who I did admire who seemed to like me and appreciate some good

discussion.

Q: Well, they are an awfully important element in making the Marines what the Marines are; a family.

BRYANT: Yes. I learned so much from the Marine Corps. As my State and Marine spouse careers ran in parallel, I compared the two all along. What I learned from the Marines helped me at State. It also highlighted a lot of negatives at State.

I was very impressed with the Marines (and Sailors) in so many ways I never knew before: devotion to work, family, each other; standards of performance and conduct; professionalism; integrity; mutual support; love of one another; kindness; humor; toughness—mental and physical; zero tolerance for racism, discrimination; and on and on. As the Marines were new to me, this was all eye opening ... and put State in a negative light.

I'm afraid I saw a lot of ugliness in the way State officers treated each other professionally; very much of a crawl-to-the-top mentality. So many officers out for Number One ... and the system supported that. Not so in the Marines. Their organization and processes showed an integrity that was so fractured in the State Department.

From what I witnessed, evaluations for promotion in the Marines were clean and based on merit, with boards looking to promote for the good of the Corps. Looking at State promotions, you can only shake your head. They seem to be based more on the skill of the writer than the competence of the officer. This leaves real potential for vindictiveness. Work virtually stops when officers help write their EERs (Employee Evaluation Reports). Battles and negotiations go on. Not so in the Marines.

I know of one case, my own, in fact, where an officer was found guilty of serious sexual harassment at post. The case was resolved by the ambassador and DCM; they then asked that the complaint be kept at post. Big mistake. In the Marines, that officer would have been dismissed. In this case, the officer was promoted. Even worse, he was promoted over officers who were immeasurably better at their work ... and did not come with sexual baggage.

I know of an ambassador who let one of her senior officers get by with spending alcohol-filled afternoons in his office with pornography (though she may not have known about the pornography); his work was done by someone else. The ambassador did not want to fight him, so she let it slide. At the same time, he was investigated for misuse of funds at his government home. If he had been a Marine, he would have been quick history. There is no tolerance for such behaviors. At State, though, he was in the good-old-boy network, and went on to several senior level promotions and prestigious overseas positions. Luckily, a proposed ambassadorial nomination quietly disappeared.

Of course I do not mean to blacken all of State. I have had the great pleasure to work with brilliant, dedicated, officers of great integrity. But overall, I do not think the system

rewards, encourages, or promotes that.

Q: Just sort of as an aside, right now we are in an era where there are so many unaccompanied assignments because of danger.

BRYANT: Another area where the Marines beat State hands down. A Marine takes the assignment he is given, based on the needs of the Marine Corps. Theoretically, in the State Department you pledge to go anywhere, anytime as well. Then came real hardship: Iraq, Afghanistan, and later Pakistan. As the wars dragged on, instead of requiring officers to go, State kept coming up with bigger and better bribes: A wealth of paid vacations during a short tour of duty; a promise of a good follow-on assignment where you could trump another, more qualified bidder. Bidders demanding follow-on posts that they “deserved,” even if they lacked the qualifications. I found it shameful.

Overall the assignments process is not one of filling positions with the most qualified person, but rather it lapses into cronyism, and who-can-top-whom in demanding a particular officer be selected; a serious lack of professionalism.

That said, as an IRO, with such a small corps, this was much less of a problem.

Q: The military wives support each other, and the whole system supports the wives who are stuck behind.

BRYANT: There are a number of support programs for military wives and families, yes.

Q: The State Department just doesn't have that. It's pretty good at a post; but once you are away from post, all of a sudden you are on your own.

BRYANT But there really is no comparison. A Marine deploys for combat, combat exercises or rescue missions, where communication home can be erratic at best. No daily phone calls home, no R&Rs to exotic destinations every three months. In State, you have those. Plus, you are not in combat, but kept from it. In my career, when I was in Afghanistan, I was kept from going anywhere near danger as much as possible. In Columbia, I could not leave Bogotá, much less go to the coca fields.

When I went solo on an assignment to Belgrade without Rick after 9/11, my family and friends cried, “How can you do that? How can you leave Rick?” The Marines understood ... and that includes their wives.

Q: Did you know where you wanted to go and what you You knew you were going to be in information; did you know sort of what branch of information? You had been exposed to the media, to culture, to sort of the technical side; did you have any feel?

BRYANT: I entered as a specialist that, at the time, was called a regional library officer, RLO. It is now called an Information Resources Officer, IRO. So it is a small corps; there were about 26 of us, not nearly enough, almost all with regional assignments. There are a

few single country positions, but most have a regional assignment, covering maybe 5 to 10 countries. For example, I was most interested in Latin America, and luckily my first assignment was to Costa Rica with responsibilities for Central America, Colombia and Ecuador. What I did was develop the information capabilities of Embassies, USIS libraries, and bi-national centers, directed toward serving the people of that country. It was a primary function is USIA and hence my job, to reach out to local audiences with the goal of developing mutual understanding on a people-to-people level. So I worked at bi-national centers, cultural centers that included libraries, and with Embassy libraries.

Q: Costa Rica is probably the one part of Central America that hasn't had a civil war going on. How did you find Costa Rica at the time?

BRYANT: It was an interesting post for a number of reasons. A lot of people went there and were disappointed because, while they call it the "Switzerland of Central America," people focus on the Switzerland and not the Central America. It is a beautiful, beautiful place, but with very high crime. I had an armed guard at my residence 24 hours a day. You couldn't park anywhere without an armed guard; it is still the case, if not worse. If you were having people over for a function, you had to hire guards as part of your shopping list, to guard your guests' cars or they would all be stolen. So people get assigned there, and it is not what they expected.

Another disappointment for many was that they expected to be more accepted into the Costa Rican culture. They expected personal involvement with the local people. Costa Rica happens to be more of a closed family-centered society, so they were not welcoming with open arms beyond official functions. I was different because, one, I was a librarian and developed great relationships with the library community in Costa Rica, which gave me an identity outside of being an American official. I still have great friends there. And, two, I had family there. My father was from Honduras, and various parts of the family had spread throughout Central America. I had cousins in Costa Rica who I got to know for the first time. So I had a very different experience. But others were disappointed. That was the thing I heard most often.

Q: In talking about it, to what did they ascribe the high crime rate there?

BRYANT: Well, if you ask the Costa Ricans, it was all Nicaraguans and the Colombians. It's always somebody else. But there was a lot of police corruption. I experienced that personally, myself, when I had my purse stolen at a restaurant in San Jose. In the follow up with police, it was obvious they knew more than they let on. One of our FSNs told me that the group that stole my purse was well known by the police, so don't expect to get it back.

One day, there was a shootout outside of my house. I gingerly tried to peak over the wall to see what was going on. You could hear the shots flying; it was a robbery. The burglar was the son of a former Costa Rican president. There were all kinds of editorials saying, "Hey wait a minute; it is not all the Nicaraguans in the paper. We have to look to ourselves." I am told by my Costa Rican friends that the situation, if anything, is even

worse. Even the Marine House (home of the Embassy's Marine guards) was broken into. The Marines were held up at gunpoint with machine guns, and their cars stolen.

One of the things the Embassy was trying to work on was juvenile law. There were no separate laws for youth and no way to deal with young criminals. Drug dealers would often use young kids as their mules, and there were no repercussions. I worked with their parliament quite a lot in developing an information capability for parliamentarians to study, for example, what was done in other countries—the legal systems, particularly for youth and other countries, and that sort of thing.

Q: Who was ambassador?

BRYANT: Peter Jon de Vos, who also served as ambassador to Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique and Tanzania. The Public Affairs section, which I was part of, had three women officers, only one with a husband in tow. No men. I made the fourth. It was a great intro to the Foreign Service life. In fact, there were a lot of women at the Embassy at that time, providing an instant social group. I got one of the best pieces of advice I ever got from the Press Attaché. She took me aside and said something to the effect that she could see my type (whatever that was!) and she knew I'd be judging myself and my performance harshly. She told me that I had just entered a whole new world, new job, new institution, new country, new language ... and that I should not try to assess my performance for at least 6 months ... better a year. She said that people like me, already with a career, and used to being confident in what they were doing, had to be comfortable with feeling like a newborn who knows nothing. It was great advice and I have passed it on, not just with Foreign Service officers, but others. She and I are still friends, and she says she does not recall giving that advice at all. I certainly do.

Q: Let's go to your library thing. We'll stick to Costa Rica, first, and then we will move on. Why a library? What were we doing?

BRYANT: I was there to help with information outreach, with developing capabilities and programs to get information out to the public about the U.S., and its values and policies. I also helped to develop libraries overall, in Costa Rica and in my regions. Costa Rica was the most developed in Central America at the time. Internet was just beginning, and in fact, I was the first at our Embassy to have Internet access. Use of libraries as information centers is part of the overall concept of information literacy that democracies are based on: educated publics. Good libraries are a source of education, basic and continuing. Libraries can be used as learning centers, community centers; many functions besides being a reading room. We tried to develop that concept. We put on seminars and workshops on a variety of topics of interest to both sides. We worked very closely with the bi-national center while I was there, a nonprofit institution with a library, an auditorium, a gallery, and which taught English lessons. It was all part of the package of education, learning, and cultural exchange.

Q: Did you find you were taking with you your Library of Congress baggage of bringing parliament up to snuff library-wise, information-wise?

BRYANT: Baggage? I would call it my bag of tricks. Actually, yes, because at this point I had worked with developing parliamentary information services throughout Eastern Europe and the Baltics, and, of course, came from the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress. Each country is different. Because each country is different, you cannot use the same model. You use what you know; but you adapt it to the local situation, what's realistic, what is needed, what is accessible, useful, what makes sense, what does not.

I went on throughout my career working with parliaments as far away as Vietnam and Brazil on similar issues. But the first point is listening, of course, to where the parliament is—how they work, what they do, what information they need—and then knowing what's available, trying to design some kind of system that will help them, given the resources they have, or aspire to.

Q: Given the era that you were in, really it's almost the month you started, that things have changed so much with the Internet (just a guess).

BRYANT: Yes, the 1990s.

Q: Internet is just coming in.

BRYANT: Absolutely.

Q: In the first place, how did you bring yourself up to snuff? I took courses in computer programming, for God's sake.

BRYANT: I did too!

Q: I mean, at the beginning of the era, that's what you did.

BRYANT: My earliest exposure was taking courses in programming as part of my Master's in library science at University of Chicago. We ran programs on punch cards. When I started at USIA in 1994, the other IROs and I played a lot with the pre-Web Internet. It was so exciting; revolutionary. Prior to the WWW, we used the Gopher Internet protocol, which was hierarchical and menu driven, unlike today's Web. It allowed for searching and retrieving documents over the Internet, via a telephone modem. It provided the first platform for sharing large library databases, so we, as librarians were some of the first users. Archie and Veronica were two early search engines. Oh, how we explored. Electronic bulletin boards were big as were what were called newsgroups. They were much the forerunners of the Web and even social media. I think we pretty much taught ourselves. Things just moved so fast. To think we went from Gopher and Veronica in 1994 to teaching the Web while I was in Costa Rica (1995-96) was quite a leap. As I said, I was the first person at the Embassy to have Internet access. Public Affairs created its first Embassy Web site just after I left, in 1997.

The State Department did a survey in 1996, asking which posts had Web sites or Gopher sites! I don't think I ever worked on a Gopher site overseas, but apparently there were some posts that did. From the start, Public Affairs were to have the lead in Web page creation and management. For a time, there was a split between Public Affairs sites and State Department Embassy sites, and they ran parallel at some posts. It was finally resolved in favor of Public Affairs, after the usual turf battles and growing pains.

When I moved to Camp Pendleton (1996-98) I took classes at several local community colleges, and created my own Web pages. You had to use HTTP coding to create Web pages. It was all very new. You had to code everything.

Q: I would think that this was at the beginning of creation, particularly in information services.

BRYANT: Yes, very much so. The Internet and then the Web have hugely expanded information capabilities, as the 1990s wore on. The Internet and then the Web were exploding. Computer use revolutionized libraries, starting with library catalogues and moving on to full-text online information. From the start, libraries have been early users of computers and the Internet.

Q: Did you find the USIA was supportive?

BRYANT: Very.

Q: I was wondering whether you were almost ahead of the game?

BRYANT: I would say we were well out in front in terms of being technology users. USIA was very supportive and interested in using new information tools. There were no problems at all in USIA; State was another story.

I gave a lot of Internet classes throughout Central America, and through my career, really. After all, when I arrived in Turkmenistan on my final posting (2007-2009), Internet was illegal, so there always training to do.

In the early years in particular, educational institutions in many countries saw Internet access as no more than a machine, belonging in the IT department. They looked at the information delivery mechanism—a machine—and said, "Okay, this belongs in the computer department, not in the library." That was a stage of development I saw over and over ... even at the State Department, when an institution realizes the computer goes in the library because what matters is the information it accesses, not the machine. That concept, from the start, was very, very hard to get across. The IT departments felt that computers and all computer training—with regard to hardware, software and information—belonged in the IT department.

Q: What about the time you were doing that? I had my offices at Georgetown University, and I had to go over to the IT department to take courses in this.

BRYANT: You see! I am not making it up then, am I?

Q: It is an early stage of things. I mean, today, it's a whole different world. But the world was changing around us, and we were helping change it.

BRYANT: Yes, very much so. I remember I gave a week-long course on the Internet at the University of Costa Rica. They were mostly library science students—they have a library science school there—and some from other departments. The IT department demanded that they teach part of it. I said to the students, "Let's see what the difference in approach is." It was almost laughable—and this is not to degrade the IT people. The IT guys, trying to teach the librarians how to find information on the Internet, spoke a totally different language. IT could not understand librarians' questions, and librarians could not understand IT answers. One side was talking IT, and the other side was talking end-result information.

Q: You know, things have changed now.

BRYANT: Here.

Q: I mean, we have interns today, all of whom come in speaking fluent 5-5 computereze. Whereas those of us who grew up in a different era, speak computereze with an accent.

BRYANT: I like that. I guess I would say I speak it with a slight accent, because it has been part of my profession from the start.

Q: How did you find the academic establishment responding to this in the various countries where you were doing this?

BRYANT: Aside from not understanding that it was the information, not the machine, all were very excited about it. It was of great interest, particularly in the libraries, because that is their stock-in-trade. El Salvador, interestingly enough, had a library school and they were developing some of their own internal databases. They were really ahead of the game, very aggressively so. I found it quite impressive.

Q: In Central America, so many of the young people of some intellect went to the United States to study that they would come back thoroughly versed into whatever was the state of the art. Did you find this? Or maybe this was internally generated.

BRYANT: Certainly at the beginning it was internally generated. In El Salvador, I recall that there were Cubans at the main university, helping to design and create databases.

At one university in San Salvador, they added a brand new building for a library. I was invited to be the guest lecturer to inaugurate the building, which was quite an honor. I was to give a lecture on how to use the Internet, which was to be followed by a live demonstration. Our Embassy IT guys worked with the University to create an open phone

line, bypassing the building's switchboard, so that we could use a dial-up connection to do a live demonstration of the Internet. (This was the era of dial-up phone connections.)

We thought we had it all set. Yes, we have a phone line; yes, we can bypass the switchboard; yes, we can call in; yes we have an account. I got to the room to give the lecture, and we had not asked the right questions. The phone line was not in the room where the lecture was. It wasn't even on the same floor. I will always remember that as a lesson that you have to learn: ask the right questions. We forgot to ask the question, "Can you get a phone line in the same room as the lecture?" So we went without the live demonstration and just did discussions. It was even before PowerPoint. I think I used overhead slides. But people were very interested.

Q: I would think, as an era, where in many ways it is like the cell phone. They were bypassing an old, outmoded system of telephone lines and all of that. At the beginning of the Internet connection you kind of look things up and all. Libraries didn't have to accumulate a hell of a lot of old stuff because they could get that. Or maybe it hadn't reached that point.

BRYANT: Hadn't reached that point. For the most part, information on the Internet is newer material, sort of from now on as things are put in digital format and made available on the Internet. But to go backwards and fill in old collections on the Internet, that's a more recent evolution and a big job. There are major attempts to digitize many of old collections. Then there is the Internet Archive, a non-profit group that, as it says, attempts to archive the Internet. It started in 1996, seeing how fleeting information was on the Web. You can find them online.

Q: I know at the end of this month we are going to see Ben Jonson's The Alchemist. I went to the Internet to see if any of our local libraries and Fairfax County has very good libraries, had a copy and couldn't find anything with Ben Jonson or The Alchemist. But I found the whole damn play on the Internet. That only goes back to the 16th century, but still.

BRYANT: What you have is a gap, because older materials that are no longer under any kind of copyright can be put on the Internet. What happened with the Internet was that, at first, current material was made accessible, but in a very limited way. Early on, you could find library catalogs, for example, and see which library had what books, but there was no full text. Of course, the World Wide Web made things quite different.

With scanning capabilities now, you can easily put materials that are not under copyright on the Internet. There are large projects, like Project Gutenberg, whose purpose it is to locate old texts not under copyright, and put them on the Internet through scanning and PDF (Portable Document Format). It is a great way to make older materials accessible. So you will find *The Alchemist* on the Internet now, but you won't find the full text of an Ann Tyler book, for example, because she's a contemporary novelist. Older material is increasingly available, again, particularly with library and archives collections.

Q: So let's sort of spread ourselves out a bit. We are moving up to the source of all the crime; in a sense, El Salvador and Nicaragua and your homeland, Honduras, and all that. These countries have been undergoing real war.

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: What did you find there at that time? Libraries, bi-cultural centers, and things?

BRYANT: As I said, El Salvador had a surprisingly vibrant university system, libraries, and an interest in education. We were starting to develop a library in the Embassy. The Embassy compound, as I mentioned before, is so funny because it was built to be the last bastion against the communist invaders. So you have this small country, and this huge complex that the State Department can't fill with people. I think they would like to pick it up and move it to Pakistan right now. What they need is a mobile giant Embassy, because now it's a white elephant. But we developed a library there, and worked closely with the active library community. El Salvador was a very high-crime country when I was there, and still is. Lots of street crime; it is a very dangerous place, a very poor country. I guess that's why their focus on the development of their libraries and education system, at the university level anyway, was very interesting to me. I was very impressed.

Nicaragua was a lot different. They had much less in the way of library resources. While we worked with a bi-national center there to develop the library, it just was not as vibrant and active as in El Salvador. I worked on getting Internet access to the Bi-National Center, something at that time was still a dream of most of Nicaragua.

Q: Particularly from the 1940s up through the 1990s, Marxism was always alive and very well in academic communities, including the United States. , A lot of the stuff doesn't fit too well into the modern world. Did you find yourself playing opposition to Marxism or anything like that?

BRYANT: No, I didn't. I think because I was dealing more with library professionals and less with policy departments. I was dealing with people looking for access to information, not with policy extremists of any kind. And after all, Marxism had not made much of a change in the region.

Q: It wasn't part of the game, in a way?

BRYANT: No, not at all. We were looking at resource and skill development, through books, speakers, magazines, Internet; basically information access, not doctrine.

Q: Nicaragua is a particularly poor country, anyway.

BRYANT: Very poor.

Q: They were coming down from the Sandinista government at the time. Did that play out at all in the library work that you were doing there?

BRYANT: It really didn't. It seems, looking back, that you think it might; but what really came through was the poverty and the need for anything, whether it was computers or books, magazines, places for people to go read and study.

Q: I would imagine you had an almost priceless commodity, and the ability to allow somebody whose home might not even have electricity to come in and use the computer. Besides, in that era, you didn't have the wireless-type thing, the satellite-type thing. Somebody was paying the telephone bill.

BRYANT: That's right. Wi-Fi and satellite access were further down the road. I dealt a lot with Wi-Fi, and State's opposition to it, later on.

Q: And we were paying the telephone bill, was that it?

BRYANT: That's right. We have paid a lot of telephone bills.

Q: I mean, the fact that we were offering this to people, particularly young people.

BRYANT: Along with courses on how to use it; all for free.

Q: This was a tremendous action on our part.

BRYANT: Yes, a tremendous action. A marvelous good will tool. And it continues today.

Q: In the first place, was anyone else doing it? The Brits, or the French, or the Soviet Russians?

BRYANT: No, not that I ever heard of. The British Council, which does stress libraries and English-language teaching, may have operated in some capital cities, may have had a presence. But the British Council is a profit-making institution. It has to recoup its costs, so it charges for services. We did not charge for computer use, using the libraries, or participating in classes or events. It has been a great gift. I believe that USIA used to keep lists of world leaders who had grown up using our libraries.

And of course, we provided baseball, the national sport of Nicaragua. In driving around Nicaragua, I'd see kids everywhere playing baseball instead of soccer. I'd call that a positive part of our legacy, baseball! You drive around the countryside on a Sunday afternoon, and see sandlot softball going on everywhere. Felt just like home.

Q: I am interviewing, actually this afternoon, John Maisto, who was our ambassador to Venezuela not too long ago, and also our ambassador to Nicaragua. He was saying that in Venezuela that is the natural sport.

BRYANT: Yes, it is, though whether it was the Cubans or the Americans who introduced it is under dispute. I have covered Venezuela, too.

Q: And the Cubans. Were the Cubans doing anything?

BRYANT: I would imagine they probably were.....

Q: I am talking overtly, and all that.

BRYANT: I know they were working in El Salvador; openly working in the libraries and universities, helping them develop their information technology capabilities. But in Venezuela, I had no knowledge.

Q: They have a financial problem, of course. Did you feel you were really looking at a new generation that was really coming up? Let's talk about Central America first. You had your hands on them in a way.

BRYANT: Yes. In thinking through all the countries, my overall impression and feeling was, of course, severe poverty, lack of development, and corruption—terrible corruption that was going and preventing development. And the pattern, of course, was slightly different in each country; but the divide between the haves and the have-nots was not going to change any time soon. It still has not.

Q: Did you have any feeling, though, that by opening up these Centers and libraries that we were breaching the wall of privilege?

BRYANT: Yes, in that we were giving people chances they would not otherwise have had. The wealthy had their private schools. The poor had next to nothing and, sadly, in most of the countries it is mostly the same. But at least we were giving chances. We now have a Center, a library that we opened in Managua after I left the region, in the Banco Nacional, which oddly enough had a library. The bank gave the Embassy space to open a public library, and I hear that it is very active and always packed full of people. Since I left Costa Rica, our Embassy opened a small library on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, which is the very poor black area of Costa Rica. First Lady Laura Bush went to the opening of that.

Q: And she is a librarian.

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: That must have given you a little extra clout, you think?

BRYANT: We had hoped for more. We had hoped she would be more active in affecting policy or funds. It didn't happen. But she did come to that Center in Costa Rica. They were, of course, thrilled that the Embassy was providing reading materials and Internet access for free for people who wouldn't otherwise have it. It's an incremental step, but it's a step.

Q: My nieces and nephews lived in Midland, Texas where Mrs. Bush was librarian at one point, so they've been acquainted with librarian skills.

BRYANT: Isn't that funny!

Q: Well, let's look at Colombia. Colombia has been the center of our concerns for decades because of drugs, and because of the drug lords who sometimes dominate. There has also been an insurrection of guerillas going on there. You were there at a time when the war was going on.

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: It is still kind of going on, but particularly then.

BRYANT: Yes, it was pretty bad.

Q: Do you want to talk about your experiences in Colombia?

BRYANT: Yes. The Embassy wouldn't let me go anywhere except Bogotá. I was never allowed to go to Medellín or Cali, or other cities. In Bogotá, the new Embassy looked like the Temple of Doom—once you went in you'd never get out again, which was sad. We had relations with one very large bi-national Center that had a big public library component that was very active and run by Colombians. We didn't have any American staff there at that time. It was very active, very popular.

In Bogotá, the Colombians built small hotels at the request of Japanese businessmen. I was told they were hotels that could not be identified as hotels, to save you from being kidnapped. When I first arrived in Bogotá, I had been given a password to exchange with the driver arranged to pick me up. Password exchanged, I gave the driver the address of the hotel, and we pulled up in front of what looked like a little apartment building. It had no signage, nothing on it. I said to the cab driver, "Are you sure this is where I am supposed to go?" "Yes, this is the address." I went in, found a small reception area, and I said, "Are you a hotel?" And that is when they said, "Yes, we are a hotel," and told me the story of the Japanese businessmen who didn't want to be kidnapped. Once you went up the elevator, you found yourself in a nice, small hotel, with a name and logo on their sheets and towels, just as if you were in a normal hotel; but there was no outside sign of it. Since it was dangerous to go out in the evenings, the room had all the local restaurant menus that you could call for delivery. They brought breakfast to your room. But you were pretty much kept inside.

Q: What about your clientele? What were we doing?

BRYANT: Teaching English, providing books, magazines, a place to go, a place to read. We may have started Internet access at that point. Prior to Internet, we supplied magazines and newspapers on CD-ROMs. Again, as you say, it was for the have-nots of the country. It would show movies, have lectures, various activities that you associate

with a public library here today. There was a network of these bi-national centers in Colombia that we supported with a budget, books, magazines, and yearly training for the Colombian staff.

Unfortunately, due to the security situation I was never allowed to go beyond Bogotá. I have to say that it is a terrible shame that there is such violence, because Bogotá is a beautiful, beautiful city with old Spanish architecture, an incredible gold museum, wonderful food, and fruits. Once, I escaped and got out on the street and found wagons with fruit that I had never seen before in my life. I grew up in Miami so I was familiar with tropical fruit, but they fruits I'd never seen. I thought, "What a shame this country is going through this, because it would be a tourist mecca." It's a beautiful place; in the mountains, gorgeous.

Q: What about Venezuela?

BRYANT: I didn't spend much time in Venezuela, maybe one or two brief visits. But, again, we were working with a network of bi-national centers. As in Colombia, they were very cautious about letting me outside of the city. When being picked up at the airport, I had to use a code word to be sure the driver was who he said it was. We were working in a more hostile environment as well, vis-a-vis the Venezuelan government. Staff who worked in the bi-national centers would come to Caracas, and we would do training and distribute resources.

Q: Talking about the Internet; in those days it was a telephone line.

BRYANT: Yes, dial-up.

Q: Okay, you dialed up, but where did the line eventually go? Was it long distance to the U.S.?

BRYANT: No. At this point there were providers, Internet providers, in most countries, so it would be a local call; but it was billed by the minute. Early on there was concern from Washington about where Embassy Web pages would be hosted. There was a sense they wanted to pull all hosting back to Washington if they could. Security again. But Internet access was slow enough as it was; hosting in Washington would have slowed it down even further. Washington did offer to assist with updating Web pages ... they asked that posts e-mail their updates. Such changes. In Panama, Costa Rica, and perhaps elsewhere, I switched the staff from communicating by fax to communicating by e-mail; a big step.

Q: Was anything in particular happening in Ecuador?

BRYANT: Ecuador had a professional library school within the university and some very good librarians and libraries in and out of Quito. I was able to travel throughout Ecuador to visit and consult with a number of these rural libraries, and was quite impressed. Not so in Central America.

Q: Were there any schools in the United States that particularly catered to Latin America for librarians? I know, for example, for engineering, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute always has a very strong contingent of Latin Americans going there for engineering degrees. So I was wondering ... or do they sort of spread out?

BRYANT: I think they spread out; a Costa Rican friend went to the University of Missouri in Columbia. Another colleague went to UNC Chapel Hill. The University of Texas has probably the pre-eminent collection of Central American-Latin American materials, the Benson Latin American Collection, and it also has a graduate library school. In the U.S., a degree in library science is a graduate degree. You first get a B.A. in a subject area. For someone doing research, that probably would be the first place to go.

Q: You left, when?

BRYANT: Well, I was based in Costa Rica only about a year and a half. I was there in 1995-1996. As a budget-cutting move, USIA decided to close the RLO (Regional Library Officer) slot. At the same time, the woman who was my equivalent in Brasilia quit to go work for the Library of Congress office in Rio. USIA told me to pack my bags and hop on a plane to Brasilia. So off I went.

Q: You were there for how long?

BRYANT: Just about three months. I said, "What about language?" They said, "You'll be fine." And, actually, I was with Spanish. I managed pretty well. Again, I worked a lot with the parliament, as that was an interest of the Embassy. In Brasilia, they had a system, in at least the bare bones, of providing information services to parliamentarians. In 1996 when I was there, they were very much more advanced than in most of Central America. But they really wanted to fine-tune their information products, catch the interest of parliamentarians, and further market their products and services.

I held all our discussions with my speaking Spanish, and the Brazilians obvious speaking Portuguese. It really worked quite well. Of course we had a context we were working in; that helped.

Q: Did you find it more of a Library of Congress-type operation for you?

BRYANT: More of a Congressional Research Service; yes, it was very familiar. The National Library was a separate institution.

Q: The Brazilians were still going through the period where they were trying to do everything on a self-sustaining basis. I suppose there were bazillion computers.

BRYANT: There were some computers, and the use of CD-ROMs (a compact disc, read-only-memory), and a blending of the two (CD ROMS with Web links).

The parliament may have had home-grown computers. But of course, anything we buy must be American ... with exceptions. We had, and probably still have, a large network of bi-national centers throughout Brazil; maybe 15 or 17, throughout the country. USIA provided them with an ongoing supply of materials. I spent my time trying to get some sort of coordination, accountability, and record keeping on a center-by-center basis; that essentially was my primary focus.

Q: What was the principle use of the bi-national centers?

BRYANT: A lot of English teaching, and a lot of English-language reading material. Magazines were particularly popular because, of course, there is always something new to look at, and the language level and the shortness of articles makes them easier to read.

Q: Did you get any feel about the connection of these centers to the academic institutions in the country?

BRYANT: No relation. They were pretty much in smaller cities, rural areas, and they operated more as the public library; a community-center concept, rather than anything academic.

Q: Did you find they had gotten sort of removed from being an American institution? I assume that most of them are staffed by Brazilians. Over a period of time, I would think that they would develop more and more Brazilian-ish than American.

BRYANT: They were supposed to be Brazilian, hence the name, bi-national centers. The concept was one of working together; as mutual libraries. Since the budget came mostly from us, and we provided a lot of the materials, the libraries retained their bi-national character. Over the years, some of them have pulled away and not wanted to be associated with us. That happened in Costa Rica and Colombia as well. Sometimes we pulled away when we no longer had the budget, which is a shame. The bi-national centers played an important role in "making friends and influencing people," through their free libraries, their classes (a lot of English language classes) and their public activities, such as concerts, art shows, and so on. They provided resources otherwise not available to the public, and brought a sense of goodwill from the United States that was not heavily policy focused. Most of this was then lost with the merger.

Q: Let's take Brazil. Did we have an American policy goal in what we were doing? Or just doing good?

BRYANT: I think overall that in the network of bi-national centers the overall goal was the standard, mutual understanding through an American presence that provided information on American culture and society. As I said, the centers gave us a countrywide platform as a positive force for the Brazilian public. In Brasilia, we had an Embassy library located in a different neighborhood than the Embassy, which allowed for easy access by the public. We were located in a small building also occupied by the Fulbright Commission.

Q: Did you get involved in getting American lecturers out in the area?

BRYANT: I was often the American lecturer that got out in the area. Everywhere I have worked, I have enjoyed being used as a bonus lecturer. With my love of teaching, my academic background in history, and my legislative knowledge from my CRS days, I could talk on libraries, I could talk and teach on many topics: U.S. government; legislative procedure; researching and deciphering American law; U.S. elections, and of course, Internet ... how to use it and evaluate your findings. I have a whole bag of tricks, and I love public speaking. Whenever I would be at a post as the visiting IRO, I would often be asked to speak on any of a number of topics. I was also invited to several countries, solely to lecture on issues related to the U.S. government (Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Greece).

Q: So where did you go after six months?

BRYANT: After that, I came to Washington and got married. I remember at the time it was a secret. When I went to Brazil I was told: "Don't think this will be your post. Don't think you can stay there; you can't stay there. The only place you can go is back to Washington." That's what personnel told me. I said, "Okay, okay, okay, I got it." Well, the PAO at the time said, "I want you to stay and take this job." I said, "Washington says I can't." "I say you can. I want you to stay in this job." "I'm sorry; it is too late. I was told there was no way on earth I could stay, and I have made other plans." And he said, "What other plans?" I said, "Well, I am going back to Washington to get married." "That's no excuse," he said. Such is the bureaucracy of USIA and the State Department! There are no rules; no absolutes ... a lesson I have come to learn and even benefit from. There is no such thing as "no." So, I came back to Washington and got married.

Q: So when you are married, I mean, you didn't marry your husband, you married the Marine Corps.

BRYANT: Oh, I married my husband, but I guess I married the Marine Corps as well. He was going to retire.

Q: Well, that took care of that, in a way, didn't it?

BRYANT: Yes, it did.

Q: Then what happened? You came back in 1996?

BRYANT: 1996, yes. And got married in November. I was lucky as my husband had to do most of the wedding planning as I was out of the country. I wore my mother's wedding gown to avoid having to shop for one. She sent it to me when I was still in Costa Rica. The Embassy nurse was also a good seamstress, so I tried it on in the examining room to have her see if it could be altered. It was great fun. All top secret.

Q: And then what?

BRYANT: I was assigned as regional IRO for East Asia, operating out of D.C. And my husband didn't retire. He was promoted to Brigadier General, and was moving to Camp Pendleton, California. I said, "Well, now what do we do?" So I asked USIA if I could have leave without pay for two years while he was posted to Camp Pendleton. This was during USIA days still, where we were flexible, creative, and open-minded. USIA said, "Do you want to work?" I said, "I would much rather work." They said, "If you can come up with a plan to telecommute from Camp Pendleton for two years, we'll let you do it." Heaven. My assignment at that point was East Asia, covering the Philippines, Indonesia, New Zealand, Australia, and Singapore. Obviously, the travel would be easier from California than from D.C.

At that point, we were developing a new product called *InfoUSA*, which was a CD-ROM disc of all kinds of information on the United States. It was just in the planning stages, and it was to be distributed to schools, libraries, individuals, you name it. So I developed a budget and a plan for developing *InfoUSA* from Camp Pendleton and traveling to my countries as an IRO. After six months they said, "This is wonderful. You can stay as long as you want."

It was a fabulous time, because I had a home office there on Camp Pendleton, a beautiful home overlooking the untouched canyons in Southern California. It made my commute much easier, to go from the West Coast to Asia. I was able to actually phone back and forth to the countries in the same day. Whereas, if you were on the East Coast, the time difference was such that you would send a message one day and get an answer the next day; a very inefficient way of doing things. But we could actually talk the same day from California, and I could fly out more easily from there as well. It was a model that worked very well.

I was quite lucky because I know of a similar situation where an IRO had to resign because her husband was moving to Jamaica. Her job at the time was covering the Caribbean, so couldn't she do it from Jamaica? No, can't do it, says USIA. You have to quit, and she did. Somehow I got lucky. Once again, that is USIA/State Department.

Q: You were doing that from when to when?

BRYANT: 1996 to 1999.

Q: USIA was dissolving, wasn't it, at that point?

BRYANT: Yes. USIA was dissolving, to great moans and groans. I think I wasn't aware enough at the time of what difference it meant by being taken into State. I didn't appreciate what a culture clash it would be, and still is. USIA was busy trying to reinvent itself as a serious policy organization. There was a huge cutback on anything that looked like what we now call "soft diplomacy," which is becoming all the rage again. We had to cut that. We didn't want to look like soft diplomacy, heaven forbid; and that included

libraries and these cultural centers.

One of the very sad things that happened during that pre-consolidation era was the impact of annual budget cuts. The theory was to make us look more serious policy-wise, so all these public libraries looked bad. That may be about when we changed our name from Library Officer to Information Resources Officer. In other words, don't say "library" because library is such an obvious little discreet item that can be cut from a budget, and a librarian as well. So we tried to make sure we didn't have libraries; they were Informational Resource Centers.

I will always remember one of my trips to the Philippines when I was asked by the PAO (Public Affairs Officer), who later became an ambassador, to go into the ambassador and tell him that we were closing the American Cultural Center in Manila. The American Cultural Center in Manila was a large complex with an auditorium, galleries, and a magnificent library—a library where people, before opening hours, would line up around the block to be sure to get into a seat. This place was packed. Our public diplomacy work day after day, after day, was reaching hundreds of people in such a positive way; so USIA decided to close it.

The PAO said, "Mary Nell, will you please go tell the ambassador?" (I always told the PAOs when I went on my site visits that I was very willing to be the bearer of bad news because they could always blame me ... I leave.) So I went into the ambassador, and I told him that USIA would be closing the cultural center and he said, "That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard." And I said, "I couldn't agree with you more, but it is not my decision." And we proceeded to close almost all of them—some of our best foreign policy tools.

Q: This is still the Clinton Administration, isn't it?

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: I can't think of his name, but the head of USIA—(Joseph) Duffy, I think—was a singularly unhappy choice because he really didn't see the use of USIA.

BRYANT: No. He didn't defend us ...

Q: I mean, he allowed it to be gutted. I mean, you have peculiar people like (Charles Z.) Charlie Wick, who was a very odd character, real Hollywood-producer type. He was this sort of almost obnoxious sort, but did wonders for the agency. And Duffy came out of, I think, the academic world, but was a disaster.

BRYANT: That's funny. I have not heard that name for a long time, but I remember there were numerous jokes at the time, like, "Have you heard the rumor that Joe Duffy is still alive?" It was a sad time. Yes, it was under Clinton. I think Senator Helms held us hostage to signing the Chemical Weapons Ban Treaty. And so we were given up, and Mr. Duffy was not a popular man in the ranks of USIA. We began to close libraries. I know in

Colombia we severed our ties with the major library in downtown Bogotá. Argentina had a big library that was closed. Many of our public libraries were closed.

Q: What happened to these libraries? Were they taken over by the government? Or did they just die?

BRYANT: A bit of both. I don't know what happened to the one in the Philippines. We did keep the library in India, in New Delhi. It is located across town from the Embassy. The ambassador has been pushing through plans for a brand new building which is quite beautiful, really bucking the tide; although now he is beginning to swim with the tide, with his concept. The one in Mexico City is a fabulous library, the Benjamin Franklin Library, which, again, is packed all the time. There are moves to recreate what were our Embassy libraries, and place them either outside of the Embassy or make them more accessible to the public on the Embassy grounds. There is now some realization that, "Oops, we have made a mistake by closing off our libraries, closing off our access to information, losing the friendship, goodwill, and knowledge we have built up all these years. How can we go back and reinvent the wheel with security considerations which, of course, are real, but realizing we have lost something?"

Q: I have had some experience in Europe. Europe—libraries and all—were mostly tied to the academic institutions. The librarians really didn't want people to take books out of the library and look at them. I mean, that's where they kept them; it's where you keep books, with emphasis on keep.

BRYANT: Yes, very different concept.

Q: We've said, "Hell, this is for everybody, open it up." I mean, things have obviously changed over time. But we did it; you librarians were working your insidious whiles.

BRYANT: Bringing information to the people. Open access, uncensored. No banned books, just opportunity. This was true particularly in places where we operated outside of the embassies, as a legacy of USIA. This was the case in a number of places around the world, not just in Europe. USIA could operate independently, could have its libraries. It was wonderful because we could keep those open, and we could have access even as the embassies started tightening up on security. There were stories now and then that a bomb, a cherry bomb, might be thrown at one of them. But for the most part, there was no problem. But as budgets again tightened and security concerns were raised, a lot of those that were external USIA libraries and Public Affairs sections were dragged kicking and screaming onto the Embassy compound. They were inaccessible and lost their function and vitality.

Q: What happened after you did your Camp Pendleton thing?

BRYANT: Oh, but there is more on the Pendleton story. That's where I got the brunt of the Marine generals' wives not liking me. I have to say that I was liked by the wives of the sergeant majors.

Q: They run the Corps, anyway.

BRYANT: They were my colleagues and my friends, because they understood working. You know, it didn't make me the enemy.

During my Asian tour (Camp Pendleton), I was also invited out as a speaker to several other countries that weren't my region. Because of my expertise in legislation, legislative process, and elections in particular, I was sent to Indonesia, where I lectured at several Fulbright forums on U.S. elections. I think I was a "good deal," as my salary was paid, and I knew the ropes.

I was also invited to give talks by the PAO in Laos, a country that was very, very closed to any outside ideas. I gave programs at various venues on the Internet, on access to information, and the openness of information. The audiences could not believe the materials I brought to show them, such as a copy of the budget of the U.S. Government. They could not believe that that was public information, which was likewise astounding to me. The concept of open access to information seems so straightforward to Americans, but that concept is a shocker in a lot of countries. I showed them publications of the CIA. I thought they would fall out of their chairs. Oh, yes, we have access to this; not everything of course, but in the U.S. you can even have some CIA publications. The PAO wrote a cable that said it was probably the most successful PD (public diplomacy) program they'd ever had and was opening eyes to other ways of life. I was very proud of that.

Then I was invited by the government in Hanoi to come for one week, and work with them on setting up an information structure for their National Assembly. And that was absolutely fascinating.

Q: Talk about that. This was when?

BRYANT: This was in May of 1998. You asked me about in Eastern Europe, if people understood the concepts of open access to information and the need for such information in decision-making. In Vietnam, they had the concept, at least of needing independent information. I would say they appreciated the concept much better than in the early 1990s in Eastern Europe. This was, as I said, in 1998. They understood what they wanted, what they needed, and why they should have it. So I didn't have to sell them on the idea of putting a copier in a library.

Q: This is interesting because, as of today, it's still a one-party system.

BRYANT: Yes, yes it is.

Q: What was happening? Were there sort of movements within the party? Was this it?

BRYANT: I think it was mostly realizing that, even as a one-party system, they had to

find ways to access and use information in their work. They wanted to know how to use information tools. They wanted to know how to use databases, and they wanted to know how to use the Internet. They wanted to know how to set up a structure to find information, because even in a totalitarian regime they need to have information from a wide variety of sources to solve complex issues.

Q: If you are in the parliament of Vietnam, obviously you are a member of the communist party or a quasi-other party. But basically, a communist dominated system. I would think there would be "Okay, fine, we want this information, but we sure as hell don't want those people down in Quang Tri knowing how things work."

BRYANT: Then, it was obvious this was a system for them that the parliament wanted. That's absolutely true.

Q: By them, you mean the party people.

BRYANT: The party people, yes. They were not looking for a system to broadcast information about their decision making to the public. But they did want to be informed themselves. They were not after an equivalent of the *Congressional Record* or our public databases of U.S. legislative information. What they wanted was a system and the tools for collecting information internally. This was a very different situation than what I had seen in Eastern Europe, where the decisions were handed down from Moscow. I guess you could say that Hanoi was acting more like a Moscow than a Prague.

I was quite surprised to find that the National Assembly staff with whom I worked were eager to obtain diverse opinions; materials beyond what was given them by the ministries, until then their primary source of information. Yes, they wanted policy debates ... within their own circles, of course. I was told they, the staff, were permitted to provide controversial information to legislators as long as it was not anti-government. They were looking for differing opinions and views; most unusual. The logjam was knowing where to look and having the resources to do so.

That brings to mind the ongoing battle of making *CRS Reports* public. Congress has always fought it while academics and others have fought for public access. We used to chase *CRS Reports* on the Internet, and various Web sites obtained copies and put them on the Web.

Q: Did you find there was a lot of questioning? You weren't just delivering lectures, were you getting ...?

BRYANT: We were very interactive. At first, I gave lectures on the functioning of the U.S. government and on the provision of policy information to Congress. This all prompted a great deal of questioning; there was no hesitation to ask questions. They were not shy. They were anxious to develop something similar to our CRS.

Then we moved on to design information services for them, including the structure, the

services to be provided, and the resources to use. We were down at the operational level. I wasn't talking policy or selling them on the need for knowledge. That was clear. Of course I talked about the openness of information to the public in the U.S., but did not push.

Q: Did you get any feel for what the system there was producing?

BRYANT: My discussions and brainstorming were held with the Office of the National Assembly's Centre for Information, Library and Research Service, which was divided into sections covering library, research, press, computers, and historical research. They were already operating as information providers, and receiving a fair number of requests from Members of the Assembly. They were looking to build on that. They had just staffed an Information Center in the National Assembly building, as a test run, and had very positive feedback from the Members.

Q: I am thinking more of the educational system. Was there a pretty good university system producing IT types?

BRYANT: They had very good IT support. The computer department had already created a legal database of all laws and regulations since 1945, and a database of members of the National Assembly.

I squeezed in a visit to the Library and Information Center at the Vietnam National University in Hanoi, specifically to see their American collection. It was quite impressive ... both the collection itself and the room where it was housed. The University wanted to establish a formal American Studies curriculum for students. Not something I had found in Belgrade, for sure. At the time, we were shrinking our library collection at the Embassy in Wellington, New Zealand, and I recommended that some of that collection be sent to the University.

Q: The Vietnamese, no matter what political configuration, are smart people.

BRYANT: Yes, they were ready to go with us. They were looking for ways to be innovative ... they did not have the fear of Eastern Europe.

They still did not have Internet in the National Assembly, so I brought a group to the USIS office for a demonstration. They were amazed at the wealth of information I showed them, particularly on international and comparative law. They had plans for Internet access, and for putting it on a LAN in their offices. Having gone through this before, I stressed that the Internet access should be in the information and research branches, and not only in the computer section. We made plans for the IRC in the U.S. Embassy to provide background materials from the Internet and elsewhere to the staff of the Assembly on a regular basis, starting immediately.

In order to get them started on a book collection, I surveyed all the parliamentary librarians I knew from around the world, asking them which 10-20 reference books they

could not live without (again, books were still a primary source of information). There was a good deal of overlap, which I used to make a suggestion list for the Assembly.

The Swedish government and the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) were also in there, primarily providing hardware. The IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union) was also playing a role. The gap we filled was putting it all together to provide an effective information service that went beyond the bounds of ministry information.

Q: What was your impression of Hanoi?

BRYANT: Oh, I loved it! I loved it. It is a beautiful city. I understand it has changed drastically since I was there. When I was there, there were hardly any hotels; one lovely old one from the French era where I stayed. There were no high-rise hotels, no Hyatts, no Sheratons, no InterContinentials, not many cars. It was so hot, and the hotel had a beautiful pool ... but I had no bathing suit. The only place to get one was in the open market. Our librarian FSN took me to the market to buy one ... I still have it, as it is so funny ... a one piece with legs almost to the knees; very demure.

I went to work and back on a *cyclo*, a three-wheel bicycle rickshaw. I would sit out in front on a seat between the two front wheels, with a small canopy overhead. The bicycle driver was in the back. I would laugh at the picture of going to work at the Assembly on a bicycle taxi with my laptop in hand. We would peddle through cars, other rickshaws, and every type of conveyance you can imagine.

There were no street lights. When you came to an intersection, it was like a dance in which everybody flowed through to the other side, somehow without hitting each other. I loved it. I was completely unprotected on the front of the bicycle approaching a packed intersection, and somehow we would come out the other side miraculously with no collisions. All this without benefit of lights, without benefit of roundabouts. Each day after work, I would ask one of the cyclo drivers at the hotel to just take me around for an hour, anywhere; to show me Hanoi. Just a charming, very friendly city of small streets, crafts, people, markets, and small restaurants. I hear they've got every five-star hotel you can think have there, now. So, I am glad I saw it when I did.

As I was in Hanoi over a weekend, several officials took me on a trip to the beach. There were two party officials and myself. I thoroughly enjoyed it. We went to Ha Long Bay, in northeast Vietnam, and I got to cruise on a boat out on the emerald waters of the bay.

Q: There were these little islands ...

BRYANT: Yes, beautiful, beautiful.

Q: I have seen pictures.

BRYANT: Their Foreign Ministry took me out there and I thought, "Isn't this interesting." They were very nice, very cordial; but they were always being called and calling in,

obviously to check on where they were, where I was, what I was doing. So I felt the control that I was never alone. When I was out of Hanoi, the phones were ringing non-stop, I imagine checking on our whereabouts and what I was doing.

Q: We had an Embassy by that time?

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: What was your impression of the Embassy?

BRYANT: I honestly had limited contact with them. It was a very small building. The ambassador was ...

Q: Pete Peterson?

BRYANT: Yes, the former Air Force POW (prisoner of war) and Member of Congress who became the first U.S ambassador to Hanoi, in 1997.

Q: Married, actually, to a Vietnamese woman.

BRYANT: Yes, Vi Le. I don't know that I met him. They had very cramped quarters. My contact was the Vietnamese woman hired to run an information center in the Embassy. She is still there. Her name is Binh; wonderful, wonderful person. I spent most of my time at the Parliament, except to check in and out with the Embassy.

Q: Well, then what did you do? You came back? Where did you and your husband settle, I guess, after Pendleton?

BRYANT: Let's see. We came back to D.C. and Rick was promoted again. He was going to retire; again. But instead he was promoted to Major General and was stationed, I believe, at Marine Headquarters in Henderson Hall. I took a regional job covering northern Europe from Washington. So we were both in Washington together. And I covered the Baltics again, which is why I bid on the job. ... I wanted to go back. I also covered Scandinavia, France, and England. That was during 1999-2001.

Q: Were you able to go out and have wonderful lectures explaining how well the American election system works, for the election of 2000? I have to say election 2000/2001.

BRYANT: Yes ... before the election! Not very much afterwards. I spent lots of time lecturing before I left East Asia—that was 1999—then in Europe, also. I was invited to Athens to talk to several university groups, in addition to speaking in my region during my regular IRO visits. Campaign finance was of a lot of interest then. Of course, the Electoral College became of even more interest after Election Day.

Also during that tour, I worked on a lot of presidential visits overseas. Of course, when the President goes overseas the Embassy ramps up and draws in other personnel. I think I

was sort of on the A-list of people to call in to do presidential visits in Europe. I worked on at least four. I did several with Clinton, and I did several with Bush. I did a Mideast Summit in Norway with Clinton, and I did his last hurrah in Ireland and Northern Ireland. With Bush, I went to London and also to the EU/US Summit in Sweden.

Q: Did you run across the problem that Bush had? Or was this the early days of his unpopularity in Europe?

BRYANT: Let me say that there was a huge difference in Europe between being there for a Bush visit and for a Clinton visit. It was night and day in terms of popularity. For the Clinton visits, it was magical. Of course, you had to go days ahead to plan for the visit and do all the logistics and the site visits. My role was usually covering the room for the press, the filing center. You go see Clinton in the crowds and it was the rock star image. People screaming, yelling, clapping, cheering, everywhere he went. In Ireland, especially in the smaller towns, if you had an ID on that showed you were part of the presidential delegation people would spot you and say: "Oh! You're here for Clinton's visit. Oh, come in the store. Tell us about him." You'd go in the shops; in Ireland, in particular, they would have pictures of him. They decorated their shop windows, "Welcome President Clinton," everywhere. It was huge; it was happy, it was fun. It was not the same with Mr. Bush.

Q: I am looking at the time. Do you think we could do one more session? Why don't we do one more session? One last question: You were talking about the Clinton visits. Did Monica Lewinsky come up? Did you have to deal with that?

BRYANT: Absolutely not. Europe can't understand what the fuss is. To a European, who cares? It was pure adoration. If anything, they loved him more.

Q: Sure, what the hell. That's part of the perks, and also part of the responsibilities.

BRYANT: It was quite remarkable.

Q: Did you have anything to do with Mrs. Clinton?

BRYANT: No, just with him. I will say, that one of the most amazing things I saw him do was at a reception at the closing of the 1999 Middle East Summit, in Norway. He held a reception at the Embassy for the staff, to thank everyone who worked on his visit. He didn't have to do this. He had to have been exhausted. The summit, with President Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, had gone on for several days, non-stop. Yet he went the extra step. He greeted and thanked everybody personally, including a junior-high girls' band from a school in Oslo. And you could tell he was having a wonderful time. I thought, how *can* he do this? The Secret Service was probably impatient. Clinton was going to take a picture with the band, and one of the girls had gone to the bathroom. Clinton said, "Oh, no, we can't take the picture until she is back." In other words, he wasn't impatient to go. These were not people who would vote for him. This was not his clientele. There was no press coverage of this. As he

was exiting out of a side door, with the Secret Service on either side of him, a Norwegian woman (I imagine she worked at the Embassy), with a small child called out, "Mr. President?" He turned around, and she threw her child at him. Can you imagine? The eyes of the Secret Service were huge. Clinton turned around without a second of irritation, fear, anything. He looked around, caught the kid, "Oh, I will be happy to take a picture with the kid." I thought, "This man isn't human." Not the slightest bit of annoyance or irritation, fear, nothing. The Secret Service faces were not the same. But I thought, "Boy, he has something. I don't know what it is."

Q: One man I interviewed was economic counselor in Seoul, back when Clinton was governor. The economic counselor's wife was very pregnant. They were having a reception, and they had the Arkansas delegation come by. They were promoting trade. He said his wife was not a touchy-feely type of person, at all. And there she was, quite pregnant, and he looked across the room and there was this governor of Arkansas patting her belly. He thought, "Oh, my God." She was giggling like a schoolgirl. I mean, there is something.

BRYANT: There's something. I am not the type to meet a celebrity or public figure and be particularly impressed. Clinton shook my hand and I thought, "Oh my God, now I see it!" He looked in my eyes and said, "How are you doing?" I said, "Oh, it's not me Mr. President, it's you. How are you doing?" And he said, "I'm fine, I'm just fine." I will never forget it.

Q: Next time we will move into the Bush Administration, and I would like to hear if you have any stories about explaining the American electoral process because we are talking the long delayed ...

BRYANT: The long-delayed 2000 election.

Q: Okay, we will pick up then.

Q: Today is the 8th of October 2009, with Mary Nell Bryant. Where did we leave off?

BRYANT: We left off on presidential visits, and I talked about doing advance work for the State Department for Clinton visits.

Q: What year at Camp Pendleton was this?

BRYANT: This was 1999-2001. I was back from Camp Pendleton at this point, back in Washington. My husband was the head of logistics for the Marine Corps, and then he was on the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about the Clinton visits. One of the things in the Foreign Service they say is one presidential visit is equivalent to two earthquakes.

BRYANT: Yes, I think that's true ... maybe even three.

Q: But, anyway, how did you find, in the first place sort of the presidential support work at the time? This is towards the end of the Clinton Administration, I imagine. So you had much more professionalism I imagine, than at the beginning, when all of the amateur politicians want to get into the trip and throw their weight around.

BRYANT: Well, as I spoke of earlier, 1999 was the Middle East Summit in Oslo, which was quite intense. I happened to be on a regular IRO visit to Oslo when the summit was announced, and was asked to stay put there and work on the press briefing books, always a major Embassy project. Being in Public Affairs, my dealings were primarily with the White House travel staff and with the traveling press, not so much the White House staff. I worked in what was called the press filing center.

Q: I would imagine the traveling press, in a way,

BRYANT: They pretty much know what they are doing.

Q: You also have to keep them fed; I am not talking about food, I am talking about ...

BRYANT: Yes, news, information. The filing center was a place where they could go. It would vary, of course, depending on the trip and the location. We would set up work spaces for them for when they rolled into a town. They had to be credentialed beforehand, of course. We set up a big press room, with rows of tables, eventually for their laptops. We provided them with all types of communication hookups. It was a place where White House press releases, updates, or changes to the schedule, were provided. Likewise, we would be tasked—depending on the trip—with requests from the White House as to what kind of information they wanted delivered to them, and in what time frame. For example, they might want all news clippings from major papers on certain stories or wire services delivered to them, twenty packages, every two hours. Or, when they landed, they wanted the main stories from worldwide papers on that particular country waiting for them in the limo that picked them up.

Q: I would have thought that you would have really been straining our Embassy and the Norwegians. I mean, it's a small country and it is not used to having this type of tornado hit their ...

BRYANT: But they are used to being peace brokers. We managed, but it was a bit wild. The Embassy brought in a lot of additional staff of course. But you talk about feeding. Yes, we did feed information bi-directionally to the White House staff. It was the same for a Secretary of State visit. I did cover one with Secretary Colin Powell at one point.

Q: Well, here I would imagine you have something a little different. And that would be when the President goes around, he is not usually followed by a large number of people representing the Arab media. But in Oslo, all of a sudden there they appear. Were they a

different breed of cat, as far as working with them?

BRYANT: The American press?

Q: No, the Arab press.

BRYANT: We only dealt with the American press. It would have been up to the host country, to deal with foreign press. As the American Embassy, we took care of our own.

Q: I would have thought we would have been making an extra special effort to get to the Arab press.

BRYANT: In the press filing center where I was providing information, that was strictly American press. If there were major press conferences, they would be held at a different venue than the filing center, which was essentially their work area..

Q: What was your impression of how things went?

BRYANT: Very well. We always seemed to pat ourselves on the back on a job well done, as long as we got everybody the information, the hookups, and the communications capabilities that they wanted, back and forth, both ways.

This is a funny story. One of the biggest issues had to do with feeding food. When American press accompany the President on a trip, they pay the White House travel section for their food. The White House travel section makes arrangements for feeding of the press. Food would always be on buffet tables at the press center where we were working. Under the Clinton Administration there was a woman, in the White House travel office who came around and made sure that we did not touch so much as an olive on the table of the press food tables. It got to be a game. We would see if we could steal a sandwich or a diet coke and not get caught. There were always down times— waiting for the next press release to come out or the next news delivery. "Oh, what will we do now?" "We'll steal a sandwich." —. The kitchen staff would let us know when they would bring the trays back into the kitchen so we could sneak back in the kitchen and eat. We were never given time off to eat ourselves, so that was all the food we got. We were in cahoots with the hotel staff to go back and grab food, and not get caught. These are the sidelights of the presidential visit.

There were always computer issues, too. This was kind of a theme, I guess, in my career in the State Department; the advance of technology and the very slow acceptance of it by the State Department. USIA was so much more advanced and open to advance, because their mission was, of course, to interact, to provide information, whereas State was secretive, closed, and more elitist. They always wanted to protect things. New, exciting, open technology was an anathema. They fought it.

We would always run into problems when we would have to be off-site of an Embassy while still being in touch with e-mail and Internet. We had to follow news stories, and

produce updates for the press and the White House. We couldn't have access to our State Department e-mail because we were out of the State Department. We would have to set up Hotmail accounts, Yahoo mail accounts, whatever e-mail accounts existed at the time. We had to set up ways to have news delivered to our private e-mail accounts, because we weren't allowed to access our State accounts. You couldn't automatically forward your State e-mail to another account; that wasn't allowed. So, we came up with many, many work-arounds to be able to do our job using the Internet and e-mail, with policy way behind technology.

Q: By this time, news people were wedded to the email, to the computerized delivery of both instructions of news, and for sending things off. So you had to make sure that, wherever you went, you had the proper lines set up in order to do this.

BRYANT: Exactly. We had to have work stations set up with a certain number of computers, if they didn't have them, just in case. Of course, they all had laptops at this point. You would set up almost picnic table-like centers with hookups for power or connection to the Internet, or both, depending on the technology at the time. Rows of computer hookups and phone lines at each workspace.

Q: Did you find the press pretty self-disciplined? They came in and they knew what they were doing. I mean, you wanted to make sure you had everything, but you didn't have people wandering around sort of saying, "How do you do this?"

BRYANT: No. They knew what connections they wanted or needed, and it was our job to make sure that we already had that provided; so we did.

Q: I think you mentioned you were with George Bush early on. Did you get involved ...?

BRYANT: Yes, yes, for his first two visits; first for the U.S. EU Summit in Sweden in 2001, and later that year in London. Anyway, it was very interesting because the attitude of the travel office and the White House staff we came in contact with in the Bush era was totally different than the Clinton people. The Clinton people were brasher, more dismissive. We couldn't touch the food, as I have said.. From the Bush people, I got "thank you" notes! I worked with Mrs. Bush at one point, setting up one of her appearances in Sweden, and she and her staff could not have been more pleasant. As for food, the travel person came around to all of us in the centers and said, "I want you to know that anything here is yours." We said, "Well, we like this. There may be other things we do or don't like, but the food is definitely better." We didn't have to sneak it anymore.

The reaction to Bush in Europe, of course, was vastly different than it had been to Clinton. With Clinton, it was the appearance of a rock star, you know, to adoring crowds cheering and waving and lining the routes. There were "Welcome, Mr. President" signs in shop windows.

Bush was a very different story. There were a number of protests against him. I worked at the EU Summit in Gothenburg, Sweden in June 2001, where there were significant anti-

Bush protests. Less significant, but more amusing was the announcement of a group mooning of the President. Mooning is where you turn your back to someone, lean over, and pull your pants down. It was announced that there would be at, say, one o'clock in the afternoon, a public mooning of President Bush on the square in front of his hotel. Sometimes State Department staff were located in the same hotel as the president, and sometimes not; just depending on logistics. In Gothenburg we were in a separate hotel and, at that time, we had to still run printed copies of materials over to the White House hotel; actually hand deliver materials. State Department staff would sign up for specific runs. I made sure that I got the run that would be able to witness the mooning of the president.

Q: Was there a significant moon?

BRYANT: I wouldn't say it was significant. There were a number of people there. The funny part about it was that it was a lovely, sunny day in Sweden and people came to the park with their kids in strollers. It was a festive occasion, and a great number of them mooned the president. There was nothing hostile or angry about it, it was festive. Here all of these people showed up with their kids in strollers, having a walk around the park, to watch the mooning of the President. So yes, he got a different reception.

Q: By this time, you have been involved in American government policy for a long time. Did you sense, or was there a palpable difference, certainly in the way you felt and maybe your colleagues, about the Bush Administration vis-a-vis, particularly Europe and all? Early on?

BRYANT: Yes, early on. And I think a lot of it had to do with, shall we say, the bad taste left in one's mouth after the election, which did not get things off to a good start. The 2000 election wreaked havoc with the supposed beauty of our system. I will say that the Electoral College became a popular topic.

I don't think the European people, as a whole, were fond of Bush; rather, they were dismissive of him. Granted, he got along with various European leaders quite well, but our impression certainly working in the embassies was that he was not a popular figure.

Q: Did this cause particular problems? I mean, you were in the public affairs part of our policy; to use a Foreign Service euphemism, it presented a challenge.

BRYANT: A challenge, yes; a challenge to develop mutual understanding, as we say. Yes, it did. What we tried to do is find areas where we could connect, where we could have discussions, and where people still wanted to talk. It became, of course, much worse with the war against Iraq, much, much worse. A lot of cynicism: America the aggressor.

Q: How did the events of 9/11 affect you?

BRYANT: Considerably. On 9/11 I was in D.C., still covering northern Europe, the Baltics, Scandinavia, France, England. I was in Washington at an Internet conference in a

hotel in Herndon, Virginia.

Q: Herndon is close to Dulles Airport.

BRYANT: I had flown in from a work assignment in Paris the day before, to attend the conference. We had a number of FSNs, the local national employees of our embassies, who worked in Embassy libraries from all over the world, in town for a four-day conference on researching with the Internet. I believe Day One was 9/11, so everyone had just arrived from all over the world. I was listening to lectures at the hotel when the towers and Pentagon were hit. Shockingly, nobody interrupted the class; it just went on until completion. I was clueless that anything had happened. Stepping out of the class, I saw the large screen TV in the atrium of the hotel, with a picture of an airplane crashed into the Pentagon. At that time, my husband was on the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon. I didn't even know about the Twin Towers at this point. I stepped outside, and saw the airplane in the Pentagon. Oh, my God!

I found the others in our group. We had a group of IROs—Information Resources Officers—and our FSNs (foreign service nationals) gathered in two hotel rooms. We herded everybody into the rooms to watch the news. I tried calling every Marine Corps and Pentagon number I could think of on my cell phone. A lot of people's cell phones didn't work; mine did for some reason. The phone just rang, and rang, and rang. I couldn't get through to anyone. Rick and I were living in northern Virginia in an apartment at the time. I said to the FSN from New Zealand, Christine Vivian, a friend of mine from my earlier assignment, "Well, the only way I am going to know if my husband is alive is to go home and see if I get a call at home." I looked at Christine and said, "Christine, I can't do it alone. You are coming with me." And she said, "Okay." She packed her bag and off we went. By the time we got home, I had a call from Rick saying: "I am all right. I'm fine. I will call you when I can; but everything is fine, don't worry." All I needed to know.

I went out on the balcony and sat. I remember Christine sticking her head out asking, "Where's the vacuum cleaner?" And I said, "Why do you want the vacuum cleaner?" "I have to vacuum when I am nervous." I said, "Go at it." So, she vacuumed and I sat out on the balcony in a daze. I got a million calls, of course, asking: "How's Rick? How's Rick? Is he okay? Is he okay?" I kept a log of all the calls for him, saying, "Thank you for your concern; I will let him know you'd called." She says I was glued to the television, but I don't remember anything except sitting on the balcony in a daze.

Rick came home occasionally, and brought home a secure phone so that when he was home he could stay in communication. There were times, and I didn't tell him until years later, that he would come home so exhausted, that for a few hours I would unplug the phone. I decided that that was my job, to take care of him. And if they couldn't find him for a couple of hours, somebody else could do the job. I would just unplug it and let him sleep. It wasn't until after he had retired that I told him what I did.

Meanwhile, we IROs had people from our embassies all over the world, in Washington. They were panic-stricken for their families, their homes, worried about how they were

going to get home. The airports were closed for some time. They were, of course, on a limited budget covering only this conference; now, what were they going to do? I was dismissed to go look after my husband. But the other IROs who were in town created an emergency "SWAT" (special weapons and tactics) team, essentially to get money and housing for the FSNs who had to stay here. The airports were shut down, they couldn't get out, and they didn't have money or reservations to stay in a hotel. We had our own little SWAT team there to work with the FSNs and make sure they had housing, money, and as soon as possible, were booked on flights to get home. That was our operations center.

Q: Did the State Department jump in to help?

BRYANT: No. I think you know the answer to that. Rapid reaction, particularly when it comes to funding anything that is out of the ordinary, is not the strength of the State Department. So, it did take a dedicated group of people pushing, yanking, calling, and tugging to take care of these people who we had responsibility for.

Q: Also, you must have had to field an awful lot of calls. I remember being out in Missouri shortly thereafter, and they asked where we lived and we said, "Oh, we live in Washington." And all of a sudden they were, "Oh!" I mean, it was as though we were personally under attack. I passed by the Pentagon, but actually that was about a mile away at the time, but I didn't feel that I was under attack. Elsewhere, and of course when you translate this into coming out of Athens or something like that, having foreign national employees of our embassies in D.C., you must have been deluged by calls of, "Is so-and-so alright?"

BRYANT: It was our group of IROs who helped the FSNs who were with us contact their families to say, "Yes, we are okay;" to get the word out. That was another role, getting them into the office, letting them use the phones, calling out, letting their families know they were okay.

Q: All of our interviews now say before 9/11, during 9/11, and after 9/11. What happened to you after 9/11? Did your role change at all?

BRYANT: Considerably. We were early into the merger of USIA into the State Department and there were tight rules on how many years you could be posted in Washington as opposed to being overseas. The kind of assignment I had done, being at Camp Pendleton, while being in East Asia half time, or being in Washington and spending half my time in Europe, were counted as overseas tours under USIA. Just before 9/11, the State Department decided that that didn't count anymore and that I had to go overseas immediately. Nobody was grandfathered. Boom! You have to go overseas right now. There weren't any other IRO slots, all of them were filled; but I was told I had to go overseas or quit. Now that's an interesting and intelligent decision on the part of personnel. This is a true story. There are no other slots to fill, but you have to move overseas to one or quit. (I might add that this is so typical of the State Department bureaucracy.) You have to move, when there is no opening to move to, or resign.

Q: Was there an intelligent human being in charge somewhere trying to figure out how to put this thing together?

BRYANT: No. Everywhere I turned, I was told those are the rules. And, again, I think this is one of the longstanding weaknesses of the State Department, that, yes, they do bend the rules when they want to, and otherwise the rules loom so largely that no one can see beyond them. That has been one of the ongoing problems between State and USIA. USIA, remember, is the one who said: "Yes, you can telecommute from Camp Pendleton for two years; let's see if it will work. That way, you don't have to go on leave without pay, we retain your services, we have that slot filled; you work." Yes, that broke all kinds of rules, but that was the attitude in USIA, at least at times. You get to State and it is: "Nope, that's the rule. We have just noticed you've been here so many years it doesn't matter that you were working overseas half the time. You were based in Washington, therefore, move or quit." I said, "Yes, now I know I am in the State Department."

So, I went and actually marketed myself through the halls of the State Department looking for a job. I said, "I am going to find myself a one-year slot," because obviously my husband couldn't go. He was dealing with 9/11 at the Pentagon. I was told that no such thing exists as a one-year slot. I said, "Just watch me..." And I prowled around the halls of the various bureaus. This was also roughly the time of the end of the wars in Yugoslavia—the Kosovo war, the bombing of Belgrade, and the fall of Milosevic in October 2000. The State Department was trying to restart an Embassy in Serbia, and they were desperate to get staff to go to Belgrade, Public Affairs staff. The European Public Diplomacy Bureau told me that if I could leave in three weeks to be the assistant Public Affairs Officer in Belgrade, I could go for one year. And I said, "You've got a deal. I can be ready in three weeks." So, no language training, no area studies, no qualifications, no competitive bidding, all rules broken ... because they needed someone. I had luckily done work in Albania with the Frost Task Force and, in fact, had done some supplementary work there in 1999. Right after the Balkan war and the refugee crisis ended, I had been called in to go back to Albania to see what we could build up in terms of information and public affairs capabilities in Albania. So I knew a bit of the region from that. I think that helped.

Sure enough, I said to Rick, "Well, here's the deal." He said basically that under the circumstances (he was on the Joint Chiefs' staff), we would not see a lot of each other anyway so it might as well be now. I said, "Yep, three weeks I am out of here. Get me a visa and I'll do it." So off I went to Belgrade.

Q: You were in Belgrade from when to when?

BRYANT: October 2001 to November 2002.

Q: What was your impression of the situation in Belgrade? We had just been at war with Serbia

BRYANT: Yes, NATO of course, not us. We had bombed them for 78 days in 1999.

Q: Kneza Milosa Street, I guess, is the street in front of the Embassy in Belgrade ...

BRYANT: Yes and the Embassy was in tatters. What had been the Serbian defense ministry headquarters was bombed to a ruin; the TV towers bombed. When I first arrived, there was no housing available yet, so I lived in the Hyatt, which had also served as the American Embassy for a while. I arrived just after they had moved the Embassy itself, from the Hyatt back into salvageable parts of the old Embassy building. Most of the Embassy itself was condemned.

Q: Well, it had been badly damaged during WWII when the Germans bombed. It was an apartment building.

BRYANT: Exactly. The facade portion contained the offices, and they were completely destroyed. You couldn't go in what was left. But, behind the main building were apartments for housing for TDY (temporary duty staff). Those were salvageable, so the offices moved into the various apartments.

Q: I had lived in one of those apartments for five years.

BRYANT: Oh, did you? When?

Q: When I was chief of the Consular Section in 1962-67.

BRYANT: Ah ha, interesting. Well, maybe it was the same apartment that I moved into as the Public Affairs Section.

Q: Apartment 13.

BRYANT: What was really comical was the idea of security. State was trying to figure out security as we moved back in. Of course, the building is right on the street, as you know. My office was 100 feet from an apartment building, and we could watch each other, the people in the apartment and me. I mean, if anybody wanted to shoot a missile, or just a gun, into our offices, they could. The narrow street between the buildings was closed to traffic, but the buildings were still right next to each other. We were sitting ducks, but I was more amused by it than frightened. The embassy building had its own cafeteria on the ground floor facing a main street, and a battle went on over closing it. Security's logic was that a car could run into the cafeteria, but not into the offices. I think they did finally close it about the time I was leaving. A pity because there was really nowhere to go to eat ... and it was our party space. As it happened, in the time I was there, the only time the Embassy was attacked was when the Serbians beat the United States in a basketball game. They beat us, so they attacked our Embassy. I can't explain it. But since you have been in Serbia, you can probably explain better than me.

In fact, I swore that I would not leave Serbia until I understood their mentality, but I

failed. I still do not understand the extreme nationalism. In conversations with Serbs, for example, I found that any time a person's name came up, the Serbs would have to pause and identify the area of Serbia where that person came from. It seemed critical to establish that before any discussion could go on. Then, of course, there was the insistence that the Serbian language bore no resemblance to Croatian, though I was told (by non-Serbs), that the two were basically the same.

Q: Well, tell me; in the first place, what about our local staff, the FSN staff? They had just been through a war, you know, a nasty bombing for some weeks and all that. So this is not a good time for them. How did they react?

BRYANT: We had the most wonderful staff, certainly in Public Affairs. What happened was, and I truly give credit to State for this, taking good care of the FSN staff. A lot of them were invited to move to Vienna and work there. Since we closed down our operations, they were at least given a chance to work. And a number of them did work in Vienna for years. When we reopened the Embassy, they came back, or came from other jobs. So we had a fantastic, very loyal and supportive staff. I thought they were just terrific.

Though some of them still didn't quite understand the antagonism felt, say, by the Croats or the Bosnians or the rest of the world against the Serbs. I heard all kinds of propaganda from them. For instance, our webmaster couldn't understand why the Croats wouldn't give him a visa to go back to Croatia for a summer vacation. He said: "I grew up going to Croatia. (Of course, this was during the years of Yugoslavia). I spent my summers in Croatia on the beaches, and they won't let me back." And I said, "Well, don't you think the fact that you bombed the heck out of Dubrovnik—which was not even a military target of any sort—don't you think that has something to do with it?" "We didn't bomb Dubrovnik," He said. "Yes you did, I have seen it. I have been to Dubrovnik and seen all..."

Q: The artillery, Serb artillery, set up on the ridge up there and, you know, gratuitously bombed Dubrovnik.

BRYANT: So we say. But according to our Serbian webmaster, it was not the Serbs. It was French Intelligence.

Q: Oh! I forgot about French Intelligence.

BRYANT: Here is a college educated, intelligent guy: "It was French Intelligence; we would never do such a thing." That, to me, symbolized so much of the work in Serbia; a mentality of, "We never did anything wrong, we're the ones persecuted and lied about." A good deal of our job was, at least an attempt at, education and broadening of minds to come to some understanding of balance. I was Assistant Public Affairs Officer and then for a good bit of the time I was acting PAO; we were very short staffed. As I said, they couldn't get people in then. Now I think it is a three- or five-officer Public Affairs Office. I was, for a good while, one person trying to run the shop. It was a huge challenge, but

fascinating, to see the impact of propaganda and how people believed it, then to try to come up with ways to counter it that weren't in your face, but were a little softer.

I spent a lot of time at the University of Belgrade working with their political science department. I gave lectures and our political officers gave lectures. I assessed their library; it was nothing. They had not received a new book in ten years. They had no journals, whatsoever; no access to journal literature, or databases. Nothing.

However, if Serbians had gone abroad during the war years and gotten university degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale—and I know specific examples of this—and come back to Serbia, the University of Belgrade, the education authorities, would not accept the degrees because they were not from the University of Belgrade! Mind-boggling.

Q: I was in charge of the Consular Section. We would issue exchange visas and we would have people going to MIT or Harvard, I mean really top shelf, because when you are dealing with Serbians you are dealing with very bright people; particularly in the mathematics area. They have a propensity to be very good at math. Anyway, they would come back, and the whole idea was you get this exposure to the United States and then you take this knowledge and come back to Yugoslavia, in those days, and use it in your own country. They were supposed to stay in Yugoslavia at least two years. They would come back and come to me, and they'd say: "Do something about this. They won't accept the professors of medicine. They are making me scrub bedpans because my degree doesn't mean anything to them." I mean, it was really very old Europe.

BRYANT: The irony is that that mentality still existed in 2001, when they admittedly hadn't received any research materials for ten years. Still, a degree from Harvard, Yale, Oxford counted as nothing.

Q: Were you able to make any headway on that?

BRYANT: Well, on that issue, I doubt it. At least we had a lot of SEED (Support for East European Democracy) money for programs and grants. It was a special appropriation from Congress that lasted for a number of years after the fall of the Soviet Union; supplementary funds for specific development projects. A lot went to people exchanges, and a lot went to programs directed toward transitional societies, to develop the education system, civil society, human rights, conflict resolution, market economics, libraries, non-governmental organizations, etc.

I worked with professors to develop lists of materials they really needed and wanted. We were able to purchase collections of books—reference books, up-to-date medical books, economic books, books on free market economies, books on civil society—things that were in our interest that they knew they needed. They selected the books and we bought them. We funded access to commercial databases for a certain number of years so that the professors could catch up on the journal literature in their fields. They probably still don't accept a degree from Harvard, but at least they have more resources.

A highlight for me was I working with the president of the Serbia Supreme Court, Judge Karamarkovic (a woman!) to create a library. They had no law library. None. Together we arranged for each judge to develop lists of materials they wanted, that they felt they needed to establish their legal system, and we purchased them.

Q: During the time you were there, what about the Internet? Was it the source of information anywhere near the way it is today?

BRYANT: No, it was not. It was very much a time of change and of a realization that this is where they needed to go. They knew that they wanted it. The Serbian Information Technology and Internet Development Agency mandated that Internet training be an integral part of the education in high schools. I thought this was very broad thinking. The Ministry of Education agreed, and so I worked with both to develop a plan to create pilot public libraries designed to promote the use of the Internet. They did have a good public library system, though there was not much content in the libraries. Still, they had the institutions, between libraries and schools, as locations to teach Internet skills. I brought over specialist for two-weeks of travel in Serbia to do a train-the-trainer kind of program at various venues, teaching basic Internet searching. Then, hopefully, the people who attended those courses could spread the knowledge of the Internet. It was a big issue, and they saw that need and wanted it as quickly as possible. I also brought over a library technology specialist to work with the Serbian National Library to look at options for automating access to their collections.

In contrast, I have to go back to one story while I was working in Europe, immediately preceding this. In 1999, I began working in northern Europe, right after the consolidation of USIA and State. USIA had the Internet and was using it extensively. We had Web pages; we were interacting with people, we were out there in the public. We had our own network, *PDnet*, separate from the State Department network. Public diplomacy officers were using it constantly—Web pages, Web page strategy, how to use them and develop them for the embassies. But among State officers at an Embassy, nobody had access to the Internet. Not safe. Security risk.—they might have it down the hall in the IT department, one machine, but far too dangerous to have access at their own desktop ... or even in their office

In 2000, I was meeting with our ambassador in Vilnius, who told me he had the Internet at home, and he worked at home looking at news stories on the Internet before he came into the office because he wasn't allowed to have it there. I said, "Why aren't you allowed to have it in your office?" The Ambassador said, "Oh, our IT people say it is a security violation." I said, "That's insane, it's not a security violation. You can have the Internet in your office." Their IT person came in and told the Ambassador, "Absolutely not. You cannot have it." I said that he and all his officers should have it at their desks.

Then, I went to Ireland, and once again, met with an ambassador wanting Internet in his office. Again, he did his work at home before coming to the office because both the IMO (Information Management Officer) and the Security Officer ganged up to say it was too

much of a security risk.

So my legacy, as I left that job, was working with what was called EUR/PD, the European public diplomacy office in Washington, and the technology office in Washington, to try and come to terms with who could have Internet where, and draft a cable that said, "Yes, the ambassador can have Internet."

Q: It is almost a guild system where the IT people wanted to keep these things in their clutches and not let them get out.

BRYANT: Yes, not let them get out. Partly fear, I think, of you know, something going wrong. You don't understand it, so you just say "no."

We were developing Embassy Web pages at the time I was covering northern Europe (2000-2001), and the State Department had no job description for a Webmaster. Our LES (locally employed staff) performing the job of Webmaster were classified as something else ... far below where their skills should have put them. With people with Web skills in demand, our staff of course started leaving. And still, State Personnel said there was no such thing as a Webmaster ... not at State and not anywhere. Finally, I wrote a job description they accepted, and positions were appropriately upgraded. "Just say no" almost won once again.

The story I recall is when Colin Powell came in to the State Department and was horrified at our state of technology. He went into the library there in Main State and said, "Why don't you have the Internet in here?" He was appalled. They said, "Oh, because it's not allowed for security reasons." He said, "I want the Internet in here, immediately." This was the time when he was also forbidden to bring his Blackberry into Main State, due to security considerations. He said to IRM (Information Resource Management), the technology folks at State; "I want a plan for Internet access on everybody's desk, immediately." And they stalled, and stalled, and stalled. Finally, he called them into a meeting with what was then the I- Bureau, (the Information Bureau, part of what had been USIA), and said, "If you don't get this to me within two weeks, I am going to have the I-Bureau do this." And IRM did it within two weeks, and people got the Internet. So, God bless Colin Powell because, otherwise, we would still be on typewriters.

Q: You know, you run across these things in any bureaucracy of people who basically are trying to preserve their jobs and make them more important. They don't think beyond that. And it is easier to say "no," than "yes."

BRYANT: True, but so frustrating. It gave me the role of the one coming back and saying: "They can have Internet on their desk. It is not a security violation. It can be done bureau-wide in EUR. Let's make this happen. Let's call these people to task and make it happen." The reason I knew was not because I was a computer wizard. My husband, here he is in the Pentagon, on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in the very building where they monitor satellites, missiles, and can probably set off a nuclear bomb, and he had desktop Internet access. Furthermore, he could go home to our computer and read his e-mail. I

would tell the people at State, "I'm sorry, if Defense can do it—he gets on Windows Outlook, or whatever, at home and reads his e-mail—don't tell me this can't be done. I am just not buying it."

When I left this past year, I was still fighting the same battle. So, hopefully, the ambassador in Lithuania finally got his Internet access. The issue is going to be shifting now. Before, when ambassadors had not grown up in the computer age, they didn't know enough to say, "Oh, yes I can have it here." You know, they believed their IT people. But now, as officers are growing up who are computer savvy, and in some cases more savvy than the IT people at post, they aren't going to tolerate it. So it's going to change.

But to get back to IT in Serbia: The Serbs definitely wanted it. Not only that, they wanted it in the broader sense of providing education and knowledge, from which they had been restricted.

One of the big programs I created that I am very proud of was to subsidize the publishing industry, trying to get an independent publishing industry going in Serbia. I would go around to the bookstores and look at what was out there. It was mind blowing, the limitations of what was on sale. There were books that would tell you that French intelligence really bombed Dubrovnik. That was the general nature of what was out there on the bookshelves. So I worked directly with publishers to select titles that we would both like to see published, everything from political science, democratic government, market economy, privatization, history, straight history, to a history of the United States, and histories of the Yugoslav wars that were not from the Serbian viewpoint. They were all books by American authors, so we would get the rights from them and their publishing companies. Then we would pay the publisher to translate and publish the book. We would negotiate a price; they would give us a certain number of books for free, and they would make the profit on selling the rest. To me, it was very exciting because it was getting more information out to the broader public. It was also boosting the native publishing industry that had nothing to publish and no money to publish with.

Maybe two years ago, or so, I saw one of our FSNs here in Washington. I said, "What are you doing here?" She said, "I'm here bringing a group of Serbian publishers to a book fair." She said, "It's been one of the most successful programs we ever did, and you are the best PAO I've ever had." And I said, "Well, thank you. I am just glad to know it took off." They were hungry for this information that just had not been accessible to them.

One other thing that we tried to do was to open what we call American Corners. They take on different models, but are essentially special reading rooms within an existing library that have a lot of information about the U.S. and, perhaps most importantly, free Internet access. They operate inside an existing institution, but we donate the U.S. materials and the free Internet access. I started several of these while I was in Serbia, something that presented some unique challenges. At the time, the central public library in Belgrade was very interested in having us do over a space at one of their branches with all kinds of new books, magazines and the free Internet access. So, I went to visit the branch library. Well, it turned out that it wasn't so much a branch library. It was being run

as a coffee house. The reason it was being run as a coffee house was because somebody in the city government was friends with somebody in the Serbian Mafia who controlled that space. The city library wanted us to use our influence to get the Mafia out of this room so we could put a reading room in. I had to tell them that, "Sorry, getting the Mafia out of your city library space is not something that the American Embassy can undertake." So we had to find another space.

I remember, on the other hand, we opened one in the city of Niš in the south, which was trying to become an international center. They built a new building that was going to have rooms for different cultures and different countries, and they wanted the U.S. to be the first. We got to pick which room we wanted in this new building on the pedestrian street. It was fabulous, just fabulous. They would run all kinds of programs and lectures and discussion classes.

Ambassador (William Dale) Montgomery said, "The only thing is, you can't have is the Internet." I said: "What do you mean you can't have the Internet? You have to have the Internet, that's the whole point. Set up the Internet and give people this access the government wants, is promoting and pushing, and that we are helping." "No, you can't have the Internet." Finally, (Robert) Bob Norman, who was the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) pulled me aside and said, "Mary Nell, stop harassing him about the Internet; just don't go there. He's not going to allow it." And I said, "But we'll look like fools if we open a modern reading room without the Internet." He said, "He just won't allow it. He feels that people would just come check their e-mail." I said: "So what? It at least gets them in to our space. They will be grateful to have free Internet access. They will see our materials, our lovely room, maybe come to our programs. It's a carrot, you know, it's a carrot."

So what I finally did was include a certain number of computers and a certain number of modems in the contract. This was still a phone-line and modem era. A certain number of computers with modems, and a certain number of phone lines, were part of the contract for the Center. If someone just happened to connect the phone line to the computer, what could you do? That's how I got around it. And then I left the country before he ever caught on.

Q: Along the way, or other places, did you find real resentment? I mean: there must have been a backlash of some people who really just hated the United States.

BRYANT: Oh, absolutely. There was a real mixture. I think, as so often is the case, the hatred was aimed at the government, and not at the people. On a people-to-people basis, people were thrilled to have the U.S. back, particularly on a cultural level. That's where the idea of soft diplomacy comes in and works: diplomacy through culture and dialog. Bringing over groups such as the Julliard and other musicians; we brought in one Serbian-American pianist, Tatjana Rankovich, who was all the rage. We contributed to theater festivals, movie festivals. People would say, "Oh, we are so glad you are back. We're so glad you're back." I heard that all the time, in the cultural milieu. It was a way to get back in the door, and avoid the hatred. Now, of course, you did find the hatred when it

came to politics and the war. But at the same time, as I said, there was a huge hunger for our books, our education, our technology, our culture. So anything we did in terms of helping them develop that, was extremely well received.

We did try to explain the U.S. bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. That was a tough one. In 1999, the U.S. accidentally bombed the Chinese Embassy. The CIA had provided NATO with coordinates they thought were for a Yugoslav weapons warehouse, but the maps were old ... and wrong. I was constantly being asked why we did it, and the explanation of old maps was never accepted. The Serb's just could not believe that the CIA would make such a stupid mistake. It certainly gave credit to the CIA.

We, of course, increased our exchange programs that you did the visas for, such as the international visitor programs. These programs were designed to bring Serbians to the U.S. and vice versa, for educational and cultural dialog. I even spent my 50th birthday, interviewing high school students in a town in northern Serbia, for an academic exchange program. It was a great way to turn 50. We had a number of scholarship programs—Ron Brown, Hubert Humphrey, Fulbright, Youth Leadership Exchange, Teacher Exchange—many programs to send Serbs to the U.S. They would sign up, and maybe two days before the program, they would cancel. "Oh, somebody is sick, I can't go." We got that a lot. We couldn't say what's really going on, but our feeling was that their place of work, particularly if it were a government institution, didn't like the idea of their going to the U.S. They were seen as somewhat of a traitor, and so they would back out. It was very frustrating to us to arrange all these programs and then at the last minute, I mean, you couldn't substitute someone else, it was too late.

Q: So you had the feeling this was the authorities who were leaning on these individuals?

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: How stood the press, while you were there? I go back to the era when there were two newspapers—Politika and Borba—and they spouted nothing but propaganda. I mean, you know, these canned speeches. What was the press situation?

BRYANT: The press blossomed. There were many, many newspapers. All kinds of viewpoints; but of course, not in support of U.S. actions in Iraq. As Serbia wanted to become a member of the EU, its policy and press were aligned in that direction.

One of our major pushes that I hadn't mentioned was to journalism; we did a lot of bringing U.S. journalism professors or practicing journalists over to work with newspapers; and did the reverse, of course. We sent many groups of journalists over to the U.S. We tried to develop journalism both at the university level and at the operational level; not only the concept of an open press, but also basic marketing strategies. They had no idea how to market their papers. By the time I left in 2002, you could find anything and everything in the Serbian papers. There are great numbers of them.

Q: We have all these exchanges, but did the press point out things favorable to the United

States? I mean, not necessarily all favorable, but were we having the impact on the content?

BRYANT: Yes, we did, but not necessarily with U.S. foreign policy. I appeared on several TV (RTS TV 2) interviews on the Serbian version of the "Today Show;" again, on the cultural side. I set up a series of such programs and we would get really good press on any that we did on soft issues about the U.S. We also got support if we tried to push the idea of anti-terrorism in general, but we didn't dare try to push support for the Iraq invasion, obviously. That was an impossible line. We did get pressure from Washington saying: "Well, can't you promote going to war with Iraq? Can't you promote that in Serbia? Can't you push this?" The Embassy's response was, essentially: "No, the Serbs are with us in terms of anti-terrorism in general. Leave it at that. If we tried to push the fledgling government we were working into supporting us on Iraq, verbally supporting us on Iraq, they would lose all credibility with the Serbian people; it would backfire. So leave us alone and let us work anti-terrorism in general. That resonates. But as far as supporting us on Iraq, absolutely not."

Q: Did we have any attempt to cover what had happened in Kosovo because, you know, it's a mixed bag. The Serbs weren't the only the nasty people. The Kosovo Liberation Army was doing it; but basically the Serbs were doing the majority of this that led to the confrontation. But you were there in the aftermath. Was this still an issue?

BRYANT: Yes, at that point, yes.

Q: I would think so.

BRYANT: One of the Embassy's primary goals was working in the area of conflict resolution, and respect for human rights. In Public Affairs, we used grant money and our exchange programs to advance the issues, without using a direct confrontational stance that would have gotten us nowhere.

Q: There is enough on your plate really not to. Well, did you have a problem?

BRYANT: I was a one-person shop for almost three months; it seemed like years. I kept my focus on grants, educational exchanges, information programs, and really anything in the educational and cultural spheres. I had wonderful support from State's Education and Cultural Affairs bureau to make things happen at the Washington end. They even sent a great staff person to Belgrade to keep programs moving

We did use grants and exchanges to approach substantive policy issues, providing funding and expertise to a number of human rights and civil society groups who were beginning to blossom at the time. At the government level, we developed programs for diplomatic training, urban planning, parliamentary development (an area where the National Democratic Institute and the OSCE were actively engaged), support for a new Center for Multiculturalism, and many more.

The press section, theoretically under the PAO, worked with the Ambassador and DCM, Robert Norman. While they kept me up to date on press coverage, that was not my major responsibility.

Q: Yes, you were a one-person shop. Also, we're dealing with the Bush Administration—this is my concept of this—quite unpopular in Europe.

BRYANT: Absolutely.

Q: And they kept homing in Madison Avenue types; in other words, they looked upon this as almost marketing or the equivalent there of. Well, it was an ideological Administration, particularly in the early years. Did you find yourself up against that?

BRYANT: Yes, very much so. I think the Embassy pretty forcibly went back and said, "Do not ask us to do Iraq." In Serbia we were just essentially trying to reestablish contacts and some kind of credibility and dialogue at whatever level we could, and wherever we could. That was to a great extent in universities, with the Ministry of Education, in cultural areas, in support of human rights NGOs, and with the press—skill training, running the newspaper, good journalism, basic Internet training, that sort of thing..

We did try to work in the area of intellectual property rights, as in Serbia you could not buy a legal CD or movie. Most of the Microsoft software in use was pirated. It was hard to believe, but true. I had to realize that few people could have afforded legal CDs, and the issue certainly was not on the front burner in their minds. I had a personal Internet account at home, and would go each month to pay my bill. Once I found someone sitting in the office making pirated CDs. Amazing to me. It was completely open.

Once we had a visit from representatives of the movie industry, coming to talk about using legal copies of movies. I wish I knew what came of those meetings. ... I knew they would not get far.

Q: It was a fresh wound and we were trying to let the scab develop.

BRYANT: Very much so. There was one attempted coup while I was there. Things were still unstable enough that it made no sense to push in areas you could not win.

Q: Was the prime minister assassinated while you were there?

BRYANT: Right after I left. Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, a very good man; very sad, very sad.

Q: Did you have the feeling that there was a ...?

BRYANT: During my tour, the Serbians kidnapped our CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) station chief and didn't report it to the Embassy; which apparently is against the

rules. You are supposed to tell that you have him or her, and the Serbs did not for several frightening days. There was plenty of nastiness going on. The Serbs finally let the Embassy know, and let the officer go. It was just harassment. Of course, he then had to leave Serbia.

Q: Were there what amounts to thug gangs? Were Arkan and all those sort of people around at that time?

BRYANT: Probably. People talked about Arkan. And yes, you knew they were around. But, actually as far as being a safe city or a safe place to travel, Belgrade was absolutely fine.

Q: You know, during Milosevic time, there was at least one radio station, quite renowned, that was in opposition to Milosevic. I think it ran out of Austria sometimes, or it ran out of Belgrade and moved around. How about radio during the time you were there? Radio or TV?

BRYANT: B92 was the opposition radio station, and about the only outlet for Western news in the 1990s. It was a force behind anti- Milosevic demonstrations for years. Beyond that, I could not follow the radio directly because, again, I left the U.S. for Serbia with three weeks' notice. I didn't have any Serbo-Croatian, so I couldn't follow radio or TV on my own. Pink was one of the new stations, and I believe a Milosevic colleague was running that. I read at some point years after I left that Serbian state television, RTS, apologized for its years of broadcasting disinformation and hate speech.

Q: Where stood Milosevic while you were there?

BRYANT: You mean in terms of popularity?

Q: I mean, was he in prison at the time?

BRYANT: Yes, he was indicted by the International Criminal Court in 1999 for genocide and war crimes in Kosovo, and was turned over the Court in the Hague in 2001 before I arrived.

Q: Was he an issue, particularly?

BRYANT: No, he really wasn't. I owe a lot of my learning curve on Milosevic to an American-Serb I met in an optometry shop. She had worked for the UN (United Nations) as a human rights worker and observer in the Balkans throughout the war period. She provided me with so much useful background and insight. She took me to places like Milosevic's birthplace, and some long forgotten Tito sites; she also toured me through the remains of some horrific conflict zones you would never see on your own. In certain rural areas, of course, Milosevic was still a hero.

I served as an election observer with the OSCE for the municipal by-elections in

November, 2001, and in rural villages you could still feel some of his influence. Yet even there, I found a serious commitment by the elections officials to honest elections. As an American, I was at times almost overwhelmed by the hospitality at voting places. It was not at all what I expected. They were still operating with cardboard boxes to hold the ballots, and in some cases, took the boxes around town to get the votes of those who could not make it to the polling station. The biggest complaint I found at polling stations was about the lack of heat. Very impressive, really.

Q: Was Mrs. Milosevic at all a figure while you were there?

BRYANT: She was there, of course, but I don't recall her being publicly active. When I was there, it was in the midst of a kind of in the euphoria of getting rid of Milosevic, at least in Belgrade and among younger people, among the younger set.

Q: These young people who had gotten the hell out of there during the war and prior to the war, headed to all over Europe. I was wondering if they came back, or were they still going out?

BRYANT: Still going out. And that brought up one big bone of contention we had with the government: We ran educational advising services, which helped Serbian students find schools to attend in the U.S., help them with applications, help them with the tests they had to take to apply, help them look for scholarships. We call that educational advising, and provide such services all over the world. Helping students wanting to go study in the U.S. was one of the most popular things we did and still do.

The Serbian government hated it, wanted it shut down, and saw it as a function that was continuing to contribute to the brain drain of the country. It is funny, the things that become issues that you wouldn't think of. Our service (staffed by a Serbia employee) was run out of the Embassy at one point. Then we ran out of space because, of course, we were in this little shoebox, half of which was condemned. We tried to find an independent space at a relevant institution for our advisor to have an office to do educational advising. In Belgrade, we kept getting turned down, "No, you can't have this space. No, you can't have that space." It was a real cat-and-mouse game to find a place where an educational adviser could do her work. She was so dedicated she even worked out of her home, taking calls, giving advice, helping people. Then of course there is the other side, where the Serbian government would not recognize even the most prestigious of foreign degrees.

Q: When you left there after a year, I take it you got a real satisfaction out of having accomplished some things.

BRYANT: I did, I did. It was a difficult time. It was difficult leaving my husband behind after 9/11. Living conditions were not great. They didn't have generators yet, the water supply was iffy; so we often had no heat and no water. We would get in the little van that would take us back and forth and we'd say: "Did you have a shower today?" "No." "Did you have a shower today?" "Nope, nope, not today." Then the GSO (General Services

Office) would come with jugs of water and leave them at our steps so that we could wash. I was on a committee that was to select U.S. Embassy Belgrade souvenirs ... t-shirts, mugs and the like. We joked that we should pick a pill case for all the stress relievers.

Medical care was iffy ... the embassy contracted with some good doctors, but hospitals were off limits. Once, I was very sick for days on end, and rather than put me in the hospital, it came to my home, complete with nurse, daily doctor visits, and an IV drip hung from the sofa table lamp.

Once when the heat was off, I went with friends to see the first Harry Potter movie—an illegal copy of course; there were nothing but illegal copies. It was so nice and warm that when the movie started, I just fell asleep. I still have never seen it. By the time I left, they were bringing in generators and life was becoming a lot more civilized. All in all, it was probably one of the easiest hardship posts one could have.

But back to your questions, yes, I created some lasting programs; our American Centers did open up, finally. I think there are about five of them now, serving hundreds of Serbians daily. They have free Internet access. (Don't tell.) I helped jump start the domestic publishing industry. I brought much needed academic material to the Supreme Court and the universities.

One thing that I did that I was very proud of, given the sensitivity of the Serbian-U.S. relationship, was the observance of first anniversary of 9/11, which fell in my lap. I was the sole public affairs officer at the time, and Ambassador (William Dale) Montgomery said, "We have to do something; figure it out." We ended up with a smash hit on both sides. There was a worldwide movement to sing Mozart's requiem, "*The Rolling Requiem*," such that for 24 hours somebody somewhere would be performing it. Around the world, different countries took time slots. I organized U.S./Serbian participation in a Serbian theater, using an orchestra from Novi Sad, and a choir from the University of Belgrade. The organization was done by the Embassy, but all the participants—the orchestra, and the singers—were Serbs. We characterized it as a worldwide call for peace and an end to terrorism. The concert was to begin at the time the planes hit the Twin Towers. It was absolutely beautiful. Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic and Ambassador Montgomery both spoke. It was the hottest ticket in town for Serbian government officials and got extensive positive press coverage. It went over just beautifully. It didn't ruffle any feathers, didn't cost a lot of money, and generated a lot of good will.

Q: So you left when?

BRYANT: I left in November 2002.

Q: Then what?

BRYANT: I came back to Washington and covered the Caribbean—Haiti, Dominican Republic, Cuba. Again, interesting places and issues. We were trying to develop some form of information outreach in Cuba.

We had a library and, of course, an employee of the Cuban government working as our librarian in the American Interest Section. The Cuban government wouldn't give me a visa to go to Cuba to train her, and the U.S. wouldn't give her a visa because the previous librarian who had come for training to the U.S. didn't go back. We would not give Maria a visa, and Cuba wouldn't give me a visa. So we met in Costa Rica and trained there.

The most interesting thing to me was that she may not have been in the U.S., only in a U.S. Embassy, and even that exposure to U.S. culture was startling ... to both of us. Her reaction to freedom of speech and open access to information just astounded me no end, even though I had worked in the post-communist world for many years. I had heard the propaganda stories of communist regimes before, as I have told you, such as Americans injecting poison into bananas. So I was used to that mentality, but I hadn't experienced it for some time.

The Cuban librarian came to our Embassy and would hear us make remarks about our government, our president, saying whatever we wanted to say, and she would be afraid for us, "You can't say that." The first time she said that to me I said, "Why not?" "You can't say that, you'll get in trouble. You'll lose your job." "No we won't." It was truly, truly astounding. I guess in our Interests Section in Cuba the Cuban staff is walled off from the American staff pretty much, so she had not experienced our openness.

Q: I am sure that they are obviously having to report on a daily basis.

BRYANT: She hadn't been in a normal Embassy, and I remember there was a *YouTube* video going around at the time of George Bush and Tony Blair looking like they were singing a love song to each other. It was going around every Embassy in the world and we were laughing until tears were rolling down our eyes. She was so afraid for us that we were all going to be fired for watching this, and daring to laugh. I think that the best thing that we taught her in the whole training was what freedom of speech meant.

Q: Did you run into the radio, I mean the TV Marti buzz saw? Or was this something you just didn't play with?

BRYANT: I just didn't play with it. It was because *Radio Marti*, *TV Marti*, we spend money, they don't see it, they don't hear it. One of the greater absurdities of the ...

Q: It's so ridiculous.

BRYANT: And especially now, with Internet, to even have it is just absolutely a waste of money. But I guess there are certain interest groups and lobbyist groups in the U.S. that want it.

Q: We are talking about, I guess, southern Florida and parts of New Jersey, and that's it.

BRYANT: Yes, though that is changing too, as the generations grow up.

Q: These aren't the same old battles.

BRYANT: They're not. My brother-in-law is Cuban-born, and his family lives in Miami so I get that story from him.

Q: What could we do in Cuba, during your time? Anything?

BRYANT: Not much. I was very dismayed. Culture was about the only thing, and even that was limited. Perhaps, and it was due as much to our restrictions as theirs really. It was our restrictions that ...

Q: There are those that say we have done more to keep the Castro regime in power than Castro himself.

BRYANT: I agree completely. One thing we try to do, interestingly enough, is distribute books. There is a ring of informal libraries in Cuba, run out of people's homes, and we would have drivers drive around to these places and drop off books, magazines, reading matter. A number of these librarians, and people who weren't necessarily librarians were put in jail. There are quite a few librarians in jail in Cuba still.

The New York Philharmonic or Boston Philharmonic, one of the major symphonies, was going to play in Cuba. Our Treasury Department said that their support group couldn't go, the friends of the symphony. Usually when a symphony travels, their booster club, especially their big donors, go with them; that's part of the package. It is through their donations the trip can be funded. They are the ones paying for the trip, and our government said that the symphony could go, but the booster club could not. So that means the symphony can't go, because they depend on the booster club's money to fund the trip. I am hoping, maybe, that will change.

Q: What do we have on Haiti? Everything seems to be so pitiful.

BRYANT: You know, it is. At the time I was going to Haiti, I was reading back in the history of its independence and its early years. It's always been a violent place, extremely violent. I don't know if it's ever had a stable, peaceful situation, which even Afghanistan has had.

Q: They fought the French, and then they fought each other; the light skin versus the dark skin.

BRYANT: Exactly! That's what I mean. The whole history of it is that way. I looked at that and I thought, "Hmmm ... how do you change that?" Then, at times, when I was there what I saw was a lack of interest by any well-to-do Haitians to reinvest in their own country, on any kind of scale, to bring some kind of basic standard of living to their country. You found all of these foreigners in giving aid, giving help, but where were the Haitians in this? It really troubled me. I went once out of Port-au-Prince to a church

mission that was employing women to make small crafts to sell. The road just out of Port-au-Prince was just horrible; it was a horrible, rutted mess. You would get out of town and there would be spectacular, palatial estates with helipads so that the owners could come and go via helicopter and not have to bother with going through the roads. And I thought, "Couldn't they even build a road to their own house that everybody could benefit by? Just pave a road?" No, they would just helicopter in and out, and the rest be damned. I didn't spend enough time to really know, so I could be really unfair here, but it was my impression that there was no native core of Haitians that we could work with to improve the country. I found it really tragic.

Q: Well, how long were you working on the Caribbean?

BRYANT: Just about a year. The travel was just too much. IRO portfolios in Latin America were, it seemed to me, rather unbalanced in that respect. We had a position in Argentina that covered about five other countries; the position in Brazil—itsself geographically a huge country—traveled to two other countries, while I traveled to 10 countries out of D.C. At times, I could hardly stand up from back pain. When I asked to curtail, I was told there was no such thing as curtailing from a domestic position. The old USIA mind did not consider this a distinctly domestic position. State had no equivalent. Again, I said, just watch ... with my doctor weighing in, my curtailment was granted.

Q: And this brings us to 2003? Then what?

BRYANT: Then I took on the job as the first coordinator for the American Corners program, which I did for several years. This was a program that had started in Russia and, as I had mentioned about Serbia, consisted of creating and maintaining small America reading rooms that offered reading materials in English, and a wide variety of programs and activities for the public. Free Internet access was always part of the deal, and made them very attractive. People in other posts began taking on that idea— "Oh, we'll do something like that here." It was rather like whack-a-mole, you know, popping up all over the place. There was no coordination, no standards, no basics, no evaluation, nothing to pull this together. It was an obvious reaction to trying to reestablish what we had lost when the USIS libraries closed. We no longer had platforms for our materials, our information, our programs, and our speakers. And there was a need.

In our (USIA) attempt to become the serious policy organization that we wanted to show ourselves to be when moving into State, we really cut off our lifeline. The American Corners were seen as an on-the-cheap and on-the-sly way of getting back out into the countries. For the most part, these were not to be in the capital cities, but in other cities throughout the country in order to expand American presence. People were trying to use the Russian model in countries where it made absolutely no sense; in places where they didn't have public libraries or a place where nobody read English, or where no one knew what to buy, or what the center was supposed to do, or how it was supposed to be evaluated. The idea just percolated up. So the International Information Programs Bureau where I was based created a position as a worldwide coordinator to try and get a handle on the programs, to develop criteria, standards, evaluation, collections, funding stream,

and basic databases of what existed where. I was the first coordinator, and worked on the program for two years.

Q: Was this something that you could expand?

BRYANT: We have almost 400, now.

Q: Good God!

BRYANT: Some good; some not so good. For the most part, they are a tremendous success ... both a valuable public affairs tool, and a bonus for local publics. Everyone wins. We have some really dedicated and creative local staff running these centers, often on a shoestring. Some offer the only Internet access in town; some the only free, public gathering space, open to all.

Q: We were into problems, because one can understand real benefits. But, I wonder what the problems were.

BRYANT: Problems were that they were allowed to grow for a number of years without any kind of strategic planning, without any guidelines, without criteria, without a funding stream. When I came on board, it was a mess because people wanted advice but there were no standards to base it on. And, yet, I didn't want to create standards that were so tight that you couldn't operate in a small country in Africa as well as in Ukraine, where obviously your resources and services were going to be different. I would be asked, "What does an American Corner cost?" "Well, let's come up with models of different types of American Corners and costs." The good thing is we got out there with a variety of platforms. The bad thing is they spread far too quickly without guidance, without any authority. This is a problem of the whole PD (public diplomacy) operation now—money goes out from R (Office of Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs) to support PD programs in the field, but the PAO reports up through the ambassador and back to the regional bureau. So there is no accountability for that funding back to its PD office. It used to be that the line of authority, control and feedback was between PD/Washington and PD in the field; but it is no longer that way. So if an ambassador said, "I want an American Corner," and the PAO knew that would mean bleeding other programs to get money for it, but that the ambassador was writing the PAO's evaluation—even if it is a bad idea, even if it is not going to work, even if they did not have the resources, by God there would be an American Corner! I started a steering committee within R (Bureau of Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy), and of the PD offices, to come up with standards. We could develop all the standards we wanted, but it didn't make a difference. If an ambassador wanted an American Corner, he would get an American Corner.

I remember another of our situations was in dealing with local governments and locations. If the local government wanted a Corner in a certain institution, and if it didn't make any sense to you, it didn't matter, because they had control. So, the locations were not always where they should be; the countries were not always appropriate, funds were

not there beyond set up and a grand opening. No one knew how to support it, and so it just became American Corner in name.

Once a Corner was established, we were to provide training and oversight but had no regular funds. This was particularly a problem in a big country, like Indonesia or Kazakhstan. The person who runs the Corner is a staff person of the institution where the Corner is, usually a library, and not a staff person of ours. So there is a limit to what we can ask them to do, and a limit to how much we can control what they do.

In some countries, cities would start vying for Corners. "We want one for this city. We want one for that city." I think it was in Indonesia, where they would hold competitions where cities would come with proposals to the Embassy for what they would offer to have an American Corner in their city. In other countries, you would have to go out and beg for a place; which I later did in Pakistan, to no avail, as you can understand.

I set up a structure for a funding stream, whereby we set out reporting criteria for American Corners that had to be reported back at a certain time of year to be evaluated. When R knew how much money they had, they would divvy it out, theoretically, to the American Corners that were performing. At least that got some kind of sustaining funds for them. That has always been the big issue, sustaining funds for these Corners.

Our carrot is the continued provision of materials that people want. Usually, the most popular things are educational advising, English-language teaching materials, speakers, English-language discussion groups, showing American feature films and, of course, the Internet for free. In many places, that's the only place you will get Internet, and surely the only place you will get it for free. But, in a place that has scarce resources to begin with, that's often not enough. The local institution may not want to dedicate a staff person to run the operation, or they choose someone who is not the person you feel is best qualified. The embassy doesn't own them; can't control that. Also, we can't control the establishment or the closing of Corners because, again, if the ambassador wants to open one it will be opened. Or, if a PAO decides he wants to open one so he can put it in his evaluation, there is nothing to stop him. There is no authority in Washington that says we will stop you. And then there is always reticence to close them.

When we left, I was trying to develop guidelines for a closing them. If it is not staffed, or even kept open, if it is empty all the time, you close it. If it is going to cause some kind of political backlash to the U.S., you don't. My philosophy was you always leave whatever materials are there for the institution. You don't go in there and pull all your books out, or your computers. They are probably too old by now anyway, so you just say, "Thank you."

I developed a standard agreement, a memo of understanding, to be signed between the host institution and the Embassy. The agreement would state terms for follow-on assessments and possible closure. That way, you could easily say, "As per our agreement, we've decided this hasn't worked out. We are happy to leave you all the materials."

Q: How can you check on these places?

BRYANT: With great difficulty. The Public Affairs sections were supposed to check on them, keep in touch with them, visit them, and require monthly reports. Here, again, you have the staff person in the Corner who is serving two masters. Say, the Embassy wants their monthly report, but half the staff of the host library is out sick, so they must close the American Reading Room and use the staff elsewhere. We have no control over that and the Public Affairs Officers have no funds to have their people out there to observe. So it became the job of the IRO, to go visit American Corners and do evaluations.

We still have only, say, 26 IROs, and we already had approximately ten countries that we each had to visit in our portfolios. Now we've added 400 additional places that we're supposed to visit, advise, train, evaluate. It's been extremely difficult. Sometimes I would have all the coordinators from a country come to the capital city for a couple of days of meetings and training. We did this in the Philippines because they had 14 at one point. Nobody could visit them all. We had them in the Muslim areas, where American officers weren't allowed to go for security reasons. So they would come to a central area, and we would meet, discuss, and do training and evaluation that way. You'd have to come up with ways to save your time, because it was out of control.

I put the basic structures in place for them with enough wiggle room. (We will talk later about the ones we opened in Afghanistan using a lot of wiggle room.) The structure is there, but there is still no authority to control them, to control the quality, and an extreme lack of willingness to close ones that aren't working. So it's a battle. As I said, you take an IRO who has to go to 11 countries to work with Embassy Information Resource Centers, and IRCs at consulates, and add American Corners to that mix, and it just cannot be done. We began organizing regional training conferences which went a long way in helping to manage the Corners. These were terrific opportunities for the American Corner staff to learn not just from U.S. officers, but from each other.

Q: The idea is great but, you know, it's not easy to maintain ...

BRYANT: Many of them, I'd say the majority of them are terrific. They provide a continuous platform for the embassies to reach foreign publics, with materials and activities they want and appreciate. I was once in Korea to look at the operations of several Corners, and was nearly mobbed by mothers of students wanting more help in learning spoken English for their kids.

Which brings me to why I was in Korea. Another bureau solicited a contractor to do an independent evaluation of some of the Corners. They never discussed it with me, or with my bureau, (International Information Programs/IIP) that ran the program; never consulted us until all of a sudden they had bids for the contract and they said, "Can you read through the bids and evaluate them?" I looked at what they were asking for in the bids and I said, "This makes no sense." Needless to say, the whole project went downhill very fast. The contractor that I thought was dreadful was the one that was selected; they were the low bidder. After the contractor had done some site visits, it was so bad that as they were about to do additional site visits, the head of IIP called and said, "Can you go

to Korea and Thailand in two weeks? I need you to go along." And I said, "Sure, okay; you pay, I'll go." So I witnessed a complete waste of U.S. tax dollars. A disaster of an evaluation, an evaluator who hadn't a clue what he was doing, what he was evaluating. The subsequent report was further evidence of that, and we tried to scrub it to have it say anything worthwhile at all and could not. It has never appeared, and should never see the light of day. It was terrible. Appalling ineptitude. So, the program needs ongoing evaluation, it needs assessment.

A parallel movement is finally beginning to look at ways to have Public Affairs, or at least the IRC, located outside of the Embassy. We're going back to the future, so that we can have what would be our own American Corners; back to a small equivalent of USIS libraries. That's being studied now, either moving the IRC outside the Embassy proper, or, where security prohibits it, ease up access to the IRC. Are there ways where we could really loosen it up to let people in to an IRC and use it? I think some common sense is finally coming in.

Q: Well it is interesting how one observes the swings.

BRYANT: Yes, the old pendulum. I think that security at times is out of control. In my previous assignment, I was asked to consult at our Embassy in Canada. On arrival, I was told by security that I would have to turn over my lipstick. That was the last straw. I was told, don't worry, you will get it back. I said I wasn't worried, that I was an officer, with top-secret clearance who had been asked to come to the Embassy, and I was not giving up my lipstick. They let me in with my lipstick after extensive discussions. In Tajikistan, you could not bring in a pencil. Security run amuck.

Q: You did this until when?

BRYANT: I did this from 2004 through 2006.

Q: So then what?

BRYANT: My dream came true, my dream of a lifetime. I was assigned to a regional position where I got to cover Afghanistan. It was the IRO for South Central Asia, so anything that ended in "stan" was mine: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan.

Q: I was wondering, I was looking at the time, do you think we could do one more? Because this is something I would really like to go into. So why don't we do that?

BRYANT: Okay.

Q: That's great.

Q: Today is October 20, 2009 and we're in another interview with Mary Nell Bryant. As I recall, we are going to cover your time going to Afghanistan.

BRYANT: Yes, right.

Q: You went to Afghanistan, when?

BRYANT: I started in a regional position, based in Washington, traveling out to Central Asia, including Afghanistan, in December 2006. My first trip to Kabul was in the winter, 2007.

Q: Okay. Why don't we talk about the other places. As a regional position, what did this mean?

BRYANT: A regional Information Resources Officer works primarily as a consultant to Embassy Information Centers and public affairs staff on providing information on the U.S. and U.S. policy to Embassy clientele. The definition of Embassy clientele changes with the era, or the place. Embassy libraries used to be more open to the public. They were designed primarily to serve information needs for officers' contacts on the outside—news media, professors, cultural people, educators of all kinds, students. With the merger into State, the libraries increasingly came to provide information to American officers.

I found being a regional officer to be of great value. As a consultant, you could get a broader picture of what was doable in a particular region...a cross fertilization of ideas. You could also see the absurdities of Embassy specific rules. By being a regional officer, and not totally belonging to one Embassy, you are part of your home embassy, but you can stay above Embassy politics and power struggles to a large extent. Each Embassy is its own little world, operating as if there are no others. I remember in training, the answer to most questions we asked was, "It varies from post to post." How true that is. And the differing rules were not necessarily rational. Technology and security issues were always variable.

Q: Okay, let's take Kyrgyzstan. What were you doing in Kyrgyzstan?

BRYANT: Among the "Stans," Kyrgyzstan was quite advanced in developing and using libraries, setting it apart from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (the latter due to political constraints more than knowledge and will). In Kyrgyzstan, they had a library in the Embassy, the Information Resource Center, where they presented a lot of programs for the public: speakers, discussions, movies. They also opened up what we call American Corners, small reading rooms in existing libraries, in other parts of the country. They also had some excellent libraries and an active library consortium which held regular educational conferences. We even had a video conference with the library school at the University of Wisconsin.

I would go with the IRC staff to visit outside libraries, local schools, and our American Corners, give talks, hold discussions, and provide training. In 2008, I gave a talk for

Black History Month at the high school level Agricultural College in Kant, and found a groundswell of enthusiasm for learning to play American football. With an American military base in nearby Manas, this opened a great public relations opportunity for the Embassy. At the time, the base was very controversial, prompting an anti-base song fest. Who knows, football lessons might just overcome that? You seize on opportunities when you see them.

In our Corners, I would listen to their needs and issues; to hear what was working, what was not working, and advise them on how to expand their audience. For example, in many places, Kyrgyzstan included, there was a big interest in learning English, so we provided materials to support that. We are lucky to live in a world where English is the universal language.

Q: Was there a particular program, a CD type program or something, of learning English that we particularly pushed?

BRYANT: No one item. There is quite a variety. In fact, there is another kind of regional officer called a Regional English Language Officer, and that is their expertise. I worked with RLOs and their office in Washington to select English-language materials for the centers. The job of an IRO is to find and distribute information. That is called information outreach.

Q: Information outreach: Is this essentially getting them plugged into the Internet and telling them what was out there?

BRYANT: Well, as time went on, when I first started with State, the Internet was just beginning. Most information was from books, magazines, printed indexes, a lot of materials that other countries did not have access to, or easy access to. Foreign audiences were always interested: information about American government, American law, model laws, how the U.S. Government functioned. For example, laws and regulations related to our Americans with Disabilities Act. It was amazing, pretty much worldwide, how often countries were interested in our law on a particular topic. It wasn't easy to access, or decipher. As time went on, the Internet became one more way of finding and distributing information; but it's really just a means to, not an end in itself. I taught Internet searching and evaluation quite a lot when I would go out to these Centers. Evaluation became more and more important as the volume of materials on the Internet skyrocketed.

Q: Okay. Let's take the Disabilities Act. Anybody looking at our laws, horribly complicated. Was part of your job to translate that into Standard English?

BRYANT: I did my best, as I did have a lot of background in explaining American government. We also had some great tools. There are several multi-volume encyclopedias of American law that will describe, in Standard English, the substance of the law itself. Good information outreach would include making your information understandable.

Q: Basically, did you sort of have, with variations, a standard package that you tried to

get to these places with law books, and other things of this nature?

BRYANT: Yes, there were pretty standard subject areas we would cover, those of interest to the U.S. and to the local population. We did a lot on American culture. Popular culture, in particular, would bring people in. At first, when the Centers started opening, the materials that were purchased were of a fairly sophisticated nature. We discovered that we needed to put in simpler, easier materials. A lot of children's books have gone in because of the simpler language; books that are easy versions of adult books graded by reading levels. We put in American movies and the equipment, to watch them. I made a master list of movies on DVD, which had the option of English subtitles, so that people could listen to the movie, read the subtitles, and practice English.

Q: Can you think of any of the movies that you were particularly pushing, or were popular?

BRYANT: Oh, my, I wish I could. I don't know of any specifically that would be popular. I do know that we also distributed a lot of documentaries, the kind of things you would see on the *History Channel*, the *Discovery Channel*, *PBS*. And in that category, one of the most popular ones was on Air Force One. People were fascinated with Air Force One.

Q: The President's plane, yes.

BRYANT: And movies on outer space, in the documentary category.

Q: What about popular culture? When you were doing this, rap was becoming quite popular. Did you get involved in that?

BRYANT: More on jazz, as being an American creation. It was of very popular.

Q: Did you find, since you were working, and dealing with Muslim countries, you have to be a little bit careful in the screening?

BRYANT: Oh, absolutely. We were very careful of that. I don't know if we even had R-rated, probably not R-rated, movies. I remember once we bought some art books for one of the Centers that was particularly interested in art and American painting. We went carefully through each book before providing it. We had one of Edward Hopper's works; I didn't realize he painted a lot of nudes.

We opened that book and said, "Whoops!" I would say we had to give every set of books or movies the "naked lady test." So I would say, "This doesn't pass the naked lady test." We did our best, but you don't always know what you're going to pop up with.

Q: As you went around to the various "stans," did you have any particular incidents or approaches that, sort of, were beyond the normal?

BRYANT: Believe it or not, some of the biggest issues still dealt with computer usage

within U.S. embassies in the region. That was one of my biggest headaches. You would think that by 2007, computers and Internet were the norm; not so. With heightened security concerns came intensified attempts to control our own use of information technology. As late as 2008, the IMO (Information Management Officer) at the Embassy in Kyrgyzstan decreed that USB, CD and DVD drives in all Embassy computers would be disabled. This crippled Public Affairs work that used USB and CD drives and laptops (oh, don't even mention laptops!) to give presentations to outside audiences. It was insane. In Turkmenistan, Wi-Fi in the library across town from the Embassy was prohibited. Why? Security, of course. In Tajikistan in 2007, Public Affairs was considering using Yahoo e-mail for communicating with outside audiences because of restrictions on official State Department e-mail. In Uzbekistan ... Well, in Uzbekistan, the IMO created a system where any media: USB, laptop, and yes, even a camera, once taken from the Embassy grounds, had to be left at the outside security post until someone from the IMOs office could come retrieve it and clear it for bringing it back into the Embassy. Imagine someone from Public Affairs taking the camera out to cover the ambassador at some event, and not being able to bring the camera back in to get the pictures on the Embassy Web site. And, oh dear, how does one get pictures into a computer without putting a chip in? One Public Affairs Officer told me that once the camera was locked in the IM office over a weekend (not released) and they had to get the Marines to retrieve it so Public Affairs could cover an Embassy event. Washington produced gift CD's covering the U.S. election in 2008. The Embassy in Uzbekistan was going to give them out at a reception...but the IT staff did not clear them in time, so they sat in a box. Crazy. Maybe local Embassies sometimes take on the character of their host governments.

Anyway, in absolute desperation, I worked with a multitude of policy, technology, and security offices in Washington and in the field to broker a meeting among all at a Public Affairs Officer conference in Washington. As you can imagine, the meeting was a bit of a roller coaster, but it did result in a cable rationalizing and standardizing Embassy technology issues, at least for a time. A number of PAOs were extremely grateful to me for being willing to tackle the hurdles of technology for them.

Of course the technology battle did not stop there. We went on to fight to have local networks for Public Affairs work, separate from the main State Department network as State's network was too limiting. We had to get special waivers to have a DIN (Dedicated Internet Network), i.e. beg and plead to be able to do our jobs. Then came Wi-Fi. The Darth Vader of the Internet. Even if our Public Affairs library was in a building across town from the Embassy, such as in Turkmenistan, Wi-Fi was initially forbidden. It made no sense. I fought so many technology battles. And they go on.

Q: How did your husband react to all this challenge in the field; you were apart during most of this time, right?

BRYANT: I told my husband he just had to accompany me on one of my trips, to see everything that was Central Asia at the time. He chose a trip to Tajikistan, and how memorable it was.

First we traveled to Kulob, in Khatlon Province, to visit our American Corner at the State University only to find that it had been moved to a back corner of a building, unmarked and difficult to find. Was this because it had such an enthusiastic audience? The Internet connection we were paying for was not working (as I recall, it almost never worked) ... and we were told that the Center had been closed for three months while students picked cotton! Oh the Soviet mentality was not gone. Luckily we found a technical university that seemed more than happy to take advantage of our resources, and I hope the partnership succeeded. I left before knowing.

Then we traveled to Khorugh, a mountain town in a remote area of Tajikistan on the border with Afghanistan. We had to go by helicopter as there were no passable roads ... or so we thought. An FSN (foreign service national) working in the embassy library was able to arrange for four of us, the PAO, my husband and me, and himself to be flown up on one of the Aga Khan's helicopters. (He sponsored a University in Khorugh.)

We were looking for a partner for an American Corner, but combined the visit with lectures at local universities. On our arrival at the State University, we were suddenly confronted with the Tajik version of the KGB, wanting to stop my talk; whatever it was (I don't think they cared).

Off we were escorted to the Mayor's office where we were interrogated Soviet style on the purpose of our visit. Our FSN told the Mayor that I would speak on the American education system. As I recall, we were then allowed to proceed, but with a limited audience ... because suddenly the president of the country was going to speak and all had to listen. No doubt this was a total fabrication. Undeterred, I proceeded to give a talk, not on education, but, "Government in the U.S.: Principles of Freedom and Democracy." Not what the Mayor or the KGB would have approved of! I loved it. Gotcha.

When we asked the University if they were interested in what we could offer in an American Corner, we were told that they had all the books and computers they could ever use, and did not need our assistance. (We never did see a computer, and it was the saddest library I have seen. Their most recent medical textbook was from 1992, and the country of Tajikistan did not even exist in their only encyclopedia, dated 1987.) Obviously, this was a non-starter.

Now it was my husband's turn, and he spoke at the Aga Khan's University of Central Asia in Khorugh. At the time, he was working with a small company making outdoors equipment, and brought with him a water-filtering device, so simple it only needed a bladder bag, a filter, and gravity to operate. We thought this might be of interest locally, as the water in town was not potable, and there were those who wanted to develop tourism in the area. (When we got off the helicopter, we felt we were in the Colorado Mountains, so you could see how tourism had potential, however long off.) Rick demonstrated the device, and while the students were interested, no one would drink the water ... except me. I gulped down a glass, to their amazement. Given that I survived, a gentleman approached Rick about obtaining a sample of the device, seeing its usefulness.

Back in search of a location for an American Center, we literally stumbled on a Community Education Center that offered computer and English classes. They were thrilled at the possibility of a partnership. Suddenly we had people making connections with local secondary schools, helping to find the best location for an American Center. Persistence pays off.

Then, when it was time for the helicopter to retrieve us, it was nowhere in sight. Our FSN could not reach anyone to track it down. We were stuck. With no way to get back to Dushanbe, the FSN negotiated with some man with a van to transport us. Off we went, for a 17-hour overnight drive, down dirt roads along the river dividing Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Little did we know what adventure lay ahead. In the complete darkness, we bumped along, not knowing we entered a restricted zone; we were stopped in what truly was the middle of nowhere by Tajik soldiers (or so we guessed). We were made to exit the van, and surrender our passports. Oh Lord, what now? I made my husband stay in the van, not wanting them to have a clue that they had a three-star Marine general in their hands, nor did I want him to take them on! Needless to say, cell phones were of no use in those remote mountain passes. The soldiers seemed to be contacting some higher ups via radio about what to do with us. In the black, black darkness, while they were distracted, I snatched the passports back and snuck them back into the van.

After a long, very tense period of time, we were allowed to proceed to a larger checkpoint, and finally back to Dushanbe. A memorable night!

But back to your question on approaches to working in the “stans.” It is a very interesting part of the world following their breaking away from the former Soviet Union. It was a very different process than what I had seen in Eastern Europe. There countries were looking to developing democracies and working in cooperation with each other. In the “stans” there was for the most part a continuation of authoritarian governments and strong nationalism. The “stans” were going through a period of what would you call de-Russification; getting rid of the Russians, getting rid of the Russian language. In some cases, getting rid of the Cyrillic alphabet—in many ways, throwing the baby out with the bath water. By doing that, throwing the Russian language out and insisting that all written and spoken communication be in Kyrgyz or Tajik or Uzbek you lost the advantage of having a common language. (The Kazakhs, not so much, as they have a longer history with the Russians.) In a global society, you can't expect people to speak Kyrgyz or Tajik. So, they were really hurting themselves, and this process is still going on.

Q: And learning English ...?

BRYANT: I think that is one of the reasons that English, and learning English, is so popular. I can't stress it hard enough how much the kids, the high school kids in particular, are desperate, desperate to learn English in any way possible; absolutely desperate. Offering opportunities to learn English was a major push in the work I did in the “stans.” Once I went to one of our American Corners in Tajikistan for a one-hour talk, and the students kept me for three hours, even following me out to the car ... still

practicing English.

In the Centers we always had free Internet. One of the things students most used it for was helping them practice for TOEFL exams, the English proficiency exams. They would also look for ways to get scholarships to the U.S., any kind of money that would get them to study in the U.S.

In places like rural Turkmenistan, they of course did not know much about American universities. This is where an information specialist comes into play; knowing not just how to find information, but how to evaluate it as well. Kids would find things on the Internet that sounded good to them, but they didn't know how to evaluate what was a diploma mill, what was a real university, or what was a university that they might not want to go to.

I remember one girl in Turkmenistan got a very positive response from Bob Jones University, and they wanted the student to write an essay on what Jesus meant to her. I had to sit down and explain to her that this probably was not a good mix. (The student was Muslim.) A positive response from any American university all looks the same to them. Just another illustration that just because you have access to information on the Internet, doesn't mean you have the information literacy needed to evaluate it.

Q: Of course, anybody coming up against the American educational system, even the best and the brightest looking at our system ... We have so many universities, community colleges, religious schools; you name it, we got it. Plus the fact that there are ones that are basically, as you said, diploma mills, which are trying to bilk students out of their money.

BRYANT: Exactly. I found that. I am sure it's a mystery around the world. One of the most interesting places I worked in was Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is the home of the now-dead Turkmenbashi (Saparmurat Atayevich Niyazov), the father of all Turkmen.

Q: The man with the golden statue that faces the sun.

BRYANT: You know everything! Yes, the Turkmenbashi faces the sun at all times. I hear the once-ubiquitous statues are gradually going away. He wrote a book called the *Rukhnama*, that you had to take exams on even to get your driver's license. He equated his book with the *Koran*. If you went into a mosque, they had copies of the *Rukhnama* and copies of the *Koran*. They were equal to each other. Wonderful, wonderful people there, but fascinating to see what a tyrant can do by controlling information and controlling education. He stopped schooling at the 8th or 9th grade; you didn't need school after that; that was enough. He closed down most universities; he closed down anything that taught English. There were just a few universities, and most of the slots were saved for people going in the military or the police. Heaven only knows what they studied. The Internet was not allowed, it was not permitted. There was no Internet. That was one of the reasons the public offering of the Internet by Public Affairs was so popular.

The Turkmen were truly the extreme when it came to an almost tribal identity, so extreme was the nationalism, propaganda and limited education under the Turkmenbashi. Once I met with a group of Turkmen women who were English-language teachers. They wanted me to confirm that American Indians spoke Turkman. I was aghast. Were they joking? Nope. That is what they were taught and firmly believed.

I also met with the Supreme Council of Science and Technology of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen equivalent of an Academy of Sciences; with the heads of each branch, to describe what might be available to them on the Internet. Here was a country awash with money from natural gas resources, and the government scientists had no money for scientific journals or commercial databases. They were being tasked with reinvigorating the study of hard science ... with no resources.

After my presentation, one of them told me that the Turkman language was the root of all languages. If it had not been suppressed by Arabs and Persians, its eternal use would have prevented all war and terrorism throughout history. Who knew? Further, she told me, that the U.S. was not settled by European refugees, but rather by Turkmen. Refugees, she said, were incompetent and useless. I was trapped. My accompanying colleagues abandoned me, wandering away as I was left to hear the truth. I further learned that Israel had no right to exist, because it was settled by those useless refugees again (must not have been Turkmen). Welcome to Oz, I thought.

I planned my escape ... I asked her to write the etymology showing the evolution of the words United States from Turkmen. As she was writing, I made my exit. She promised to pass on her research to the Peace Corps, who she hoped would pass it on to President Bush. Good luck!

At one point, I met with technology professors who taught the Internet without having ever used it. I did not pry into how that was done.

Q: Well, what were you doing there? It sounds like there wasn't anything you could do.

BRYANT: Pushing, pushing, pushing, in little ways. We gave book donations to various places, to libraries at different levels. We were allowed to open American Corners in a couple of cities. One the government closed down; others they would harass. They had this philosophy that they were politically independent; friends to everybody. They would let you do something to a certain extent, and then they might shut it down. Or, here is an example: They would allow student exchanges to the U.S. But if you went to take the exams for the exchange, the goons, if I may call them that, would hang around outside and harass the students saying, "It is un-Turkmen to do this." Telling the parents, "You are terrible parents to even consider sending your kids to the U.S." So they would allow the tests and allow them to go, and yet they would harass the families. It was a very much push-me, pull-you atmosphere. When you had the opportunity to make some kind of advance, you did.

We had a terrific Embassy library across town from the Embassy, located together with the Embassy Public Affairs staff. For some reason, people there were not harassed to my knowledge. The library was free and open to the public, and provided a wealth of books, magazines, movies, and of course, the Internet. It was not nearly large enough for the audience. It was open in the evenings; it was open on Saturdays, and it was always packed. In fact, we began providing reading materials in the hallway where people waited to get seats inside.

Students who did make it to the United States on exchanges were frequent visitors, though some were still hesitant about receiving innocuous news updates from our library. Don't get too close was, I think, the message.

You really never knew what was going to happen in Turkmenistan. I imagine that was intentional. For example, in one city, Mary, Turkmenistan, the American Corner held a Halloween party without incident. Then the American Corner in Turkmenabad had a Halloween party, and the town council went into an uproar. The PAO (Public Affairs Officer) and I had to fly out to appear before the city council and board of education to explain what on earth we were doing allowing a Halloween party. This story, apparently, even went back to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. There were all kinds of cables and notifications about harassments because of the Halloween party, and I thought, "I really am in the Twilight Zone." We're sitting there with these big, heavysset men in their suits, and their Turkmenbashi pins on their lapels (instead of a flag pin, they all wore Turkmenbashi silhouettes on their lapels), saying, "How dare you have a Halloween party!" And I thought, "My goodness, don't we have better things to do?" It was very, very strange.

During my visits to Turkmenistan, anytime I wanted to go meet with people at another institution, I would have to get formal approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sometimes you'd get it, and sometimes you wouldn't. Crazy. Things were easing up just a little bit as I left ... but it was a roller coaster.

The American Corners in Turkmenistan were quite special, in spite of off-and-on harassment by the government. The American Embassy was not permitted to sponsor them directly, so we worked via an NGO, ACCELS (American Councils for International Education), to rent space and manage them. Peace Corps volunteers staffed them. One had to be creative in Central Asia! Our Centers filled a huge gap for teenagers in particular, who had no other education options. Each day, they waited in groups to whoosh into the Center the minute they opened.

What was remarkable was how they made the Centers their own. They were so creative in coming up with ways to use them. The kids dreamed up all kinds of groups to participate in, such as reading groups and discussion groups. They also created volunteer groups to go into their communities and do things such as helping at orphanages, or cleaning up parks. Students who had been to exchange programs in the U.S. came back and became teachers of various classes relating to their experiences and education in the U.S. The classes always filled the Centers. I found both the thirst for education and the

self-directed desire to help their communities most remarkable. Our offering them places to gather and better themselves and others is, I think, one of those small unsung efforts of the U.S. to help in the world.

Q: I would think, for example, in Turkmenistan you must have had very devoted and very clever local staff.

BRYANT: Fabulous staff.

Q: I am just saying, what we were after, probably subscribing to it wholeheartedly, they had to live and operate in that thing so that you would have to depend on them for their instincts.

BRYANT: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Fabulous staff; absolutely fabulous. Sadly, in some of the countries, staff didn't tell others who they worked for because of the difficult political climate.

We had a case in Uzbekistan where we had opened nine of these American Centers, and the government came in and said: "We are closing them down. Take all your books, take all your materials, and take them away. Get them out of here. We want nothing." Again, this was another push-me, pull-you ambience. One library had been holding a space and hoping for a Corner for two years...and then the government pulled the rug out of all of them.

The Embassy library in Tashkent is a mob-scene of students, packed all day long. A senior FSN (Foreign Service National; embassy employee) was, during one of my visits, picked up by the police and held for a day or two. He was accused of selling visas, and he was doing no such thing. Apparently, somebody used his name, as it turned out, and saying: "Give me money for a visa. I'm going to give it to this fellow in the American Embassy. He will call you when your visa is ready." None of it was true. The guy was just pocketing the money, and apparently got out of the country. Meanwhile, this senior FSN is picked up by the police. Harassment went on constantly.

Q: What happened in Uzbekistan when they told you to pull out all these books? Did you pull out all the books?

BRYANT: Yes. Everything was pulled out and quietly donated to other libraries, to be included in their regular collections; in other words, not to be set aside as an American room, or an American reading room. There were plenty of libraries there that wanted the books as smaller donations that were less obvious. One in particular was the International Business School, Kelajak Ilmi, a school conducted in English on a U.S. model. We just slipped the books in the back door, unannounced.

Q: Why did they shut you down?

BRYANT: Hostility against the U.S.; harassment. We got the warm-to-cool-to-warm

treatment in several countries in the region.

Q: When you say these little American Corners, what were they? Describe what they might be.

BRYANT: If you picture a public library that may have a local history reading room, or a small periodical reading room, something that is a special collection of materials, it would be like that, only this would be an American reading room. It would have books, magazines—fun magazines for the most part—or a mixture that people would want to come in and read. It would have lots of film documentaries about American society, culture, history, government, and movies. It would be a platform for interest groups to form on their own, for groups to have discussions, to have English-speaking practice. They would have maybe movie nights, or book discussions. They would have a set-up where there is a TV where you could play a documentary or movie to practice English ... and enjoy the movie, of course. They would have language stations where you could play tapes to learn English.

Q: Would you have a local employee in each one of those places?

BRYANT: The employee would be, for the most part, an employee of that local institution.

Q: And you would train them?

BRYANT: Right. We would provide the materials, computers, free Internet access and regular training. As I have explained, the explosion of these Centers created a real problem of how to provide oversight. Furthermore, I saw the need for some sort of cohesion and group identity among the people who staffed the Centers. After all, they might all be in the same country, or region, but have no connection to each other. I started Internet Listservs (electronic discussion groups) to promote cooperation. I also held country and regional workshops to bring all relevant staff together. (These began when I was the Regional Coordinator of American Corners.) In Astana, Kazakhstan we even had a mock U.S. election at one of these workshops. The staff just loved it...cardboard ballot boxes and all.

At one workshop, where I had Kyrgyz and Turkmen participants, the Kyrgyz were astounded to hear of the societal restrictions in Turkmenistan, but were equally impressed by the creativity of the Turkmen staff in creating programs on their own. Likewise, the Turkmen could not believe the relative political freedom of their Kyrgyz colleagues. So the training, especially the group workshops, led to much more than just learning how to run programs or techniques of Internet searching.

Q: When you say free Internet access, there was a time, now it is sort of gone, but I mean people were paying through the nose to get on the Internet in the States. What was happening? Were we buying time?

BRYANT: Yes. For example, in Turkmenistan when the Internet was illegal, we offered it for free to the public in our Embassy library. Particularly in countries with little Internet access, I always made a practice of finding and going into Internet cafes to see who was searching what, seeing what the costs were. Within the last year, when the Internet was made legal in Turkmenistan, I saw that the price was so expensive that most people couldn't afford to use it. Also, it was terribly, terribly slow, which made the cost even greater because you couldn't go in and find something quickly; it took a long time. Having good access to Internet depended on the infrastructure in the country. What we offered was also dependent on local infrastructure, but at least it was free. When we put Internet into our reading rooms in other institutions, they were not allowed to charge for it. We would foot the bill for all Internet access.

Q: The Internet is sort of a free-flowing thing. There must be both political and social problems with access to it. How did that work out?

BRYANT: Countries can put filters on the Internet to block so-called objectionable sites. That was true in parts of Central Asia. It is certainly true in China. That was one of the issues with the Olympics in China. The Chinese government said that they would open up the Internet so that our media people could have access to what they wanted, but they did not. They still kept sites closed. So we fight for open Internet. That's an argument that goes on even in our public libraries, more along the lines of restricting access to pornography. On a national government level, countries block sites for political reasons.

I ran into this on a trip I made to Syria in 2008. Given my particular expertise in working in oppressive environments, I was asked to go to Damascus to look for ways to expand contact with local audiences. At the time, there was very little Internet access, and information flow of any kind was tightly controlled. People using the IRC, which was off the Embassy grounds proper, were monitored. Even I was monitored in my hotel room. One time an employee knocked on my door, and went to inspect the far reaches of my closet, said, "Thank you." And left. I found it quite amusing. Of course, when he left, I grabbed a chair and poked around myself ... nothing found. I was told I was the last visitor the Embassy put in that hotel.

Public Affairs used my information specialist credentials to crack open a door for a meeting with the one-and-only think tank in the country ... again, I wasn't talking policy, just information resources. I also gave a long presentation to journalists on the U.S. election process. I even gave a one-on-one interview on the same topic to an independent Syrian satellite television channel, the first such programming the Embassy had been able to do in years. It must be that librarian in me that wins them over.

Q: I would imagine you also had—let's take Pakistan—under your wing. That's become a very dangerous place. How did it work for you?

BRYANT: Yes, very dangerous; far different from when I backpacked there in the 1970s. When I first started going to Pakistan, I guess in early 2007, you could stay in the hotel but you weren't allowed to go out anywhere. Once those hotels were blown up, obviously

I stayed elsewhere ... generally at the homes of other officers. We have consulates in Peshawar, Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi, all of which were candidates for my visits and possible American Corners. The rules for visits varied from city to city. For example, in Islamabad, if you were being picked up at a hotel to be taken to the Embassy, you weren't supposed to wait in the lobby. The minute the car was scheduled to be there, you were to come down in the elevator, jump in the car, and take off. Likewise, the car was not supposed to wait for you. You would be taken to the diplomatic enclave where the American Embassy was located. In Lahore, you had to have armed escorts of Pakistani guards and police when going by car to certain areas of the city.

I remember going to Peshawar to one of the universities to donate books and do a roundtable discussion. I had to have armed guards the whole time I was on the university campus. I always felt more vulnerable in Pakistan than in Afghanistan, maybe because we were allowed more exposure. But after the bombing of the Marriott in Islamabad, I was not allowed to stay in hotels. Instead, I would stay with one of the officers stationed in Pakistan. Except for Islamabad where there were apartments on the Embassy grounds, officers stationed in Pakistan lived in homes in carefully screened parts of town. For a long time, Islamabad was considered very safe. Obviously now, there have been so many incidents that it is no longer the case.

In fact, on one of my trips, there had been a number of bombings just as I left Washington for Pakistan. I kept e-mailing and asking, "Are you sure I have clearance? Are you sure I have clearance?" "Oh, yes, you have clearance. It's fine. Keep coming." I got as far as London, and on my Blackberry got the message, "Turn around and go home." That was a long day.

I understand now they are bringing in trailers, like they have in Afghanistan, to the Embassy grounds in Pakistan. I imagine movement has been clamped down considerably.

Q: When you get down to it, you are trying to run a library program which means people are coming to you. How can you be open, and yet be under threat?

BRYANT: Well, it is a big challenge. We try to be creative. For example, if we wanted to have speaker programs in the library on Embassy grounds, we would have to submit the names of the people attending to Diplomatic Security for clearance two days ahead of time. It was a huge hassle, not fun for anyone. We tried for a while to have programs at the National Library, because it was easier for people to get to. But since the Marriott bombing, the whole area where the National Library is located is pretty well shut down.

It is a terribly limiting factor. Instead of having people visit, we designed an outreach program to provide information to contacts via e-mail and the Internet. The library and all Embassy officers have contacts in the media, at universities, in government, in NGOs (non-governmental organizations), etc. Those contacts want materials on their areas of interest. The library can provide a wealth of information on specific topics using commercial databases that no one else has access to. We would search those databases to provide materials such as newspaper and journal articles to outside contacts via e-mail.

That is basically what we had to do. You adapt.

We had a very difficult time trying to set up American Corners in Pakistan. Potential partners were too afraid to associate publicly with the United States. There was too much risk of being blown up. Oddly enough, we have a very successful American Corner in a cultural center in Karachi, the city considered one of the most dangerous places in Pakistan. In fact, I was only allowed day visits to Karachi. Not even an overnight.

Q: I think we ought to explain here, because people will be reading this in other times. Who was trying to blow you up? And, what was the problem?

BRYANT: It would be Taliban or other Islamic radicals; it is hard to say *who* exactly. In Lahore there was a big Islamic radical faction on the main university campus, which at times even so much as dictated what the curriculum would be at the university. For example, the university wanted to start up a music program. This faction of Islamic radical students, (although some say they weren't really students), said, "No, you are not going to have music on this campus. If you want music courses, you will have them off-campus." The radicals won out over the university rector and board. The radicals had a lot of power and people were afraid to cross them. Institutions did not want to be associated with America.

You read that the popularity of the United States in Pakistan is extremely low, and that was why we had a hard time ever finding a place that would take us. Finally, we started looking into smaller cities that had cultural centers that were much more open to the idea. On one visit we went to the city of Multan, where they were very anxious to give us a lot of space in a cultural center. They didn't seem to be afraid of any radical blowback. I left before everything was formalized, but I hope it worked out.

Q: What about Afghanistan? We are talking as of now, when a full-scale civil war is going on there and doesn't seem to be getting any better. You were doing this when to when?

BRYANT: I would say January 2007 to January 2009, two years. I went back again in 2010 after retirement.

Q: What were you doing during that time?

BRYANT: As always, I was developing libraries, beginning with one at the Embassy, housed in the old Embassy building. It was, as anything in Afghanistan at that time, a huge challenge. There is no librarian training in Afghanistan, so I had to hire and teach some really bright staff. I did a crash course in running a library for newly hired staff, and opened the Information Resource Center in April, 2007. From there, we tackled opening American Corners around the country, a truly wonderful and very challenging project. I have to tell you, our Centers are a huge success story in Afghanistan. I think we have seven or eight now, and they hope to open as many as ten more. We call them Lincoln Learning Centers, not American Corners, to keep them from being blown up. That was an

early issue: what to call them that would imply American without saying so. Our Afghan staff liked the pictures of Abraham Lincoln we put up; they did not know who he was, but the beard was a winner.

In addition to developing our Learning Centers, I did a lot of Internet training, particularly with Afghan journalists. Investigative journalism was a new concept as was critically evaluating information, so reaching out to journalists was a big part of our program. I also lectured to various academic groups on the American political and legal systems as I did during most of my postings. As it was so difficult to do anything outside of the Embassy, we held a number of educational programs and meetings with Afghan groups on the Embassy compound.

Which reminds me of one minor crisis. I was hosting a reception at the Embassy for Afghans involved in libraries, and all the attendees arrived and were cleared by security with no problem. The problem was that the food could not get through security. A caterer had brought food in chafing dishes that would not fit in the scanner. And the caterer left. I don't recall the details, but eventually we did get the food, and the reception went on.

But back to the heart of my work, the Lincoln Learning Centers. Between the war and the severe poverty of Afghanistan, I had to devise a totally different model than we used elsewhere in the world ... and get it approved by Washington. In much of the world, we were able to partner with existing libraries, using their staff and space while providing materials, speakers and, of course, free Internet access. It is a shared, cooperative venture. In Afghanistan, with its extreme poverty, with only a handful of libraries and no formally trained librarians, we had to take a different tack. We designed a different model where we provided everything except the building. In Afghanistan the Embassy hires and pays the directors. They are not really employees of the U.S. Government, but we pay them as no other institution has money or extra staff to spare. Fortunately, we have been able to find great staff. Our Lincoln Learning Center directors are just wonderful in thinking of creative ways to use the spaces. For example, poetry is very popular in Afghanistan, and they claim the poet Rumi, as theirs. In the town of Mazar-i-Sharif, the fourth-largest city in Afghanistan, there are a number of female poets, but they had nowhere to gather such as men would have. With our Center, they now have a place to meet. Various local people, even university professors, volunteer to teach classes at the Lincoln Learning Centers. The patrons, usually students, are so anxious to learn anything that the classes are packed. It is fascinating.

For the most part, we were able to negotiate space in local government buildings, some of which had existing cultural centers. In Kabul and Bamiyan the Lincoln Learning Centers are in universities, while in Herat, it is in a public library. The Center in Kabul is, I think, the least successful one, interestingly enough, because it is too hard for people to get to due to security restrictions. While we realized that when we started it, politics demanded that University of Kabul be the first. I guess you'd call that a "loss leader." In contrast, we opened a Center in Bamiyan, the beautiful, remote mountain town where the Taliban blew up the ancient Buddhas (the same Buddhas I climbed in the 70s). The Bamiyan center is in a new university that is easily accessible by all. Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif

are among those in government cultural centers.

Wherever our Centers are, (except, as I said in Kabul), they are an incredible success. They are always full of people, extremely popular. You see the usage statistics and they are just amazing. The Centers are comfortable places for people to come, study, read, listen to speakers, form their own discussion groups, watch movies, and of course, use Internet for free. In most locations, there is no alternative.

To provide some sort of connection to and support of our Centers, they are mostly co-located in towns where there is a provisional reconstruction team, a PRT, within a military outpost. Some of them are American; others are German, Italian, English, or from New Zealand. We try to get some kind of interaction and support from the PRT, asking them to visit the Center, deliver materials, and possibly lead an activity, such as offering an English-language discussion group. One major problem in maintaining the Lincoln Learning Centers is keeping them supplied with new materials. With few good roads, and no regular, reliable transportation system, getting materials to the Centers is an ongoing challenge. We depended in part on PRT officers going back and forth to Kabul to help with what was a rather irregular delivery system.

Our Center in Herat is unique in that it is in a large, well-functioning public library. To my knowledge, there is nothing remotely resembling it in the country. It was a joy to work with the staff there, people that welcomed the arrival of a Lincoln Learning Center, understanding what resources it could provide. Some staff came forward to ask if they could volunteer to work in it. My job in Herat even included meeting with furniture makers, as it was too difficult to get furniture in any other way than to have local craftsmen make it.

Q: Speaking of resources, did you have materials in local languages?

Interesting that you ask. I met a lot of people from NGOs who were out there teaching literacy. One of the big complaints is, "Okay, we teach literacy, but then there is nothing for people to read." There are only one or two projects that I know of trying to get reading material out to people.

Most of what we have in our Centers is in English, not in the native language of Dari-Pashto. We wish we had more. We've got some projects in the works, that I am working on the side *pro bono*, to get more materials published in Dari. But there is not much. The irony is, Dari is almost the same as the Farsi that they speak in Iran, and in Iran there is a wealth of materials, American materials, everything translated, even the latest best sellers translated into Farsi, a language the Dari speakers could read. (It is like British-English/American-English from what I understand.) But because of our sanctions against Iran, we can't buy the books in Iran to stock the shelves in our American Corners. Maybe I need to write my congressman about that, to see if we can find a loophole. There are even book dealers here in the U.S. who have those books to sell. But I was told that we, as the government, cannot buy them for our Afghan Centers. Luckily the Goethe Institute was able to buy in Iran and ship to Afghanistan, though I don't know the destination of

the books. Even the National Geographic was publishing a color magazine for kids in both Dari and Pashto, called, “*Parvaz*.” The trick was always trying to find these diverse sources, convince the Embassy’s procurement section (always a horrid bottleneck) to buy them, and then find a way to distribute them. Nothing was easy from our side or the Afghan side. From another angle, I developed Web chat capability between the Centers and the Embassy. This enabled the Embassy to reach a wider audience by communicating in Dari and Pashto over the Internet on a wide range of topics of mutual interest. These chats proved to be quite popular, and of course, broadened our audience.

Q: Did you find that, not only there but elsewhere, these things we are doing are particularly a place for women to get out and get out from under the Islamic regime?

BRYANT: Yes. And, in fact, one of the caveats we have for opening one of our Centers is that it must be equally accessible to men and women. Now, we have to work with the authorities on what that means. For example, in Jalalabad, which is in a very conservative area, you couldn't have men and women in at the same time. So they have male days and female days. We do carefully monitor access by women. It can't just be, oh, well, we'll say Monday, Wednesday and Friday are for women, but it just so happens the director never shows up and the doors are locked. We track closely that the women do get in to use the Centers. In other places, you will have mixed groups. There is such a variety of situations, depending on where you are. We had the same issues in Pakistan.

One of my most memorable trips was in April 2010, to the town of Khost, ten miles from the border with Pakistan. I flew into and stayed at Forward Operating Base Chapman. Only a few months before, Camp Chapman was the site of a suicide attack that killed seven CIA agents and two contractors. I had not put two and two together and did not realize where I was going until I got there; interesting times. My goal was to interview and hire a female director for the Lincoln Learning Center in Khost.

Such were the dangers, that to leave the base, you had to go in a convoy of MRAPS (mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles). Convoys would not go out for single missions (such as my interviews); rather they would take people out for multiple missions, with everyone going to each meeting site and waiting.

Visiting the Lincoln Learning Center in Khost

My interviews were indeed eye opening. To begin with, very few women in Khost were literate. In addition, the area is so conservative that women had to come with escorts to the interview. Would they have to be accompanied at their work? I honestly do not know who was eventually hired, but think it was the wife of a local official, who worked in the building where the Lincoln Learning Center was located.

Following my interviews, I sat in on a regional security briefing, including U.S. and Afghan representatives. The conversation was all done with simultaneous translation, but one phrase stuck out ... “the bad guys.” There was no identification of affiliation such as Taliban or Al-Qaeda, just “the bad guys.”

Q: Do you have to have guards for these places?

BRYANT: Theoretically, there should be guards. The local governments have said they would provide the guards, but one of the complaints from the directors is that often times the guards never show up. But we have never had any trouble in any of them, only just intense excitement caused by the fact that the resources, such as we offer, are open to them.

Q: From Afghanistan, for example, how stood students coming to the United States to study?

BRYANT: Well, they've had a lot of problems with students not returning. I think they have had to cut back on some of the exchange programs, because they get to the U.S. and they disappear and they don't go back. And you can certainly understand why.

Q: Absolutely.

BRYANT: You can certainly understand why, but then what are we supposed to do? Keep sending them over knowing that they are going to disappear? Or, we have had excellent Embassy staff go to the U.S. on a training program and disappear and not come back. So, for a while, there was a moratorium even on sending anyone for training to the U.S. I hope that will stop.

Q: Were any other countries, say the British or the French or Russians, running comparable programs?

BRYANT: I don't know of any other exchange programs. Certainly not the Russians!

Q: Was there much connection in this whole area you were dealing with, with non-governmental organizations? Were there ones working in that particular field, or were you sort of alone?

BRYANT: We worked a little bit with the Asia Foundation, as they have a program providing books to Asian countries, and they work on library development. The Goethe Institute is in there running some library related programs. There are not any trained librarians in Afghanistan; correction, there were 2, one British. As of 2007, the Afghan Research Evaluation Unit (AREU), and the Afghan Center at Kabul University (ACKU) were working with the Asia Foundation and the Goethe Institute on basic training for working librarians. A few years later, the World Bank was planning a librarian training program for the Attorney General's office in both Kabul and the provinces. Something similar had been done for the Academy of Sciences. USAID tried to develop a library student curriculum at Kabul University, but it failed. You see, even if libraries in Afghanistan obtain books, magazines, and Internet access, they have no idea how to organize them, how to make them useful to anybody. Again, the whole concept of information literacy, how to use materials to find the information you need, is just not known. After all, it is and has been taught in the U.S. for ages, but in Afghanistan, it is

very new. While most faculties at the University had their own libraries, they were considered status symbols and had no professional management.

I visited the Academy of Sciences.... a very sad experience. No space; no money; a collection of about 35,000 books, but no catalog to identify what or where they are. One treasure they did have was newspapers going back to the 1930s. I hope someone is able to fund preservation for those. Oh the plus side, they had completed 2 volumes of a multi volume encyclopedia in both Dari and Pashto. Of course, I suggested buying it for all our Centers.

A major contact of ours was the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University (ACKU), a magnificent creation of the Louis and Nancy Hatch Dupree Foundation. Mrs. Dupree is truly a national treasure. She has weathered the storms of Afghanistan since she first went there with her husband in 1962 and has chronicled the culture and history of the country since then. ACKU sponsors a program called ABLE, Afghan Boxed Library Extension, which provide footlockers of easy-to-read, practical paperback books to small villages to encourage literacy and knowledge of practical subjects of everyday life. Some collections are given to schools and community centers, while others are mobile libraries in metal boxes, carried by donkeys if necessary to remote areas and housed in shops, clinics, etc. Of course, the books are in local languages. When I was last in Afghanistan in 2010 we were trying to get these lockers into our Centers. As a side note, I was able to wander through the Afghanistan Center's collections, and found copies of Taliban newspapers in English from the late 1990s. Amazing.

At first, we partnered with the group, American Councils for International Education, to handle paying our Lincoln Learning Center staff, because as officers, we couldn't always get out in the field. Without much freedom of movement, we would instead work with the NGOs, giving them grants to run various programs in places we could not go. We also worked a lot with English-language teachers, and facilitated the formation of an association of English-language teachers that provided ongoing training to others.

My predecessors in the job were freer to go out of the Embassy, but by the time I got there in 2007, and over the two-year plus period I was there, I was only allowed out in town except for special occasions ... sometimes as defined by me. If I were going to the university, research institute, or orphanage, the trip had to be cleared by security. You had to go primarily armored vehicles, sometimes with armed guards. If there was a crisis while you were out, then you were radioed instructions as to what to do. That happened once to me while I was at the University of Kabul, where I had to remain until an "all clear" was given.

Q: When you were taking library science back in the United States, did they train you much in putting on flak jackets and such?

BRYANT: No, but what a wonderful way to be a librarian. I loved it. I flew mostly on small planes or helicopters to Herat, Mazar, Bamiyan, and Khost. Overland was both too dangerous and lacking in roads. Once we were flying to Mazar, and had to turn around

mid-way when fighting broke out. I was so disappointed. You never knew when you were going to actually arrive at your destination. Planning, as you can see, was a little difficult.

In 2008, I helped create and opened the Center in Bamiyan, the remote town where the Taliban blew up the ancient Buddhas in the red-rock walls. You still see the holes there where the Buddhas were. There are no real roads into Bamiyan, and no regular transportation there, so we had to fly everything in, from books to computers to furniture; even a generator for electricity. Now our Center is full of books, magazines, and media, and offers the only Internet access in the province—free, open to all and so, very exciting.

Headed to Bamiyan for the opening in 2008, I remember putting on my flak jacket and helmet, packing all the food for the opening ceremony onto a helicopter, and getting the drill on what to do if we crashed. I was the happiest person in the world. There I sat in the helicopter, in my flak jacket and helmet, a big box of cookies on my lap, with guards in the windows armed with their AK47s. I thought to myself, "You know, you are not even nervous. You're not scared. Maybe there's something wrong with you." I was just so happy to be able to bring all of this to Bamiyan, a place I had been as a backpacker in 1978, when I had seen the Buddhas. I could only imagine what the people had suffered, and the idea of being able to go back and bring them such a gift as a modern library far outweighed any thought of security.

Q: You were opening a new...

BRYANT: Library. It was absolutely, absolutely one of the highlights of my life. I understand it is full all the time with students, and other groups. A lot of the NGO groups use it as a place to meet or hold classes or trainings. It is free meeting space ... something in very short supply. And of course the Internet is a huge benefit. We established satellite access there.

Q: When one looks at media coverage of Afghanistan or before, Iraq, one gets a feeling the media people are running from one bombing to another. They all kind of look alike. It gives a feeling that this is life there, and yet there is this tremendous, vibrant life going on elsewhere.

BRYANT: Yes, there is life. The level of danger varies from one part of the country to another, and with it, the kind of security given American officers. And, yes, life does go on, and there are good things going on, though it is very difficult to accomplish anything because of security, because of lack of infrastructure, lack of electricity, lack of resources, lack of skills and education. You know, it is an extremely difficult situation.

When I was camping in Afghanistan in the 1976, it was a wonderful, peaceful place. I was comfortable going around on my own as a female. People were friendly. People were helpful. I was never harassed. I understand that in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s when they had the king; it was fairly stable. Women were educated as men were. I have seen the pictures of the schoolgirls in class that looked like a classroom at a girls' school

in the U.S. maybe. No hair coverings, no burkas, just school children. So I believe very much that it can happen again.

I had a startling thought on one visit, when I realized that our Embassy staff were of such an age that they had only seen their country at war. They never saw the peaceful beauty that I had. I told them stories of my 1970s trip ... and of the country they had never seen.

Given that my job in Afghanistan was to build outside libraries, I was able to escape the confines of the Embassy more than most. I visited potential sites and met with others who might be of assistance. I must admit I did my best to contrive ways to get out of the Embassy. After all, how can you create a public institution with no knowledge of what the outside is like?

One very successful outing was going to meet with the *BBC Trust Afghanistan Education Program* who operated quite freely and openly in a seemingly unguarded office toward the outside of town. They had a studio where they produced a radio show, "New Home, New Life" that was very popular in Kabul. It was an ongoing family saga, illustrating social interactions and dealing with family and social issues with a slight Western bent. They also produced story books on social issues, vetted by Afghans. These were distributed around the country via NGOs. We planned to be on their distribution list.

In addition, they were interested in using our Internet centers in the LLC as a vehicle for distance learning programs. I hope the cooperation continued as we seemed to have a lot to offer each other.

I also arranged meetings with potential vendors, particularly ones who might transport our books, at some unusual locations. One meeting was at the home of a Lithuanian businessman, who was hosting a party for the British Hash. My meeting just happened to be at the time of the party. While it might seem frivolous, it was at that party, as with other outings, I gained various insights. One, I met an American professor, working in the University of Kabul's agriculture department. He said that his job of revamping and modernizing the curriculum was almost impossible, as various NGOs and aid agencies (to include USAID), had snapped up all the good people to work for them, leaving the university with nothing. I also met a contractor trying to work on an electrical grid in Kabul. His frustration was that they could make little progress as their materials were constantly being stolen.

My wildest escapes were to a compound outside of Kabul that truly was surreal. It was a walled secure city, housing Western workers. It came complete with swimming pool, restaurant, bar, and even a spa. The security to enter was as tight as for the U.S. Embassy. I had a connection that lived at the compound, and through him arranged several meetings at the spa. Mind you, I held meetings at the same time ... truly I did. If you have to meet, why not at the spa? You know, I have no clue who built or ran the place. No one at the Embassy seemed to know about it.

When our previous contracting company for coordinating the LLC did not work out, we

hired a female contractor, an American who lived on her own in Kabul. She thoroughly enjoyed it and did a great job. She was always full of tales of her life in the real world. How I envied her ... to a point!

Of course we even had a bit of a life inside the Embassy, to include hosting an inaugural ball for President Obama in 2009.

Q: Were you getting any commentary from your contacts there about the Taliban as a movement?

BRYANT: An interesting irony of the Taliban that has helped Afghanistan in certain ways is that when the Taliban were in control so many people fled to Pakistan and learned English. Many of the staff who work for the Embassy now and for the World Food Program, the United Nations, whoever else is there of the international NGOs and organizations, learned their English in exile in Pakistan. Now they can come back and be translators and help their country. I don't think there would have been that depth of English-language knowledge, had it not been for the Taliban. How ironic that their very anti-Western stance helped open connections with the West through language.

Most of what I heard of the Taliban was of severe restrictions ... leading those who could to flee to Pakistan. Many if not most of our Embassy staff spent time out of Afghanistan during the Taliban years. Now, of course, I heard the same stories that you hear in the news, that the Taliban will recruit by paying people to join; those who have no job and no hope for a future, or see no hope for a future. Or they'll threaten a family with death, if they don't give up one of their sons. In other words, they are forced into the Taliban, not driven by Islamic zeal. I had to laugh the other day when the story came out, true or untrue, that the Italians were paying the Taliban not to fight. Fair is fair, I thought. If the Taliban pay people to fight, why not pay them not to fight?

Q: You know, I spent 18 months in Saigon during the war, and it was well known that the French paid off the Vietcong, and they were running their plantations there without problems. Did you get any feel for the effectiveness of these provincial reconstruction teams, the PRTs?

BRYANT: I think from the military standpoint what I saw was that the PRTs were good platforms for security and for providing the potential for civilian development. The time I was there, each PRT had a State Department officer, I think, as well as someone from USAID. Some of them had an agricultural officer as well. Now they are getting local hires, local Afghans, to work at them so that they have a larger civilian component. There is potential, and a lot of good will. Yet there is also a lot of corruption, and not all on one side. How effective it will be in the long run, I just don't know. There are both State Department funds and special military funds available for locally-identified projects. Sustainability is key, though, and on that, I cannot say.

I did visit one project where a large potato cellar was built with U.S. aid. It was in a very rural area where potatoes were the staple crop and food. However, there was no means to

store the potatoes to last through the winter. This cellar solved the problem. Projects like that, I think, make an important contribution. It was simple, it filled a real need, and it was easy to maintain. When you get more complicated than that, I think you are apt to have trouble. Sadly there is always the potential of corruption on all sides, and of projects being done just to make a mark on an officer's performance evaluation or to credit a local official

Q: You retired earlier this year, did you?

BRYANT: Right, yes, in May.

Q: How did you feel about it?

BRYANT: Terrible. In fact I just turned down a job to go back to Kabul for four-to-six months, because the timing isn't right for me right now. But if there *is* a next offer, I would love to go back. I actually resigned because I was due to go overseas for a full two-year tour, and my husband, who retired as a Lieutenant General in the Marines, had had it with moving overseas, and moving at all for that matter. Though he offered to support any decision I made, we decided that being together was the most important, so I resigned.

Q: But you are ready for a short trip back?

BRYANT: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. In fact, today, it looks like the final paperwork has come through for my WAE (when-actually-employed) status, which is kind of a State Department call-up roster. That paperwork has been ongoing since May.

Q: What sorts of things would you expect to do?

BRYANT: Go to Afghanistan, now. I couldn't do this earlier. My paperwork wasn't completed for one, and I am now doing some work for the Peace Corps. I think I'm going to be doing some work for USAID, here domestically, over the next month. So I am picking up small assignments, short term assignments, possibly Pakistan as well, because they are really gearing up on their public diplomacy side.

Q: What was your impression of Kabul when you were there?

BRYANT: As a city?

Q: As a city, as a place in the American presence and the international presence.

BRYANT: It's hard to tell because I was rarely let out. I only had a couple of drives to the university, and didn't see too much of it. The major problem in Kabul, I think, is lack of electricity and infrastructure in general. Being on the Embassy grounds in our little trailers, we had power, we had water, we had heat; we never had any problem with that. But outside in the city, I thought it was an outrage that we'd been there for so many years

and even the capital city did not have electricity. I never got a straight answer that I could quote as to how that could possibly be, that it wasn't a Number One goal to at least have the lights on in the city; have electricity. Then there would be opportunities for employment; there would be heat in the winter. There is almost no heat in the winter and they have bitterly cold winters there. Kabul is at about 6000-foot altitude, so very much a hardship. If you think of a big city without heat, intermittent water, and almost no electricity, it almost seems unimaginable, but that's the situation. And in my mind, until they get that fixed, they are not going to get anything fixed because expectations were so high when we came in that there would be development and opportunity, and there hasn't been.

Q: Well, I guess this is a good place to stop, Mary Nell.

BRYANT: I am not giving up.

Q: Okay, so we'll stop at this point. I want to thank you, very much.

BRYANT: Thank you, very much.

End of interview